European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy

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European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy

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Editorial Note

Roberto Frega, Filipe Carreira da Silva

Pragmatism and the Social Sciences: a Century of Influences and Interactions, vol. 2

This issue continues the symposia on Pragmatism and the Social Sciences: a Century of Influences and Interactions that has appeared in the vol. 2, year 2011 of this journal. For a general introduction to the issue we refer readers to our Editor’s introduction to the volume 1.

This new issue, inspired by the same criteria used in the making of the first, is divided in three sections.

In the first section, titled “Classical Pragmatists and contemporary sociology” contains three papers, all dealing in different ways with the question of the legacy of pragmatism to contemporary social theory. All three papers tackle different strands of the appropriation of pragmatism in French social theory from Pierre Bourdieu to contemporary pragmatic sociology.

In the second section, titled “Law, Power, and the prospects of a pragmatist social theory”, the selected articles deal with more specific issues in social and political theory, always in ways that focus on the distinct contribution of the pragmatist tradition to contemporary research. The papers address issues that are of concern for social theory in broad sense, as well as for more specific fields such as international relation theory, the theory of power, the theory of historiography.

In the last section, titled “Contemporary appropriations”, we have gathered articles that explore issues that extend beyond social theory to cover fields such as the cognitive sciences, communication studies, and educational theory.

This volume closes the project. We hope that the articles published in both volumes will be of interest to philosophers as well as to scholars coming from other fields, and we hope in this way to have contributed to a broader understanding of pragmatism as a cultural enterprise that encompasses an increasing larger sphere of contemporary reflection.
Section I. Classical Pragmatists and contemporary sociology
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† I received very generous comments on previous drafts of this article from Horst Bredekamp, Maria Luisa Catoni, Sascha Freyberg, Carlo Ginzburg, Lydia Goehr, Helmut Pape, Salvatore Settis. I thank them all. Laure Astourian and Julian Smith-Newman have much improved my English. Without the many conversations with the late John M. Krois this research would have never been born.

Peirce and Iconology: Habitus, Embodiment, and the Analogy between Philosophy and Architecture†

Abstract. “[I]t is the belief men betray, and not that which they parade which has to be studied”. This short Peircean sentence has been the subject of important yet underrated attention in the reception of Peirce’s philosophy, passing through the art historians Edgar Wind and Erwin Panofsky and arriving finally at Bourdieu. This paper explores the affinities between Peirce’s and Panofsky’s thinking, as well as their historical connections and their common sources, taking its cue from an analysis of the similar arguments the two authors offer to justify the analogy between Gothic architecture and Scholasticism. The fulcrum for the comparison between Peirce and Panofsky is located in the writings of Edgar Wind: a leading figure, this article proposes, in the history of European pragmatism.

I. Introduction: From Peirce to Sociology, via Panofsky

The starting point of this paper is a thus far barely remarked upon – and at first blush somewhat negligible – textual consonance: both the philosopher Charles S. Peirce and the art historian Erwin Panofsky have written about the classic analogy between Gothic architecture and Scholastic philosophy.

Panofsky, of course, dedicated one of his most famous and debated books – the 1951 Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism – to the topic; while Peirce addressed it almost in passing, first in his renowned review of Berkeley, and then, even less systematically, in a number of subsequent manuscripts and papers. This asymmetry notwithstanding, and also in spite of the fact that no direct connection among these texts is extant, I shall maintain in what follows that such a convergence does have a theoretical weight: one that may help us better to assess and historically locate the more general contact points between Peirce’s thinking and iconology.

Panofsky did in fact know of Peirce, whom he quoted in a number of passages dealing with the justification of iconological method. All these passages refer to one single phrase of the American thinker, one which at first seems peripheral but which actually (as we shall see) goes to the heart of his philosophy: “it is the belief men betray, and not that which they parade which has to be studied”. This brief sentence, which Panofksy took from his student Edgar Wind, will help reveal the broader story of an early, thus far neglected, yet at the same time momentous line of reception of Peirce’s philosophy.

Although my focus in the rest of this article will be on the art-historical tradition, however, it is important to add here that this line of reception did not stop with Panofsky. Albeit

1 Issues of Pragmaticism” (1905), *EP* 2: 349n. See further, par. VIII.
not altogether explicitly, it also played a crucial role in the genesis of Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology.

To clarify this, let me say in advance that I shall locate much of the common terrain between Peirce and Panofsky in the notions of habit and habitus: two distinguishable yet tightly interwoven concepts, which since their Greek origin have occupied a central position in Western philosophy. Originally the scholastic translation of Aristotle’s hexis and echein, the Latin term habitus has traditionally designated the philosophically stronger (and ontologically more committing) notion of the two: the system of abiding dispositions which define human nature in a broad sense. At the beginning of the twentieth century, founding thinkers of the social sciences such as Durkheim, Weber and above all Mauss still heavily relied on this strong, by and large Aristotelian idea of habit; but the naturalization of the concept put forth by behaviorism increasingly caused sociologists and anthropologists to do away with the term\(^3\). As of the late 1960s, it was Bourdieu who most strongly opposed this tendency, famously making of habitus the lynchpin of his methodology. Yet scholars do not always realize how important Panofsky was for Bourdieu’s rediscovery of the scholastic term.

Devoting much of his early work to the sociology of art and education (as well as to the cultural meaning of architecture\(^4\)), Bourdieu came to recognize in Panofsky an important ally in his methodological approach. In 1967 he translated Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism, and accompanied the text with a postface that reflects on habitus as the decisive tool for circumventing the shortcomings of both structuralism and positivism. Not only habitus, but also Panofsky’s more general problem of iconological meaning appeared to Bourdieu to point towards that unwitting dimension of agency which, mainly formed through education, connects individuals to the broader social context in which they are embedded\(^5\). At the same time, Edgar Wind’s 1936 article on “Some Points of Contact between History and Natural Science”, which is precisely the text that contains Peirce’s quotation, helped him to better underline the methodological assumptions of Panofsky’s model; he thus included a long excerpt from it in the 1968 handbook on sociological method\(^6\). And although this fact seems to have gone totally unnoticed, in both the 1966 paper on “Intellectual Field and Creative Project” (in which the notion of habitus already appears) and the introduction to the book on photography Bourdieu literally quoted Peirce:

> To relate the works produced by an age to the educational practices of the time is […] to provide on oneself with one means of explaining not only what they say but also what they betray in so far as they participate in the symbolic aspects of an age or society\(^7\).

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\(^3\) Camic 1986, 2001; Funke 1961. See in particular Mauss 2010: “J’ai […] eu pendant de nombreuses années cette notion de la nature sociale de l’”habitus”. […] Le mot traduit, infiniment mieux qu’”habitude”, l’”hexis”, l’”acquis” et la “faculté” d’Aristote […]”


\(^6\) Bourdieu, Chamboredon, Passeron (1968: 92, 97-98, 287-289, 324-327). Wind’s sentence is translated as follows: “Peirce écrit dans un fragment sur la psychologie du développement des idées: “ce qu’il nous faut étudier ce sont le croyances que les hommes nous livrent inconsciemment, et non pas celles dont ils font étalage.””

\(^7\) Bourdieu (1969: 118), emphases mine. The original French version, Bourdieu (1966:905), reads: “rapporter les œuvres d’une époque aux pratiques de l’école c’est donc se donner un des moyens d’expliquer non seulement ce qu’elles proclament, mais aussi ce qu’elles trahissent en tant qu’elles participent de la symbolique d’une époque ou d’une société. See also Bourdieu (1965:23-24): “Comprendre adéquatement une photographie […] ce n’est pas seulement reprendre les significations qu’elle proclame, c’est-à-dire, dans une certaine mesure, les intentions explicites de son auteur, c’est aussi déchiffrer le surplus de signification qu’elle a trahi en tant qu’elle participe de la symbolique d’une époque, d’une classe ou d’un groupe artistique.” The second edition of this text (see the English translation, Bourdieu 1990) is particularly interesting, for there Bourdieu introduced the notion of habitus as
Only a few years later, Bourdieu would partially change his mind about Panofsky, beginning to see the latter’s methodological stance as merely restating the same intellectualist fallacies that flawed structuralism\(^8\). As he explicitly wrote, it was another art-historical masterpiece – Baxandall’s *Art and Experience* (1972) – that had prompted his change of opinion\(^9\); but I am also tempted to recognize in it the traces of a dialogue with Émile Benveniste. In an essay from 1969 which also dismissively touches upon Peirce, the French linguist had suggested that Panofsky’s book on Gothic architecture be construed as relying on a semiotic basis, thus backing a Saussurian reading of iconology (also advocated, in the same years, by Giulio C. Argan) which inevitably downplays the role of habit, and reduces the significance of a comparison with Peirce to a vaguely similar semiotic interest\(^10\). Yet if, by contrast, the notion of habit is given proper weight – as I shall attempt to do in what follows – this similar interest will not only appear less casual; but the thread that holds together Peirce’s pragmatism, Panofsky’s iconology and Bourdieuian sociology will also gain significance. All the more so as Peirce’s treatment of habit is also the origin of that pragmatist theory of action which subsequently proved capable of influencing American social thought; and Panofsky’s iconological take on the same concept reveals debts and overlaps with the classics of sociology which go far beyond Bourdieu. (As we shall see, the dialogue with Karl Mannheim is particularly important in this respect\(^11\).) For all these reasons, the following pages, while dwelling on the apparently remote subject of Gothic churches, should also be read as a chapter in the history of the exchanges between *Pragmatism and Social Theory*\(^12\).

I shall begin with a few prefatory observations on the parallel between architecture and philosophy. Although cursory, they intend to suggest that, once historically contextualized, the seemingly casual textual correspondence between Peirce and Panofsky can reveal significant aspects of their works. At the same time, these observations will serve as a touchstone for bringing to light similarities, shared premises and common sources between the two thinkers. I shall then proceed by presenting Peirce’s and Panofsky’s arguments. My strategy is to locate these arguments within the broader web of the two authors’ lifelong concerns, thus letting the similar purport of their contentions come to the fore. In doing so, I also aim to give proper weight to some of Peirce’s observations on art, which, however sparse and clumsy they may be, deserve a more serious consideration than they have been accorded so far. Finally, I shall dwell at length upon the philosophy of Edgar Wind, as the crucial link between the two authors; and attempt to draw some theoretical conclusions.

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8 Bourdieu 1972.
9 Bourdieu (1992:43ff.)
10 Benveniste (1974:61); Argan (1975) calls Panofsky “the Saussure of art history”. See also Holly (1984:43ff., 181-183) and Horst Bredekamp’s misgivings (1995). Benveniste was an important figure for Bourdieu: he often quoted the former’s linguistic works, and precisely in 1969 published *Les vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes* in his book series *Le sens commun*. Benveniste, for his part, in his pages on Panofsky quoted both Bourdieu’s translation and his postface.
12 Joas 1992 has been a fundamental inspiration for this study. I am aware that arguing for the existence of such a link between pragmatism and Bourdieu’s sociology may sound problematic to readers acquainted with the critique Luc Boltanski addressed to his former teacher, from a standpoint he explicitly relates to American pragmatism. Of course, the topic goes beyond the scope of this article, and I plan on dealing with it more thoroughly in the future; but let me just say that what is normally referred to as “pragmatism” is vague and heterogeneous enough to accommodate the apparent contradiction. (I thank Séverine Marguin for having first alerted me to this problem).
II. Philosophy and Architecture: the Significance of a Parallel

The history of the attempts to relate Gothic architecture and Scholasticism is by no means confined to Peirce and Panofsky. Both belong to a longer and philosophically consequential line of thought. Meyer Schapiro locates its birthplace in the last page of Kant’s Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen, which criticizes the taste of the Middle-Ages as emanating from “grimaces” (Fratzen). Not limited to architecture, Kant writes, this taste was also reflected in costumes as well as in the “tausend Schulfratzen” concocted by men of science.

During the nineteenth century Kant’s idea was taken up over and over again. Michelet, Semper and Wölfflin are only a few of the scholars who dealt with it, typically less for the sake of the specific historical problem than as a way of broaching the general issue (Hegelian in some measure) of the relation between the art and the culture of a period. An indicator of the emblematic status the topic came to acquire, the assertion of such an analogy proved much stabler than the rationales alternatively proposed to account for it; the very problem of finding a way to connect the two phenomena became the pars pro toto for a much more abstract question.

Why did this happen? The almost perfect chronological overlapping of the two terms of the analogy is hardly a sufficient explanation. Paul Frankl has suggested that the very history of the word “Gothic”, which from a strictly architectural meaning came to denote a broader range of cultural phenomena, has gradually led to the problem Panofsky addressed. Still more important, however, is the phenomenon of nineteenth-century “historicism” architecture, both in its revivalist and eclecticist version, which caused architects to pose the question of their social and historical embeddedness more emphatically than other artists or scholars. Within this framework, the protagonists of the Gothic Revival (a movement that stretched well beyond architecture) in turn typically colored their rediscovery of the Middle Ages with traditionalist, Romantic if not conservative assumptions, championing the weight of tradition and collective historical forces as opposed to meta-historical laws. Now, as we shall see (though the matter deserves to be explored much more deeply) these assumptions permeate Peirce’s keen interest in the Middle Ages as well; so that when cast into this context, his reflections on the Gothic may offer an unexpected occasion to shed new light on his broader philosophical temperament.

A few considerations are also in order with regard to philosophy’s age-old attraction to architecture. Once again it is Kant who first comes to mind, and his notion of architecture, which Peirce heavily relied upon in his own reflections on the nature of philosophy. Albeit not so masterfully as Wittgenstein, Peirce even practiced architecture. Since the very years in which he worked on his Architecture of Theories, he directed the renovations of his own country house, “Arisbe”, which he had also planned to turn into a center of philosophic inquiry – the incarnation, as it were, of that “philosophical edifice” that he was at pains to erect in his writings. And yet this thread, too, ends up leading us to Scholasticism:

14 I am relying here and elsewhere on Frankl 1960. See pp. 487-8, 591-2 and passim. See also Gombrich 1969, especially p. 28. Wölfflin’s words (1888: 62) are particularly revealing: once the need for a bridge between art and the “Inhalt der Zeit” is assumed on a general level, he says, “welches soll der Weg sein, der von der Zelle des scholastischen Philosophen in die Bauhütte des Architekten führt?”
15 Frankl (1960: 228); See also Dynes 1973. From this angle, Kant’s observation appears as the continuation of the tendency, already well established, to explore the parallels among different “Gothic” phenomena.
much prior to Kant and Peirce the parallel between architecture and philosophy had been proposed by Thomas Aquinas. At about the same time in which, in France, the figure of the (Gothic) architect began to be invested with a new dignity, Thomas was able to recover the Aristotelian sense of the term and to label philosophical activities “architectonicae” for their capacity to confer order on things and govern secondary sciences17.

III. Peirce’s Review of Berkeley

In the October 1871 issue of the North American Review, Peirce published a lengthy essay on Alexander Fraser’s new edition of George Berkeley’s works. Despite its apparently occasional nature, this is a seminal and in some ways unsurpassed text within Peirce’s oeuvre, both for its conceptual depth and for the breadth of knowledge and interests it masters and brings into play. Peirce took the review as the occasion for a much wider reflection on the fundamental question that preoccupied him at that time: the quarrel between nominalism and realism. Focusing exclusively on the British tradition, he traced the history of this dispute from its scholastic origins (which he had thoroughly studied during the late 1860s) up to nineteenth-century positivism, with a remarkably keen eye for the evolution of ideas in time and their documentable transfers from one author to another.

Alongside this historical reconstruction, Peirce offered a rather heterodox construal of the philosophical gist of the controversy18. In his version, the disagreement between the two doctrines really amounts to a different conception of reality. Nominalism conceives it as what is external to the mind and is not created by it: the “fountain of the current of human thought”, independent from and directly influencing it precisely because of its being outside of the mind. The realist, on the contrary, sees the real as “the unmoving form” which will be reached in an indefinitely distant future by means of converging trajectories gradually doing away with the partialities of individual viewpoints. Far from being external to the mind, reality is hence independent “not […] of thought in general, but of all that is arbitrary and individual in thought”, and presupposes the idea of a community of inquirers gradually approaching consensual truth: “there is a general drift in the history of human thought which will lead it to one general agreement, one catholic consent19a.”

As is easy to perceive in this last sentence, Peirce read the logical “technicalities” of the controversy as ultimately bearing on a much more general (or ideological) bundle of issues: something every man, “if he is not less than man”, will have to confront. As he saw them, the morally “debasing”, materialist and individualist drives that dominate modern science are of a piece with the nominalist outlook. Realism, on the contrary, is only upheld by “the most conservative minds”20a among which he clearly counted himself.

In order to render more plausible the realist view of reality as not separated from the mind, Peirce resorted to Duns Scotus’ distinction between “two ways in which a thing may be in the mind, — habitualiter and actualiter” (which is in turn dependent on Aristotle’s discussion of first and second actuality with regards to sensation21). While the universal does not need to be conceived actualiter in order to be real, it does have to be in the mind habitualiter.

17 Pevsner (1942:559-562), and Frankl (1960: 135-136), who adds that Thomas’ argument “does not support the thesis that scholasticism and Gothic are related […] On the other hand, it does support the thesis that around 1260 the workmaster or architect was looked upon as a man who had duties on the building site comparable to those of the philosopher in the university lecture hall.”
18 See Fisch 1967.
19a W 2: 467-471.
20a W 2: 485.
21 De Anima, 417a22 ff. See also Peirce’s “Upon Logical Comprehension and Extension” (1867), W 2: 75.
ualiter; that is, such that it “can directly produce a conception […] by virtue of mental association” and “independent[ly] of consciousness”. These words reveal better than many others the extraordinary fecundity of Peirce’s notion of habit, and its ability to serve as the virtual meeting point of the different threads of his philosophy. Its more properly metaphysical purport, here only adumbrated, will be apparent in the later theory of categories, in which the process of habit-forming is tantamount to the category of concepts and signs (thirdness), as opposed to the realms of sheer actuality or “brute action” (secondness) and pure possibility (firstness). But the notion also plays an especially crucial role in the formulation of Peirce’s pragmatism (according to which a belief is only definable in terms of habits of action), as well as in his reflections on the mind, perception and the self. From our perspective, it is particularly noteworthy that Peirce came back to Scotus’ habitualiter-actualiter distinction precisely in the 1905 article that also contains the distinction between “parading” and “betraying”, using it in his attempt to better articulate his view of the unconscious as not qualitatively opposed to consciousness but rather continuously shading into it.

The role that Berkeley plays in this scenario is a complex one. His conception of reality, Peirce argues, is akin to the realist one only at the surface: at bottom, the rift he established between mind and matter in fact makes him a nominalist and a Platonist at once. At the same time, his theory of perception and knowledge is of outstanding importance for modern thought. This is a trait Peirce would return to more emphatically thirty years later, in another review of the second edition of Fraser’s work. There we read that “Berkeley is, in truth, far more entitled to be considered the father of all modern philosophy than is Kant”; and “it was he, more than any other single philosopher” who should be regarded as the father of pragmatism.

The precise reason for such a bold statement can be found in a manuscript of 1911: “I think the idea [of pragmatism] was suggested to me by Berkeley’s two little books about vision.” Peirce was referring to the *New Theory of Vision* (1709), followed by the *Theory of Vision Vindicated*. In these works Berkeley put forward his ideas about the inferential nature of vision and its dependency on touch or proprioception which have represented the paramount source, from Helmholtz to Gombrich, of all subsequent reflections on perception as unconscious inference. Although the matter is much more complex and controversial with regards to his later period, Peirce’s early theory of perception may be easily inscribed into this tradition. His writings from the late 1860s make clear that he saw in Berkeley’s work not only a milestone in the history of associative psychology, but a fundamental benchmark for his reflections on the inferential and habitual character of perception and the

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22 *W* 2: 472.
23 *Issues of Pragmaticism* (1905), CP 5.441: “since we are conscious of what we do deliberately, we are conscious *habitualiter* of whatever hides in the depths of our nature; and it is presumable […] that a sufficiently energetic effort of attention would bring it out.” See also CP 5.504, c. 1905.
24 *W* 2: 479-481.
25 CN 3: 36 (1901). See also W 2: 483, where Berkeley’s recurring argument “that such and such a thing cannot exist because we cannot so much as frame the idea of such a thing” gets replaced by a rough version of the pragmatic maxim: “Do things fulfil the same function practically? Then let them be signified by the same word. Do they not? Then let them be distinguished.”
26 Charles S. Peirce Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. [MS], L231. See Moore 1984. The other name continuously cited as a direct source of pragmatism is of course Kant.
non-existence of intuitive cognitions which eventually led to the celebrated “anti-Cartesian” essays of 1868-69.  

IV. Peirce the Historian

It is within this framework that the comparison between Gothic architecture and scholasticism, presented in the very first pages of the review, gains its most immediate significance. Peirce wished to introduce the issue of nominalism not only as a theoretical problem, but also as a chapter of what he called “[m]etaphysical history”, or the history of philosophy as “the best representative of the mental development of each age”, and which he invited historians to address together with the history of other aspects of human affairs such as society, government, war, law. It is by dint of these comparisons that we can “trace the significance of events for the human mind”, and discern deeper regularities or transversal analogies.

The phenomenon that most interested Peirce in this respect was the “revolution of thought” that occurred in twelfth-century Europe, the causes of which he looked for in the Crusades and the effects of which he found in fields as diverse as commerce, law, ecclesiastical history, and finally philosophy and art. “Indeed” – he claimed – “if any one wishes to know what a scholastic commentary is like, and what the tone of thought in it is, he has only to contemplate a Gothic cathedral.”

Albeit cursorily, Peirce put forth four different rationales for this analogy. The first shared feature between the two phenomena is a “heroic” religious faith and a “complete absence of self-conceit on the part of the artist or philosopher”. Both kinds of works were catholic, that is, they were not meant to “embody” the author’s ideas as “the universal truth”. This also entails a scrupulousness that would be unthinkable in other contexts: the Schoolmen’s ruminations on the most abstract theological questions no longer appear gratuitous if one takes seriously their unswerving trust in biblical revelation. The second shared trait is “a detestation of antithesis or the studied balancing of one thing against another […] – a hatred of posing which is as much a moral trait as the others.” The third is the “increasing sense of immensity” emanating from both. Finally, Gothic architecture and scholasticism are similar in the way they eventually faded, losing touch around the same time with their religious impulse, and sinking “first into extreme formalism and fancifulness, and then into the merited contempt of all men.”

What sources was Peirce drawing upon when penning these lines? What knowledge of Gothic architecture did he rely on? An attempt to answer these questions seriously must begin from the fact that at the moment he was writing his review of Berkeley, Peirce had

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29W 2: 166; 196 (“There can be no doubt that before the publication of Berkeley’s book on Vision, it had generally been believed that the third dimension of space was immediately intuited, although, at present, nearly all admit that it is known by inference.”); 233-236 (all from 1868). But see also, much later, CP 7.624 (1903): “Since 1709, [psychologists] have been in possession of sufficient proof […] that, notwithstanding its apparent primitiveness, every percept is the product of mental processes, or at all events processes for all intent and purposes mental, except that we are not directly aware of them; and these are processes of no little complexity.” The importance of Berkeley’s theory of vision is also much emphasized in the already mentioned 1901 review: CN 3: 36-39.


31W 2: 464-465. Let me cursorily draw the attention to the phrase “tone of thought”, which is far from innocent, for in Peirce’s technical vocabulary it designs the firstness of thirdness, or the quality of a sign. A scholastic commentary is a semiotic entity embodying a quality that can be put in relation to that of different semiotic phenomena – like cathedrals.

just come back from the first of the five European journeys he made during his life.³¹ Sailing from New England on June 1870, he spent almost nine months in Europe, on a tour that brought him to a large number of northern and Mediterranean countries. The main goal of the journey was to make preparations for the observation of a solar eclipse; but Peirce also took advantage of his travels to cultivate scientific relationships, as well as to visit libraries, purchase books and photographs, and get acquainted with European art. The papers conserved at Harvard contain some private letters and diaries which, ignored by scholarly editions, offer a glimpse into Peirce’s interest in the art and architecture of the countries he visited.³²

In particular, the image of Peirce that emerges from these documents is – to borrow the words he himself would use five years later, during his second trip to Europe – that of an “enthusiastic admirer of the Gothic”.³³ Both the letters and the private notes contain numerous records of his visit to Gothic churches in England, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and France (with the important exception of Île-de-France, where he did not go because of the war), which reveal, in addition to admiration, a familiarity with technical vocabulary as well as a distinct curiosity for the art-historical debate.³⁴ Thus on January 30th, in Canterbury, Peirce purchased Robert Willis’ *Architectural History of Canterbury Cathedral* (1845)³⁵. Still more significant, though, is the note he had jotted down ten days before, while in Strasbourg: “Saw only cathedral. [...] In evening Z[ina] [his wife] read Whewell’s Notes on German Churches. Very pleasant.”³⁶

The reference, of course, is to the eminent British philosopher and scholar William Whewell, the third edition of whose *Architectural Notes on German Churches* came out in 1842³⁷. Whewell is known to have been a decisive intellectual model for Peirce; and indeed the affinities between the two are significant. To begin with, both were great polymaths. But it was primarily the quarrel with John Stuart Mill on the logic of inductive sciences that sparked Peirce’s deepest admiration. Against the nominalism of the latter, Peirce saw in Whewell the incarnation of the realist scientist, capable of reconciling the demands of scientific inquiry with philosophical soundness. A clear statement to this effect can be found precisely in that final page of the Berkeley review in which Peirce attacked the rampant nominalism of modern times: “science as it exists is certainly much less nominalistic than the nominalists think it should be. Whewell represents it quite as well as Mill”³⁸.

³¹ See Brent (1993: 79-81); Nubiola, Barrena 2009.
³² The letters, addressed to Peirce’s close relatives, are contained in MS L129, L333, L336, L337, L339, L341. They also contain some interesting drawings. In addition to these, I am taking into account MS 1614 (a personal diary) and MS 1560a (a list of suggestions for a friend’s subsequent visit to Europe). As of 2007, all this material has been published online, together with a commentary and many other related documents, by the Grupo de Estudios Peirceanos of the University of Navarra, Spain, under the direction of Jaime Nubiola: See Grupo de Estudios Peirceanos 2008-2012; Nubiola, Barrena 2009.
³³ Peirce to his family, Apr. 14th, 1875, MS L341.
³⁴ From the numerous churches Peirce visited, one may mention Netley Abbey (“if you go to Southampton don’t omit Netley Abbey”, MS 1560a), Salisbury Cathedral (described as superior to St. Peter’s, Peirce to Sarah Mills, 14 Oct. 1870, MS L341), Milan cathedral (“wondrous”, MS 1614), as well as many other buildings in Switzerland and Germany as those Peirce seemed to enjoy more.
³⁵ I take the information from Nubiola’s commentary of Peirce’s diary, Nubiola 2009, which in turn relies on a file by Max H. Fisch conserved in the Peirce Edition Project archives in Indianapolis. Fisch says that the book (annotated by Peirce) was conserved with the Peirce papers; yet it has been impossible to locate it. Frankl (1960:530) finds the importance of Willis’ treatise “in its being the first detailed monograph in the modern sense, with a complete analysis of all parts of the structure and reconstructions of the state of the work at various times.”
³⁶ MS 1614.
³⁷ Whewell 1842. Peirce is likely to have known of Robert Willis precisely through this book, the third edition of which was issued under the stimulus of the latter’s objections (see preface).
As becomes evident in his renowned History of the Inductive Sciences, a seminal hallmark of Whewell’s philosophy of science is its inherently historical character. This trait deeply attracted Peirce, as is testified by the words he devotes to it as early as the 1865 and 1869 lectures series on the philosophy of science and British logicians. Indeed, it can be affirmed that both Peirce’s lifelong interest in history and his overall methodology decisively depend on his encounter with the man whom he dubbed “the most profound” among modern philosophers of science41.

Appealing to the famous Kantian adage on the relation of concepts and intuitions, Whewell put at the center of his reflections the thesis that “all facts involve ideas unconsciously; and thus the distinction of facts and theories is not tenable42”. This entails a denial of pure observation, or of any “colligation of facts” that is not determined by previous ideas. Paraphrased by Peirce: “observation as distinct from mere gazing consists in perception in the light of a question43”. Whewell’s engagement with a “philosophical” history of science is also derived from this focal point. As Peirce puts it, historical colligation of facts has the pretension, in Whewell’s writings, not to content itself with extrinsically giving “a color of verisimilitude” to a theory already deduced; rather, it aims at representing the very gate through which philosophical ideas should be inductively formed and examined44.

The notion of history of science which emerges from the History of Inductive Sciences is a very broad one. Digressions on the history of philosophy, art and society are plentiful. It is not difficult to relate this quest for parallels between cultural phenomena to Whewell’s broader philosophical stance. If the uncontaminated eye is a myth, art is more liable to embody ideas of the same kind as those examined by philosophers or scientists. If ideas are not brought about a priori, but through a continuous interaction with the external world, then the latter will be more easily regarded as intellectually pregnant. This is important for us, since Whewell’s chapters on the Middle Ages are full of hints at correlations between architecture on the one hand and science, philosophy, or more general intellectual traits of the epoch, on the other45. Whewell does not propose a straightforward analogy between Gothic architecture and scholastic philosophy; but he gives enough hints in that direction that we can imagine Peirce having these pages in mind, too, when giving shape to his ideas.

A number of writings of the 1890s confirm the influence of Whewell in both Peirce’s conception of historical knowledge and the important role therein played by Gothic architecture. In the renowned Evolutionary Love of 1892 (which closes the series opened by The Architecture of Theories), Peirce definitively systematized his evolutionary conception of rationality. And once again Gothic architecture appears: this time as a starting point for a reflection on the problem of the “spirit of the age”, and the related fact that ideas occur “simultaneously and independently to a number of individuals of no extraordinary general powers46”. Then the Lowell Lectures series on the history of science Peirce held the same year (and which I regard as a sort of empirical counterpart to the work on evolutionary love) opens with an apology of “the method of Whewell” in historical research, of whom

41W 1: 211 (1865).
42Whewell (1840: xvii); W 1: 205.
43W 2: 344 (1869).
44W 2: 338-339. See in particular the introduction of Whewell 1857. Cf. also, much later, MS 1274a (c. 1892).
45It is also interesting to note that Whewell’s Architectural Notes are already mentioned in passing in W 2: 338.
Peirce presented himself as a disciple. In these texts a number of scattered reflections can also be found on the mutual relations among artistic, scientific and philosophical manifestations of the same epoch, which clearly depend on Whewell.

In a slightly later text on the history of ideas, Peirce returned to the revolution of thought of 1200, and once again related (albeit more subtly than in 1871) its two major outcomes: scholastic philosophy and Gothic architecture. Regarding the latter, he tackled the vexed topic of its origins, dismissing as “ridiculous” the hypothesis that it has come from the Arabs. “No” – he wrote, – “Whewell was right. [Gothic] was simply forced upon the architects by their desire to open large spaces, and […] to use compartments that were oblong not square.” He then went on to describe the architects’ “train of thought” with words that recall logical reasoning:

The men of that time were not content to go on building as they had always done; they wanted to do better. In order to do better they must have wider aisles. In order to accomplish this they must have oblong compartments. Here they had to think hard to solve a new problem […]. The result was the Gothic arch. But they did not stop with simply making a gothic arch. They carried it to its logical conclusion, a lofty roof. A lofty roof implied slender columns. […] What a wonderful train of thought this was! How strong and simple in every step! The effect of a Gothic church is to embody that intense yearning for something higher […] which marks the fall of pride.

The comparison of Gothic architecture and scholasticism contained in the review of Berkeley is not an accidental or insignificant digression. Among other things, it epitomizes some basic aspects of Peirce’s philosophical approach to history. No wonder that, years later, he considered the topic worth addressing again. Partially stirred by his interest and his high respect for medieval philosophy, Peirce resorted to this challenging, much-debated and far-reaching issue to come to grips with an aspect of his methodology that we can also discern in his notes on historical periods other than the Middle Ages.

V. Panofsky’s Argument

The strong theoretical richness of the analogy is even more pronounced in the work of the other thinker I would like to consider here: Erwin Panofsky. Indeed, Panofsky’s Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism should be seen as a late reflection on the central preoccupation of his intellectual life: the link between ideas and figurative artifacts, and more specifically, the question of the latter’s “intrinsic meaning”, or relation with the “underlying principles which reveal the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophi-
cal persuasion\textsuperscript{50}. At the same time, Panofsky touched upon some broader philosophical issues (the nature of perception and agency, the need to reconcile the conflicting demands of reason) which reveal his sympathy for the scholastic thinking with which he was dealing.

The book opens with a defense of the quest for analogies among different cultural phenomena of a single epoch. Risky as this enterprise necessarily is, it is nonetheless inescapable for the historian who wishes to give an intelligible shape to the flux of time. The case of Gothic architecture and Scholasticism, however, is particularly favored, in that it rests upon a striking congruence in the “purely factual domain of time and place”. Early Scholasticism and Early Gothic were born around the same years (the middle of the twelfth century) and in the same place: the area surrounding Paris. They matured and reached their “classical” period at about the same time. Finally they entered their decline together, in the age of Ockham, Eckhart and Giotto\textsuperscript{51}.

But the main thesis of the book is that “in the period from about 1130-40 to about 1270” the link between philosophy and architecture goes well beyond this geographical and chronological coincidence. What is more, this link is “more general than those individual (and very important) “influences” which are inevitably exerted on painters, sculptors, or architects by erudite advisers.” It is, in short, a causal relation, but one which “comes about by diffusion rather than by direct impact”. The fulcrum of such a relation is what Panofsky called the mental habit\footnote{Panofsky (1957: 21ff.)} that Scholasticism allegedly instilled into architects\textsuperscript{52}.

Revealing an interesting weaving between the method of inquiry and its object, Panofsky traced back this notion to Thomas’ discussion of habitus as a “principle that regulates the act” (“importans ordinem ad actum")\textsuperscript{53}. More precisely, what philosophers and architects actually shared was a common modus operandi, which was dictated in turn by “the very raison d’être of Early and High Scholasticism”: the need to reconcile the demands of reason and faith, thereby salvaging the unity of truth. Two main operative or methodological principles develop from this fundamental trait. The first is manifestatio. Reason’s task of elucidating the articles of faith was generalized into an all-embracing rhetorical stance that aimed at “clarification for clarification’s sake” and at making intellectual contents as perspicuous as possible at the level of their mode of expression. The second principle is concordantia, or the quest for the “acceptance and ultimate reconciliation of contradictory possibilities” which sprang from the tension between the wholehearted faith in the auctores and a sense of the contradictions into which they sometimes fell.

Both these rhetorical or methodological features had their correspondence in the domain of Gothic churches. As for concordantia, Panofsky tried to show that the different “solutions” to the “problems” gradually tackled by Gothic architects have the samedialectical and conciliatory progress of the Scholastic quaestiones: videtur quod – sed contra – respondeo dicendum. But it is manifestatio that is especially interesting. Panofsky quoted a renowned assertion from Thomas Aquinas, and gave an interpretation of it as essentially in agreement with those Gestalt psychologists who described perception as always “intelligent” or interpre-
tive54. Thomas wrote: “The senses delight in things duly proportioned as in something akin
to them; for the sense, too, is a kind of reason as is every cognitive power” (“ nam et sensus
ratio quaedam est, et omnis virtus cognoscitiva”)55. In accordance with this tenet, Panofsky
argued, the domain of visuality was treated as intellectually charged in the Scholastic peri-
od, and figurative artifacts (architecture above all) as bearers of a visual logic that made
manifest in the realm of materiality the abstract principles embodied in it. This means,
among other things, that the notions of functionalism or illusionism cannot be applied to
Gothic architecture in any meaningful way.

VI. Habit and Iconological Method

The polemic against the notion of a “pure eye” is one of Panofsky’s oldest motifs. It can
already be found in his first theoretical paper, the 1915 criticism of Wölfflin, which attac-
ted precisely the latter’s idea of a clear-cut divide between a psychologically or epistem-
ically neutral (individual) and a content-laden (super-individual) root of style – between
Auge and Gesinnung. Panofsky denied the existence of a purely optical component of per-
ception, as well as the related dichotomy between form and content. The succession of art-
styloes depended on changes not only in the Anschauung der Welt, but in the Weltan-
schauung56.

The implicit Kantian standpoint of this essay emerged with clarity in Panofsky’s subse-
quent publications. In the renowned paper on the Kunstwollen, Panofsky took pains to con-
struct Alois Riegl’s notion in a non-psychological way – as the immanenter Sinn of works of art – with an explicit eye to Kant’s transcendental philosophy57. But it is the writings
around 1924 (the year during which he definitively confronted the work of Ernst Cassirer58)
that mark a number of especially interesting developments. In a work directly related to the
Kunstwollen paper – Über das Verhältnis der Kunstgeschichte zur Kunsttheorie – we find
the first hint of a dialogue with his most gifted pupil, Edgar Wind, who in his doctoral dis-
sertation had put forward a view of works of art as always characterized by the eternal po-
ularity of Fülle and Form. In a similar vein, Panofsky attributed to the intrinsically polar
character of works of art the methodological necessity of conceiving the latter as temporary
solutions to problems that manifest themselves in antithetical form. (This view runs through
Panofsky’s whole oeuvre, up to his book on Gothic architecture59).

The same essay is also important for us because of its reference to Karl Mannheim’s so-
ciology of knowledge. In the famous 1923 article on the interpretation of Weltanschauung-
en, Mannheim had resorted to Panofsky’s work on Riegl in order to support his notion of
Dokumentsein: the unintentional stratum of meaning which hints at the worldview particu-

54Panofsky (1957: 37-38, 99). The primary reference is to Rudolf Arnheim. It is worth noting that while
Panofsky considered this theory of perception as “very much in harmony” with Scholasticism, he said it is “in
contrast to the doctrine of the nineteenth century”. On the coexistence of differences and analogies between Ge-
shape psychology and the Berkeley-Helmholtz tradition one may consult Rollins 1998.
55 Aquinas (1964-73), Ia, 5, 4. “Ratio” may alternatively be translated as “proportion”. See Aristotle, De Ani-
ma, 426b4.
59 “Über das Verhältnis der Kunstgeschichte zur Kunsttheorie. Ein Beitrag zu der Erörterung über die
lar cultural object presupposes — or, in case of human behavior, its general “Habitus”\(^{60}\). In his subsequent work, Panofsky reciprocated the acknowledgment when he claimed that it is precisely the conception of cultural objects as solutions to antithetical problems that may legitimate the quest for parallelisms\(^{61}\). The discussion with Mannheim then continued in a contemporary review of a book on Giotto, which presented the occasion for a discussion of *Weltanschauungen* in the context of Medieval studies. Here we also find a first allusion to Thomas’ “et sensus ratio quaedam est”, construed in an anti-subjectivist and Aristotelian sense\(^{62}\). (A true guiding thread of his ruminations, Panofsky discussed Thomas’ sentence yet again in a review from 1934\(^{63}\).

Panofsky’s technical use of the notion of habit has been usually regarded as a novelty of his 1951 book. However, there are some precedents. In the writings of the German period, some occurrences of the term “Habitus” (in the Latin form) can be found, with the circumscribed sense of “posture” or “physical attitude”\(^{64}\). But a letter from 1938 registers an important turning point. Asked to sum up his general lines of research, Panofsky wrote:

> On the one hand I have tried to do what I shall call “Iconography”, if it was not for the somewhat terrifying implications of this term, that is: to interpret the subject matter and content of works of art on the basis of contemporary sources, and to connect with [sic] the general habitus of the period\(^{65}\).

The term “Habitus” is placed here at the very center of Panofsky’s enterprise, and is noticeably expanded in its semantic scope – probably also with an eye to the intellectual evolution of Mannheim during the thirties. Later, in a letter from 1946, Panofsky wrote of the “mental habit of duplicity” pervading Mannerist architecture\(^{66}\). During the years that separate these two texts he gradually embarked on his more than ten-year research on Gothic architecture, which, as the private correspondence shows, was dotted with hesitations and loaded with large theoretical expectations\(^{67}\). Up to that point, the dialogue with Mannheim had focused on the “documentary” (and *abductive*, we may add) character of iconology, as is well attested by the classical statement of Panofskyan method, the 1932 *Zum Beschreibung und Inhaltsdeutung von Werken der bildenden Kunst*\(^{68}\).

The first version of this celebrated paper – rewritten and translated into English in 1939, then slightly reworked in 1955 – explicitly refers to the Hungarian sociologist. It also pushes further the dialogue with Edgar Wind, regarding the latter’s observations on the inherently circular nature of both scientific and historical inquiry. But most importantly, it is here that Peirce’s philosophy makes its first appearance. In the midst of his discussion of the


\(^{62}\) Ibid., 178-185.

\(^{63}\) Ibid., 176-177.

\(^{64}\) Ibid., 264, 449, 982, 988.

\(^{65}\) Panofsky to Th. W. Koch, Aug. 24th, 1938; Panofsky 2001-2011, 2: 135. Cf. also ibid., 172. In 1939 Panofsky had not yet drawn the distinction between “iconography” and “iconology”: the first term covered the whole spectrum of meanings.

\(^{66}\) Panofsky 2001-2011, 2: 714.

\(^{67}\) Cf., e.g., Panofsky 2001-2011, 2: 514-515, 1037. Cf. also Heckscher (1995: 184): “I know that Panofsky passionately believed in the theses of *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism*. This works highlights, it seems to me, the specifically scholastic strain in his whole manner of thinking. He felt vulnerable in publishing this *confesio amantis*, more so than ever before or after.” Panofsky held also a very interesting exchange on the content of this books with M. Shapiro, E. Curtius, E. Auerbach. Cf. Panofsky 2001-2011, 3: 191-194, 199-202, 208, 212.

unwitting character of documentary meaning (Martin Heidegger’s notion of the Ungesagte appears, too), Panofsky quotes “einen geistvollen Amerikaner” and his distinction between what a man “parades” and “what he betrays”. The 1939 version of the paper suppresses this reference to Peirce, together with the names of Heidegger and Mannheim, stressing instead the proximity with Cassirer’s philosophy of symbolic forms. But no less than three subsequent allusions to Peirce’s phrase can be found elsewhere in Panofsky’s writings, the most consequential among which is in the introductory chapter of Meaning in the Visual Arts, written in 1940:

Content, as opposed to subject matter, may be described in the words of Peirce as that which a work betrays but does not parade. It is the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion – all this unconsciously qualified by one personality, and condensed into one work.69

Scholars have often diagnosed a neat discontinuity in Panofsky’s oeuvre. After his American exile, he abandoned his mother tongue, dramatically changed his rhetorical style, and – so it is usually maintained – grew dissatisfied with the heavy philosophical tone that permeates his early work. I do not wish to deny the truths in this picture; yet the threads I have been following suggest a more nuanced story. Far from being the product of a philosophically disengaged mind, the book on Gothic architecture recapitulates a number of theoretical preoccupations that go back to the 1910s and presuppose the dialogue with the whole gamut of thinkers Panofsky confronted during his life. Granted, he by and large abandoned the Kantian standpoint of his early phase, to the advantage of a more pluralistic and empirical stance. Perhaps the later emphasis on habit might allow us to speak of a more Aristotelian, or even pragmatistsolution to his lifelong concerns.

VI. A German Pragmatist: Edgar Wind

It is certainly possible to account in part for the consonances between Peirce and Panofsky which have so far emerged by referring to a common philosophical background (Kant and the Aristotelian tradition, first of all; but also post-Kantian aesthetics). Nor would it be too difficult to point at mediating figures who pushed Panofsky’s thought in directions similar to Peirce’s. Let me again mention Karl Mannheim, and his late, extensive use of the notion of habit of thought. But Ernst Cassirer, too, though he did not read Peirce, bears affinities to the latter which are far from random.70

If, however, we are interested in grasping the details and the scope of Panofsky’s actual acquaintance with Peirce, it is to Edgar Wind that we must turn.

A student of philosophy and art history, Wind arrived in Hamburg in 1920 in order to work under Panofsky.71 He obtained his doctorate with a thesis on Ästhetischer und Kunstwissenschaftlicher Gegenstand which, as already mentioned, strongly impressed his men-

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70Podro 1982 locates the roots of the German art-historical tradition leading to Panofsky in the work of Kant, Schiller and Hegel. On the first I have already commented. Schiller’s Aesthetic Letters is described by Peirce as his “first dip into philosophy” (See Ketner [1998: 139], De Tienne [1996: 33–41]). On Peirce’s troubled but important relation to Hegel see Stern 2005, 2007.
71Krois 2004; Stjernfelt 2002.
72Biographical informations on Wind are from Krois 1998.
tor. Driven by the economic crisis, he left Germany in 1924 for the United States, where he stayed until 1927, first in New York, then as a philosophy instructor at the University of North Carolina. He thus made the acquaintance of the American philosophical world, the influence of which on his thought was profound, as is clearly attested by his Experiment und Metaphysik, published in 1934 but presented as his Habilitationsschrift in Hamburg in 1929 and already substantially anticipated in a talk given at Harvard three years before.

Wind was among the very first German scholars to write extensively on the philosophy of Whitehead, and seriously to confront Peirce’s writings. Later in his life, he would go so far as to affirm that he had had only two “masters”: Aby Warburg and Peirce himself.

The American philosopher Sidney Hook is likely to have played an important role in Wind’s discovery of pragmatism. Hook was a student of Dewey’s at Columbia when he met Wind; and his doctoral dissertation, Metaphysics of Pragmatism (published in 1927) bears implicit witness to a close dialogue with his German colleague. Largely devoted to a bold defense of Dewey’s instrumentalism, Hook’s text heavily relies on Peirce, as contrasted with the “nominalist” James. Uncommon among philosophical books of the period, it opens with a picture – William Blake’s The Ancient of Days – as a way of introducing the main features of Hook’s conception of the instrument (a notion whose prominence “is not an evasion of a metaphysics but a challenge to one”): its semiotic status, the circular relation it maintains with the world to which it belongs. From this focal point Hook also derives a number of observations on the active character of perception and the philosophy of space and time which come very close to Wind’s ideas.

Even more importantly, in 1924 Wind met the pragmatist philosopher Morris R. Cohen (whose student and colleague, Ernst Nagel, would positively review Wind’s book ten years later). Wind found Cohen “very pleasant and clever”, as we can read in a 1931 letter to Panofsky, in which the latter – then in New York – is given a number of interesting contacts. In 1916, Cohen had edited the first journal issue entirely dedicated to Peirce; and only one year prior to Wind’s arrival in America, he had published the first collection of Peirce’s writings, containing many of his most famous papers. It is most likely through this path that Wind grew directly acquainted with Peirce’s writings.

The Habilitationsschrift defended at the University of Hamburg in 1929 (under the supervision of Cassirer and Panofsky) is by far Wind’s most important philosophical work. Its

73 Wind 2011, which also contains Panofsky’s and Cassirer’s Gutachten.
74 Cf. Wind 1927, 2001. These are the texts to which Panofsky referred in 1932.
76 Krois (1998: 184), originally a personal communication from Margaret Wind.
78 Hook (1927: 6). “The title of this study has been selected with malice prepense. It conjoins two terms whose connotations are generally regarded as opposite in order to make more emphatic the belief that “method” is dogged by a pack of metaphysical consequences; that a “pure” method which does not involve reference to a theory of existence is as devoid of meaning as a proposition which does not imply other propositions.” Hook’s interpretation of Blake’s picture is criticized in Blunt 1938.
79 Cf. pp. 11ff., and 29: “We use our eyes as we do our hands – to grope, to pry, to scan, to escape danger, to signal to a friend. Sense activity, like all behavior generally, is not inertly receptive […] It is interactive. The eye is the organ of vision but the vision is not in the eye.”
80 Nagel 1934.
absence in today’s debate is an undeserved fate that goes back to its having appeared “dead-born” in the midst of dreadful political circumstances. Compared to Hook’s witty but facile Pragmatism, Wind’s work stands out for its erudition, its intellectual breadth and its philosophical rigor. Its main goal—a confutation of Kant’s transcendental dialectics—may not be irrefutable from a Kantian standpoint; but the first part of the book sets down a theory of Verkörperung or embodiment which makes of Wind one of the major, if neglected, figures of European pragmatism. These pages also exerted a strong influence on Panofsky, who constantly came back to them in his reflections on iconological method.

Wind’s central contention is that metaphysical questions—conceived on the model of Kantian antinomies, as questions that bear on the totality of the world—are in principle always decidable, for they necessarily entail consequences in the domain of experience which will prove verifiable in the long run. The act of measuring through which the scientist, in the experimental situation, interrogates reality, never concerns solely the single fact with which it primarily deals, but always tests a whole theory, together with its metaphysical presuppositions. Facts ought not to be conceived as unrelated or immediately given data; experimental results always have a metaphysical bearing.

The ultimate reason for this fact is to be found in the very nature of the measuring instrument, which, being itself part of the same world to which it attends, cannot but presuppose or embody the same regularities of nature which it is meant to test. This sort of circularity—“methodical” or hermeneutic rather than vicious—is proper not only to the scientific instrument, but also to the historical document, which is also part of the same world with which it deals. Natural sciences and Geisteswissenschaften are thus unified under the general principle of the “internal determination” (innere Grenzsetzung), or “organic” relation of part and whole.

Scientific instruments and historical documents thereby reveal their “symbolic”, or semiotic nature, on which the principle of the internal determination ultimately depends. Being itself part of the world to which it refers, every “symbol” (or sign) can have a claim to validity only insofar as it entails perceivable effects of some sort. To put it in slightly different terms: “symbols are “real” only to the extent in which they can be embodied in an experimentum crucis whose outcome is directly observable.

With this general rule Wind innovatively merged the polar theory of the symbol he derived from Warburg (the symbol is a janus-faced entity, in which sensible matter always embodies a spiritual force, and which always swings between the two poles of Verinnerlichung and Entäußerung) with the “pragmatic maxim” Peirce set forth in the 1877 essay on the How to Make Our Ideas Clear—a text Wind referred to both in the 1934 preface to his book and in another paper from the same year. More importantly, however, it is the very notion of embodiment that stems from Peirce. The term recurs many times in Peirce’s papers. In its most technical occurrences, it indicates the relation that holds among the three fundamental metaphysical categories. The thirdness-related elements of reality can be such only as long as they are embodied, that is they govern material realities; otherwise, they de-

83 Wind 1958.
84 For some parallels between Wind’s thought and contemporary pragmatism cf. also Falkenburg 2001. Engel 2012 makes a similar point with regards to the differences between Wind and Cassirer.
85 I am drawing on Wind 1927, 1934, 1936, 1958, 2001. Buschendorf 2001 is a very useful overview of the main traits of Wind’s philosophy.
86 Wind 1958 (emphasis mine).
87 See especially the 1934 “Einleitung” to the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliographie zum Nachleben der Antike, reprinted in Wind 2001 and 2009.
teriorate into pure abstraction. In particular, it is the nature of thought that Peirce described through the notion of embodiment: “Thought has no being except in so far as it will be embodied, and the embodiment of thought is a sign”. “By thought is meant something like the meaning of a word, which may be “embodied in”, that is, may govern, this or that, but is not confined to any existent”.

The theory of Verkörperung has important repercussions for Wind’s more general views on man’s symbolic activities. A political action, an ethical demand or a law are merely “utopische Gedanken” if they fail to prove translatable into the realm of praxis. More importantly, artistic conceptions can become works of art only if they can be channelled into a grammar of artistic expression, and thus tested in their actual liability to be embodied or realized. In the same vein, Wind’s theory of the symbol underpins what should be regarded as the ultimate theoretical justification of his iconological method: I mean the polemic, which we have already come across in both Peirce and Panofsky, against a clear separation between “pure vision” on one side and “pure thinking” on the other. The issue runs through Wind’s whole oeuvre, from his doctoral thesis up to Art and Anarchy. In the 1931 essay on Warburg, it is employed to criticize the tendency (in Wölfflin, Riegl) to draw parallels among artistic genres without granting the right centrality to the “hantierender Mensch”. But the overall intellectual urgency that lies behind the issue is that of fighting against what Wind, paraphrasing Plato, called “the fear of knowledge”. Far from being irrelevant to our appreciation of works of art, scholarship and historical learning are able to enhance it. The theory of Verkörperung leaves no room for sharp boundaries between intuition and concept, image and word, seeing and thinking. Similar, in this respect, to the instrument of the scientist, the figurative artwork always embodies an intellectual dimension from which it cannot be detached.

On the other side of the same coin is Wind’s polemic against the diverse spectrum of thinkers who tend to conceive of philosophy as the activity of unbounded or disembodied intellects, detached from verités de fait and from the historicity of the concepts with which they work, or those who uphold intuitionist accounts of cognition which set men apart from the finite and conditioned nature of their epistemic practices. It is in such a context that we find the citation to which Panofsky’s encounter with Peirce should be traced back. Let me quote from the 1936 paper on Some Points of Contacts Between History and Natural Science:

Whatever objections may be made to the current psychology of the unconscious, it is undeniable that men do not know themselves by immediate intuition and that they live and express themselves on several levels. Hence, the interpretation of historical documents requires a far more complex psychology than Dilthey’s doctrine of immediate experience with its direct appeal to a state of feeling. Peirce wrote in a draft of a psychology of the development of ideas: “it is the belief men betray, and not that which they parade, which has to be studied”.

89 EP 2:256 (1903).
90 EP 2:269 (1903).
93 Wind 1985, fourth chapter. A similar case is made by Panofsky in “The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline” (1940), in Panofsky 1955.
94 Wind (1936: 258).
We reach here the very birthplace of Panofsky’s acquaintance with Peirce, from which virtually all the elements I have been gathering in these pages unfold. In order precisely to locate it in time, it is essential to bear in mind that as early as 1930 Wind probably read the original German version of the text as Probevorlesung for his Habilitation (which Panofsky no doubt attended)\textsuperscript{95}. A glance at the differences between the two versions yields some unexpected results. The original version pushes the criticism of Dilthey farther than the subsequent translation by tightly linking the quote from Peirce to an exposition of Warburg’s ideas. Still more significantly, some subsequently abandoned hints make clear that Wind did not have only Freud in mind when he spoke about the “psychology of the unconscious”?\textsuperscript{96} On the contrary, he was interested in revitalizing a number of reflections on the unconscious which are much older than Freud, and which at times diverge from his views. Although Wind did not linger over this point, thanks to contributions as diverse as his retrieval of Duns Scotus and his experiments on the Unterschiedsschwelle\textsuperscript{97}, Peirce holds an outstanding place among these studies. An appraisal of his influence on Wind or Panofsky may thus also have the beneficial side-effect of rendering more nuanced the parallels between psychoanalysis and iconology that have been looming large over the last years.

A few more references to Peirce in Wind’s oeuvre are worth recalling. A passage dating from just a couple of years after Panofsky’s publication of Gothic Architecture bears new witness to Wind’s attention to Peirce’s notion of habit – interestingly translated here into the Latin habitus\textsuperscript{98}. Still more important, however, is a subsequent text, which Wind wrote with an eye to briefly sketching the methodological hallmarks of iconology, and which ends with a renowned Peircean sentence (though today’s readers are more likely to associate it with Wittgenstein):

To convey this experience [i.e., mutually to shed light on images and text], a method of demonstration is required which is radically different from mathematical proofs. In the place of a linear logic, in which each proposition has its well-defined antecedents by which it is linked to a well-defined set of premises, we must aim for a configurational logic by which contingent arguments are interlocked. In the words of Charles Peirce, it is essential to this form of study that our reasoning “should not form a chain which is no stronger than its weakest link, but a cable whose fibres may be ever so slender, provided they are sufficiently numerous and intimately connected”\textsuperscript{99}.

\textsuperscript{95} The German original has been published posthumously: Wind 1988. Ironically, the volume in which the text appeared was part of a series on the relationships between architecture and science. The text is reprinted also in Wind 2001 and 2009. See Wind (2001: 254n) for information on Wind’s Probevorlesung. As I already mentioned, Panofsky quoted Peirce’s sentence as early as 1932, that is, well before the publication of the Cassirer Festschrift.

\textsuperscript{96} See in particular the footnote on Wind (1988: 39n): “Schon zu Diltheys Zeiten war dieser Gedanke nicht neu. Vgl. Als ein Beispiel für viele, Carus, Psyche (1846). Auch soll bereits ähnliches gelehrt haben”. The reference is to the German physiologist, polymath and painter Carl Gustav Carus (1789-1869). I thank Carlo Ginzburg for having made me aware of these differences between the English and the German texts.

\textsuperscript{97} See the article “On Small Differences of Sensation” which Peirce wrote together with his pupil Joseph Jastrow (W 5: 122-135, 1884). Not by accident Peirce also quoted this article in the very text of 1905 in which he dealt with the difference between betraying and parading as well as with Scotus’ notion of being in the mind habitualiter (see fn. 23).

\textsuperscript{98} Wind 1954.

VIII. Habit, Tacit Knowledge, Iconology

Peirce’s statement concerning the difference between betraying and parading originally appeared in a footnote of his “Issues of Pragmaticism”, published in The Monist in 1905. (Unlike the other texts Edgar Wind referred to, this is not comprised in Cohen’s anthology). Peirce reflected here on what he calls “critical common-sensism” as one of the footholds of his philosophy. Whilst every man’s intellectual life relies on a number of unquestioned premises, these are by no means intrinsically undoubtable. The boundaries between what is doubted and what is taken for granted change from generation to generation. A historical study of these shifts is possible, and Peirce himself claimed to have once embarked on the enterprise, which “needs the qualities of age and does not call upon the powers of youth. A great range of reading is necessary; for it is the belief men betray, and not that which they parade which has to be studied”100.

The key-term here is, of course, belief. As I have already recalled, the pragmatic maxim can be rephrased by saying that the purport of a belief is tantamount to the sum total of possible actions which it would elicit under every conceivable circumstance. This principle dovetails with Peirce’s semiotics, which asserts that a sign can be such only if it is part of a chain of other signs that interpret or reproduce it. There is a “general rule” which, though it cannot be exhausted by any of these individual “interpretants”, governs (is “embodied in”) the process of their production.

In the case of human agency and thought, a role analogous to this general rule is played precisely by the belief-habit. If one puts together these two prongs of Peirce’s pragmatism, it follows that all actions, or products thereof, which fulfill some sort of semiotic function (from signs of greeting to figurative artifacts) do not merely stand for their primary or intended meaning, whatever it be. They are at the same time the interpretants of beliefs that, like the eye’s blind spot, may be opaque to the subject’s auto-analysis. Human actions and products embody or betray the meaning of such beliefs. It is thus significant that one of those “proto-iconological” observations that can be found in the Lowell Lectures of 1892 reads: “[The Greeks] ruling intellectual passion was a passion for unity. […] Their architecture, their decoration, their sculpture, the construction of their dramas, and of their prose writings equally betray this passion for unity”101.

The accent on the unwitting dimension of habit-governed behavior calls attention to a point of contact with thinkers such as Wittgenstein, Bourdieu or Michael Polanyi. “We know more than we can tell”; the “rules” that govern human conduct can never be made wholly explicit. They constitute a different way of knowing – a practical one; or what we “attend from” as opposed to what we “attend to”, in the Polanyi’s terminology102. The simpler illustration of this implicit or habitual knowing is what we have already encountered as the main guiding thread of this study: perceptual activity as necessarily guided by unwitting abductive inferential habits. On this level, the properly bodily roots of habits emerge; and even though Peirce is far from clear or univocal as other authors on the role of the body in shaping human cognition, his semiotic understanding of the habit does offer a link between those two meanings of “embodiment” – a stricter and a more metaphorical one – that many authors, among them Edgar Wind, regard as belonging together.

At the same time, Peirce’s account of perception also plays an important role in his vindication of pragmatism. Precisely the symbolische Prägnanz of perception (to borrow Cas-

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100 EP 2: 349. (First emphasis mine.)
101 HP 1: 204 (1892), emphasis mine.
102 See Polanyi 2009.
sirer’s expression\textsuperscript{103}) makes available the rationality or legality embedded in the material world. Indeed, it is this rational dimension (laws of nature, to begin with), and not brute materiality, which is most real, and to which our cognition primarily attends – somewhat akin to the way, on a different scale, “we can repeat the sense of a conversation but not the words uttered”\textsuperscript{104}.

We face here two sides of the same coin. Both the secondness-related aspects of reality and our habitual inferential apparatus are things we draw upon in the processes of forming our perceptual judgments (and hence the whole spectrum of our conceptions). These are abductive processes, abduction being the only mode of inference able to bring about new cognitions, by springing from the particular – the \textit{hic et nunc} – to the universal. Peirce also called pragmatism “the logic of abduction”: it is via abductive processes that the world of material existence immediately surrounding us acquires its rational and understandable nature. From this angle, his account of reasoning reveals indeed its vicinity to those broadly coeval thinkers who, sensitive to the cognitive value of the particular, as well as to the unwitting, tacit and mediating dimension of human agency, were on the lookout for a more flexible, craft-made, and less strictly analytical notion of rationality: more akin to the model of medicine than to mathematics\textsuperscript{105}.

One such thinker is Erwin Panofsky. His references to the “irrational”, “empathic”, “subjective”, “interpretative”, “synthetic”, “intuitive”, “diagnostic” character of iconological analysis\textsuperscript{106} are all half-successful attempts to come to grips with the epistemological challenges lurking within his own method. Karl Mannheim’s more rigorous notion of \textit{Dokumentsinn}, which Panofsky drew upon so heavily, belongs to the same context. In both cases, these thinkers draw attention not so much to the abductive process carried out by the subject, but rather to the complementary one which the beholder, or interlocutor, has to perform in order to pass from the concrete particular to the general interpretant that governs it. As in every instance of communication, which always presupposes a duality, two different subjectivities or conceptual horizons confront each other and interact here. The hermeneutic circularities that Wind and Panofsky detect in every kind of inquiry (and which Peirce, similarly though less explicitly, touches upon in his account of abduction) more decisively leap to the foreground.

\textsuperscript{103} Krois (2008: 115): “According to Cassirer, perception always already embodies various symbolic meanings simultaneously, and the majority of these meanings are not the result of intentional acts of interpretation. This thought clearly struck a responsive chord in Panofsky, who emphasizes the unintentional character of symbolical values in iconology.”

\textsuperscript{104}EP 2: 229 (1903).

\textsuperscript{105} Ginzburg 2000.

\textsuperscript{106} Panofsky 1955.
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Tanja Bogusz

Experiencing Practical Knowledge: Emerging Convergences of Pragmatism and Sociological Practice Theory

Abstract. The classical philosophy of American pragmatism has experienced a striking renaissance within the social sciences during the last decade especially in France and Germany. My essay takes this development as a starting point to propose a historical and epistemological combination of pragmatism and sociological practice theory from an anthropological viewpoint. In the long run this combination is not only supposed to overcome their pretended incommensurateness in social theory, but to consolidate their methodological convergences, which, while actually reclaimed in international social and cultural anthropology, still wait to be applied in a more systematic relation. Hence, the essay examines their respective approaches concerning knowledge, action and the importance of experience starting with William James and Émile Durkheim (1). In a second step, the concepts of experience and practice in the works of John Dewey and Pierre Bourdieu will be compared one to another (2). The essay finishes by outlining a possible combination based on emergence theory that still has to be developed (3).

Introduction

“Pragmatism and sociology” observed Émile Durkheim in 1914, share “a sense of life and action. Both are children of the same era” (Durkheim 1983: 1). This assumption has gained ground in current social science and humanities discourse, in particular in France and Germany, a development I shall examine below. Following the skepticism of postmodernism, both practice theory and pragmatism are undergoing a renaissance that can be seen not least in the so-called epistemological turns of the past decade. Thus the “pragmatic turn” of the 1990s was followed by the “practice turn” of the beginning of the 21st century internationally in social and cultural sciences as well as in philosophy. Despite the obvious convergences of both traditions of thought, there has not yet been a systematic analysis of their epistemological convergences. This essay addresses this desideratum through a comparative analysis of the sociologists Émile Durkheim and Pierre Bourdieu and the philosophers William James and John Dewey. Without a doubt, these four protagonists are different in many respects. Durkheim rejected the vitalist principles that characterized James’ pragmatism and radical empiricism, and Bourdieu did not embrace Dewey’s political optimism about social and cognitive spaces of opportunity that could potentially support social change towards a more democratic and humane society. It seems it is exactly these distinctions that differentiated sociology from pragmatism from the very beginning and that, at least in francophone countries, long hindered pragmatism from gaining the recognition and attention in Europe that it deserved. The situation in Germany was not much better until Hans Joas has introduced American pragmatism into German sociological theory. At the

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2 For a discussion on a combination of practice theory and pragmatism in order to develop a contemporary theory of social mechanisms, see Gross 2009; for a discussion on Pierre Bourdieu’s and John Dewey’s approaches to critical activities through the lenses of the French pragmatic sociology of critique, see Thévenot 2001.
same time, no connections were made between pragmatism and the epistemological foundations of Pierre Bourdieu’s practice theory, which the late Frankfurter School saw as utilitarian cultural sociology (Honneth 1984, Joas and Knöbl 2004); practice theory’s call for the creation of theory based on experience and empirical reflection was applied anything but stringently.

The French neo-pragmatic movement under the label of the “sociologie pragmatique de la critique” was constituted in the early 1990s notably by ex-scholars of Bourdieu against his sociology, or, more precisely, against the structuralist heritage in his conception of the habitus. On the other hand, and without making it explicit, it reinforced Bourdieu’s practical epistemology through an ethnomethodological and actor-centered perspective, that had obviously inspired Bourdieu’s own practice as a researcher, but was widely neglected in his theoretical architecture. Moreover and curiously enough, the French pragmatic movement was itself not originated by a reception of the American classics. In a way, these inconsistencies contributed to the general idea that pragmatism and practice theory have not much in common. However in the meantime, over ten years after Bourdieu’s death, today it is again possible to take up the idea of Bourdieu’s practice theory free of the former Parisian trench fighting (Boltanski 2008 and 2009, De Fornel and Ogien 2011) and at the same time systematically re-read James’ and Dewey’s writings (De Fornel and Lemieux 2007, Karsenti 2007) and conceptualize them anew for the sociological theory of knowledge (Thévenot 2011). This is the impulse I have followed.

Practice, in James’ and Dewey’s pragmatism, as well as in Durkheim’s and Bourdieu’s sociology, signifies first of all an anthropological category. Its material, physical and cognitive complexity is that it refers equally to contradictory states ever-present in *homo duplex*: difference and repetition, creation and reproduction, action and reflection, volatility and stability. This definition of practice contrasts – particularly explicitly in Dewey and Bourdieu’s writings – on an epistemological level with a reason-centered and universalistic concept of humanity that was again radically questioned by the post-modern ideas of the 1990s. At the same time, this concept nevertheless created an awareness of the considerable power of institutions and structures both to reinforce social inequality and to question its internalization and modification through practice. “Practice” is at the same time the critical counterpart to “theory”, provided that the latter is not hypostatized as the origin of knowledge. The creation of a dichotomy between theory and practice is already the starting point of all four authors’ critiques of consciousness considering the philosophy and humanities of their respective times. In this sense, the term practice is very close to concepts of “experience” (in Bourdieu “disposition”), “knowledge” and “emergence” – an idea that already informed Durkheim’s thought and also allows for a connection between pragmatism and practice theory as I shall suggest below.

My assumption is that an interpretation – based on emergence theory – of the categories central to both these schools; experience/disposition, knowledge and practice shall make an explicit combination of pragmatism and a sociological theory of practice possible that has not yet been attempted and that takes into account both socio-structural limits and contingent and optional spaces of possibility. In my use of the practice-oriented term “emergence”, I use Wolfgang Krohn and Günther K üppers’ definition: the appearance of a new quality characterized by a specific “self-organized dynamic of process” (Krohn and Küppers 1992: 7-8) considering the fact, that, as Neil Gross points out, “pragmatists suggest

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2 Krohn and Küpper precede “appearance” with the adverb “sudden,” which I have left out. Particularly from a pragmatic/practice theory perspective – and especially in regard to the positions examined here – the processual-
that means and ends are not always given prior to action ..., but are instead often emergent from action. ... This is especially the case in situations of ambiguity, which pragmatism is uniquely poised to make sense of” (Gross 2009: 367). This processual dynamic is especially important to the prominence of practice in terms of its ability to form reality, its creative force, central to both practice theory and experimental thinking. For James and for Dewey, as well as for Bourdieu, knowledge is a mode of practical action based on the fundamental rejection of an essentialist point of reference divorced from action. They were interested in the dynamics of human action as a practical construction of the social. I therefore take a particularly close look at James’ and Durkheim’s theories of knowledge and action and the meaning of (collective) “experience” (1). I then compare the terms “experience” and “practice” in the philosophy of John Dewey and Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of knowledge and society (2). Finally, I shall make an attempt to explain why conceptualizing these approaches using a theory of emergence is important for a pragmatist theory of practice that is yet to be developed (3).

I. Modern critiques of consciousness in France and the USA: Durkheim’s “sociologie de l’action” and James’ “radical empiricism”

At the start of the twentieth century, Émile Durkheim elevated sociology to a discipline that, not incidentally, in France oscillated between scientific positivism and metaphysical philosophy. This new French discipline could only gain as philosophy and the natural sciences vied for interpretative supremacy. Durkheim’s anti-fundamentalist criticism of teleological metaphysics on the one hand and empirical determinism on the other hand sparked passionate debates at the turn of the century on how best to grasp the societal challenges of the modern era. This is the point at which Durkheim’s empirical social science connects with American pragmatism and which accentuates his sociological method. Durkheim’s claim to a completely new social science, genetically and empirically, has a worthy opponent in William James’ pragmatism and radical empiricism.

Durkheim’s lectures on pragmatism, held in the winter of 1913/1914, but first published in 1955 from students’ notes, were a reaction to three questions articulated by the pragmatist movement: 1) The meaning of experience for the constitution of social reality, 2) The centrality of action and practice to gaining knowledge and finally 3) The search for a method to gauge the relationship between empirical facts and individual and collective consciousness. According to Hans Joas and the French philosopher Bruno Karsenti, the importance of Durkheim’s pragmatism lectures as a component of his sociologie de l’action has been underestimated to date. Thus both sociology and pragmatism made an important early contribution to practice theory, most recently discussed in the context of the so-called practice turn (Karsenti 2006: 162-163, Karsenti 2007: 139).

The pragmatists’ epistemological interest arose from an underlying anthropological assumption; that humans can be distinguished from animals by their reduced instincts. As a result, they meet crisis situations with neither a universally given nor internalized spectrum of action, but rather must experiment. In his well-known 1878 essay “How to make our ide-
as clear”, C.S. Peirce founded pragmatism as an epistemological semiotics and a means of clarifying the practical significance of terminology. Peirce, James and Dewey were searching for methodological connecting points between natural sciences and philosophical epistemology. The problem with philosophy, as Dewey in particular never tired of saying, is its insistence on metaphysically founded absolute certainty from which it defended its dominance in the humanities in the face of the growing omnipresence of the natural sciences. The philosophy of pragmatism on the other hand, was based on the underlying assumption that both quotidian and scientific knowledge is based primarily on experience and practice. Knowledge represents therefore a hypothetical endeavor, while practice has both a creative and an experimental character. For James, John Dewey summarized James’ accomplishment in this context as follows: “In brief, James’s theory is replacing the traditional concept of absolute truth with experimentalism” (MW 12: 220).

The sociologist Durkheim was skeptical about this epistemological optimism. For one thing, he doubted the existence of unfettered possibilities espoused by experimental thinking, he rather believed in constrictive social norms; he also found that the pragmatists ignored the importance of history by their emphasis on the new social spaces of possibility opened up by the modern era, the structural framework of which was equally created and limited by the freedom of the human will (Durkheim 1982: 134-135). James believed these spaces of possibility were based on experiences in the world and of the world in which old truths and new experiences collaborate, a particular focus of his radical empiricism. James’ pragmatism sought in the end to ensure the connection of truth and usefulness. While Peirce’s “pragmaticism”, as he later renamed his philosophy to distinguish it from James’, concentrated on applying mathematical logic to philosophical knowledge in order to introduce it to philosophy through an experimental method of abduction – building hypotheses – as a “laboratory habit of mind”, James, a psychologist, applied naturalist methods to practice-based cognition. A polemic against both rationalism and (particularly Humean) empiricism, pragmatism aimed also to refer to a basic method of thinking; both a theory of reality and a genetic theory of truth. The pragmatic method should act as an intermediary between different perspectives, highlighting their transformative elements, as James explained in 1907 in “Pragmatism”: It is thus an “indication of the ways in which existing realities may be changed. Theories become thus instruments, not answers to enigmas, in which we can rest. We won’t lie upon them, we move forward, and, on occasion, make nature over again by their aid” (James 1978: 32). Similar to Durkheim’s sociology, pragmatists are in opposition to all essentialist tendencies in the philosophical tradition that divided the empirical from theory. Durkheim’s sociology is also instrumental and interventionist; not only in terms of its methodological approach but also in terms of its practical function - in two senses a sociologie de l’action. But how do James’ philosophy and Durkheim’s sociology correspond in regard to their respective aims?

1.1 Experience and collective consciousness

The following examination of Durkheim’s comments on pragmatism elucidates the way in which Durkheim was able to hone his original sociological arguments by grappling with James. The term “experience” is central to both; as a new critique of consciousness it is one of the most important paradigms in the modern humanities. Bruno Karsenti observes that Durkheim’s “opposition to pragmatism [is] ... just as clear as to Kantianism and empiricism. However it makes the relentlessness and the specificity of Durkheim’s thesis clear, which attempts to prevail against the challenges of a theory, which itself acted similarly at its onset, by overcoming both classical theoretical trends by redefining ‘experience.’ Ac-
cordingly one could ask whether [Durkheim’s] socio-empiricism is not primarily a sociological version of ‘radical empiricism’” (Karsenti 2007: 134)\(^4\).

Karsenti is referring here to the lectures on pragmatism and to Durkheim’s studies on the sociology of religion which for some time have been discussed in France and in the USA as “socio-empiricism” in regards to the impulses they provided for practice theory (Rawls 1996, De Fornel and Lemieux 2007). Both James and Durkheim phrase their humanist critique of consciousness as a radical empiricist attack on metaphysical ideas of consciousness: “Truth thus means, according to humanism, the relation of less fixed parts of experience (predicates) to other relatively fixed parts (subjects); and we are not required to seek it in a relation of experience as such to anything beyond itself” (James 1975: 212). James’ radical empiricism thus refers primarily the attempt to bring together the process of the relation of experiences with the demands of any given reality; or to connect rational and empirical thought\(^5\). In his famous 1904 essay “Does consciousness exist?” James even goes so far as to take complete leave of the term “consciousness” in favor of its “pragmatic equivalent in realities of experience”. However, since this thought appears absurd to him he adds:

> that I mean only to deny that the word stands for an entity, but to insist most emphatically that it does stand for a function. … [T]here is a function in experience which thoughts perform, and for the performance of which this quality of being is invoked. That function is knowing (James 1922: 3-4).

Radical empiricism as a critique of consciousness seeks to debunk the underlying ontological assumption of an absolute origin of consciousness, as David Lapoujade emphasizes:

> To free the self from the assignation to an origin at the same time frees human action from an organizational plan hidden in nature, with the mind subjugated to its effects. There is no plan other than the organizational plan of experience (Lapoujade 2008: 185).

Seen this way, both radical empiricism and Durkheim aspire to connect to the *Lebenswelt* (life-world), however Durkheim doubts that it is possible to capture consciousness within social reality using James’ at the same time abstract and subject-oriented terminology of “pure experience” or the “stream of experience”. He criticizes James’ vitalist approach, a criticism he also aims at his French competitors Gabriel Tarde and Henri Bergson. Similar to Bergson, the pragmatists, according to Durkheim, postulate a reverse evolution in which the simplest life form is differentiated and individual and the highest life form is commingling and life-flow. He in contrast sees differentiation of both organic and social life as proof that “creative development” (Bergson) goes in the other direction: from the primitive state of commingling to the current (modern) state of differentiation. The respective central terms – the “stream of experience” (James following Bergson) and the “social fact” (Durkheim) mirror this fundamental difference, further ignited by Durkheim’s desire to distance himself from psychology – James’ origins – as well as his claim to an objective

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\(^4\) A similar view is found in Joas regarding the agreement of Durkheim and pragmatism on building a “theory of the social constitution of the fundamental category of knowledge” (Joas 1993: 267). However in my opinion this is less true of James who (unlike Durkheim) does not extrapolate from the dualism of practice and knowledge, but radically circumvents the difference between thought and action by preferring the concept of experience. It is thus presumably experience (Joas 1993: 261) that needs to be questioned as a radical empiricist and sociological term.

\(^5\) On the contemporary form of the empirical turn see Joas 1993, 261-2.
sociology. Whereas pure experience as an “experience of actualities” (Lapoujade 2008: 184) is always in the process of becoming, a social fact is also governed by process, but it is the result of differentiation, in particular of the social division of labor. The respective understanding of practice is similar; in Durkheim it is based on a theory of differentiation and is not holistic as in pragmatism. The “organizational plan of experience” (Lapoujade) is for Durkheim also primarily an external factor; it develops within the framework of a collective consciousness which both acts upon the individual and at the same time is created by him. This dual character of experiencing and producing mirrors Durkheim’s underlying assumption of homo duplex, whose irreducible social self culminates as “collective representation” in the “social fact”, in the “association” or even in the “crystallization of social phenomena from social currents” (Durkheim 1981: 173, Durkheim 1954: 433). This genealogical culmination results from an understanding of the social as sui generis, institutionalized within specific social milieus.

Durkheim’s sociology oscillates between this processual perspective and an emphasis on the structuring power of social and conventional norms (Durkheim 1953: 24-25, Lukes 1973: 10, Sawyer 2005: 103-104). This oscillation distinguishes both the contradictoriness and the complexity of Durkheim’s thought and also makes it thoroughly plausible that he was influenced by both Bergson and James, as this passage from “Sociology and its scientific domain” (1900) shows, a reply to Georg Simmel’s essay “Das Gebiet der Soziologie” (the field of sociology):

Without a doubt phenomena concerning structure are somewhat more stable than functional phenomena, but there are only gradual differences between these two orders of facts. Structure itself can only be grasped in becoming and we can only see it as evident by taking into account the process of becoming. Structure is ceaselessly built up and broken down, it is life that has reached a certain degree of consolidation and to separate it from the life from which it has come or the life which determines it is equivalent to taking apart that which is inseparable (Durkheim 1975: 22).

R. Keith Sawyer correspondingly makes out the following forms of social emergence in Durkheim’s oeuvre: “1. The crystallization of social phenomena from social currents. 2. The historical perspective of a social stage from a social milieu. 3. The emergence of collective representations from the social milieu” (Sawyer 2005: 123)\(^6\). Collective experience is primarily important for the practice theory dimension of Durkheim’s conceptual thought because it reflects the functional interdependence of “impersonal norms of thought” and social practices (Durkheim 1975: 30, Karsenti 2006: 195f.). Durkheim, as a reaction to the accusation that his sociology was similar to Hobbes’ or Machiavelli’s power theories, holds up the emergent character of collective experience – in his Rules already linked to the term “association”: “But if, contrary to these philosophers, we say that social life is natural, it is

\(^6\) An excurses on Durkheim’s exploration of James’ Principles of Psychology which runs through his pragmatism lectures would shed more light on this. While some sociologists tended to see psychology primarily as a area of demarcation (particularly true of Pierre Janet’s und Gabriel Tardes’ psychologie sociale), Durkheim and his student Maurice Halbwachs’ psychologie collective repeatedly stresses the importance of psychological knowledge for a sociological analysis (Durkheim 1953: 1-34; Bastide 1958).

\(^7\) Here I follow Steven Luke’s argument that Durkheim replaced the term “crystallization” with the term “institution” or uses them synonymously.

\(^8\) Accordingly, it is possible to interpret Durkheim’s statement that sociology is the science of institutions from an emergence theory perspective: Sociology is at the same time a science for studying institutionalizing (Castoriadis) evolving phenomena, “associations,” as well as stabilizing institutions in the meaning of material and moral structures.
not because we find its origin in the nature of the individual; it is because it derives directly from the collective being which is, of itself a nature sui generis; it is because it arises from that special process of elaboration which individual consciousness undergo through their association with each other and whence evolves a new form of existence” (Durkheim 1982: 144). Sawyer trenchantly remarked on the place of consciousness in this context: “Collective representations are of qualitatively different nature than individual representations because they are emergent social facts” (Sawyer 2005: 106). Therefore the collective, external to the individual person, marks the impossibility of reducing the social to the individual subject.

Durkheim’s sociologie de l’action thus positions itself as an emergence theory alternative to radical empiricism in which experience and consciousness are historically saturated due to their collectivity – for Durkheim the central characteristic of the modern era. If experience and consciousness are equally central to the constitution of reality for both Durkheim’s sociology and James’ philosophy of pragmatism, what role does practice play? Here I arrive at the core of Durkheim’s criticism of pragmatism, on the basis of which the centrality of practice and its differing functions in sociology and pragmatism becomes clear.

### 1.2 Practice: Action and knowledge

In his sociophysiological studies, Durkheim uses both the terms “action” and “practice.” His professor and supporter in Bordeaux, Alfred Espinas, had already introduced praxéologie as a sociological theory of practice in 1897 (Espinas 1897: 8-9, Filloux 1987: 45-46, Durkheim 1969: 296). James’ definition of the term practice on the other hand is greatly influenced by Peirce and signifies an epistemological category the purpose of which is not quite clear, as John Dewey criticized in his 1907 essay “What pragmatism means by practical.” For James practice is a distinguishing attribute of an assumed measure of the truth of a statement, although it refers to the hypothetical character of every truth. Truths, as faits accomplis, are not a priori concepts, but are made. Their characteristics are not static, but dynamic and practical (MW 4: 98 ff., Durkheim 1981: 125). This instrumental thought is based on the one hand on an analogy with natural sciences and on the other hand on a concept of experience to which James imparts, as to consciousness, a functional importance for acquiring knowledge. This analogy is clear in the term “experimental thought” that, similar to the French expérimentation subsumes experiment, experience and mental movement. Empiricism is connected with life-worldly and scientific experience, to which a mentalist advantage is given, and now can also be applied methodologically. Dewey remarks on this: “I believe we can say ... that the development of the idea of experience to which James more than pointed, which he initiated for us, constitutes a revolutionary change in traditional empiricism” (LW 15: 13). Thus “practice” in pragmatism means above all turning away from metaphysical ideas of truth and toward a life-worldly reality (James 1975: 278-279). For this reason, James sees an inseparable connection between practice and knowledge. This connection is created cognitively by experience. Because thought and reality are never completely in concordance, experience has the reality-stabilizing function of bridging this gulf. This fundamental critique of Humes’ empiricism, Kant’s a priori and the Cartesian cogito is at the same time the foundation for pragmatism’s attempt to rehabilitate practice; only when the individual elements of experience (James 1922: 63-64) have become manifest as practice in the Lebenswelt do they create that what Lapoujade termed the “organizational plan” that no longer needs an a priori origin.

Durkheim rejects this theory in its entirety – he sees no affinity between practice and knowledge as they serve completely different functions (Durkheim 1981: 166-167, Thé-
venot 2006: 190-191). Whereas James and Dewey see “practice” as a variable, a contingent, experimental category that questions existing patterns of behavior and ways of thinking, meant to withstand the danger of a philosophy divorced from life; Durkheim (and later also Bourdieu) emphasizes its repetitive, stabilizing, compulsory and collectivizing aspects which allow individuals only a “relative autonomy” (Durkheim 1953: 23). Like James, he speaks of an experimental method (Durkheim 1982: 110), but one that differs from all other social sciences – and thus also the philosophy of pragmatism: “The manner in which society is constituted is one thing, how it acts is something completely different. These are two kinds of realities, so different that they cannot be researched using the same procedures and must be separated from one another” (Durkheim 1975: 22). It is this methodological separation that, in a second step necessary to sociology, first enables putting societal practice and general science into the right relationship to one another: “It is true that science can only concern itself with the facts through the mediation of art, but art is only the extension of science” (Durkheim 1982: 87). According to Anne W. Rawls, this argument stems from a theory of practice: “For Durkheim, social practices are not ideal and they do not consist primarily of ideas, representations and beliefs. These are merely secondary phenomena. For Durkheim, society consists first and foremost of enacted practices that give rise to real social forces that participants in the assembled group experience jointly” (Rawls 1996: 434). At the same time, Durkheim’s theory is hardly a bottom-up perspective, as Rawls asserts using an interactionist and ethnomethodological approach. Durkheim’s definition of practice – though never explicitly stated – is rather situated at the threshold of stability and change that produces the act of association and its crystallization as a practical, emergent phenomenon (Durkheim 1953: 30). This is particularly clear in the understanding of practice in Durkheim’s late sociology of religion in which he describes the act of believing as a disposition to act, expressed both in creative (éffervescence, délir) and in everyday acts. This, according to Karsenti, is the important practice theory core of Durkheim’s thought: “In other words, the sociological vision never resolves the tension between creation and institutionalization and this is the context in which it poses the question of practice” (Karsenti 2006: 208). According to Durkheim, the relation of thought to reality is therefore “a practical relationship” (Karsenti 2007: 135). The contingency of social practices led him to the fundamental anthropological belief in the duality of consciousness and action, assuming a homo duplex. From Durkheim’s viewpoint, consciousness and action are not to be treated on the same ontological plane on which his anti-utilitarian rebuttal of supposed pragmatist utilitarianism is founded – the emergence theory critique of an intentional category of practice, guided by free will. Durkheim replaces the reciprocal relationship of thought and action based on the underlying assumption of the “reverse evolution” that he imputes to Pragmatism with a psychological theory of differentiation, as Karsenti explains: “[It] is about understanding imbalance as a pause in movement, which causes thought to emerge and not thought as the trigger of a compensating movement” (Karsenti 2007a: 139). According to Durkheim, consciousness requires the suspension of action in order to unfold at all. Following Karsenti, this is a “process of the idealization of objects through which they are transformed. Such a process is in one sense creative, in the measure to which it is collective” (Karsenti 2007a: 138). This is clear not only in the “Elementary Forms of Religious Knowledge: 2036-4091

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1The term “relative autonomy” already appears in early Marx and is later taken up again by Bourdieu (see Bourdieu 1992: 26; Bogusz 2007: 18ff.).

2Around 1900, “les arts” was a synonym for practice, Durkheim’s supporter Espinas uses the terms interchangeably (Espinas 1897).

3A criticism that however has no impact, as Joas has shown (see Joas 1993: 263ff.).
Life” (Durkheim 1954: 16ff.), but also already in the “Rules” (Durkheim 1982: 39f.) and in Durkheim’s writings on individual and collective beliefs, in which he applies emergence theory to the relation between experience, practice and knowledge (Durkheim 1953). Far from negating practice as constituting knowledge, in Durkheim’s view it is exactly the process of turning practice into non-practice which is the precondition for knowledge; “a singular practice of thinking, a practice of suspending practice” (Karsenti 2007a: 140).

In sum it can be said that Durkheim’s epistemology oscillates greatly between social holism on the one hand and a theory of differentiation on the other hand which makes the emergence theory centrality of association plausible. In order to establish social holism (i.e. to grasp it in its complexity) it is important to examine the dualism of action and knowledge and then resolve this dualism though a theory of emergence in the social as sui generis. James no longer needs this dualism. His work is characterized by a complete break with the positivist epistemological position, replaced in radical empiricism by an emergent phenomenology of associated experiences. While Durkheim therefore still needs the dualist opposition of rationalism and empiricism to introduce his sociological method as a way of reconciling them, James positions himself apart from this dualism. James’ and Durkheim’s theories differ in their empiricist radicalism. While Durkheim defends this radicalism by setting his sociological method against a knowledge that is not empirically saturated, James circumvents the latter by means of a scientist cognitive theory of knowledge (MW 12: 205). One could therefore also say that their respective emergent ideas differ in that Durkheim used a conceptual principle to create a connection to life-worldly practices, while James invoked a functionalist principle based on vitalism.

II. The epistemological centrality of experience and practice: Dewey and Bourdieu

John Dewey and Pierre Bourdieu, in their respective fields of philosophy and sociology, were keys in lending a specific epistemological meaning to “practice.” In his last lectures at the Collège de France on the epistemological goal of the idea of the social field, Bourdieu defined it as a combination of a comparative method and a dispositional philosophy of action (Bourdieu 2001: 68). The dispositionality of action is an idea Bourdieu began formulating in the 1960s within the framework of his field theory as sens pratique up to his concept of habitus, which stresses the dynamic and processual incorporation of social knowledge. Asked in 1987 the extent to which his ideas coincided with the American tradition of pragmatism, Bourdieu answered:

Indeed, the affinities and convergences are quite striking ... . [T]he theory of practical sense presents many similarities with theories, such as Dewey’s, that grant a central role to the notion of habit, understood as an active and creative relation to the world, and reject all the conceptual dualisms upon which nearly all post-Cartesian philosophies are based: subject and object, internal and external, material and spiritual, individual and social, and so on” (Bourdieu-Wacquant 1992c: 122).

In this statement, Bourdieu specifies two decisive intersections: the rejection of a dualist, reductionist, purely metaphysical theory of knowledge, also Durkheim’s and James’ starting point, and the importance of the concept of dispositional practical sense, in the meaning of a performative creative action option also inherent in his idea of habit and especially – as I will examine in further detail below – in Dewey’s active experience (experimentation). Dewey describes James’ legacy in this area as having in pragmatism laid the
foundation to be able to “recognize that experience is an intimate union of emotion and knowledge” (LW 15: 17).

II.1 Experimental thought and practice as a method of knowledge

John Dewey’s entire oeuvre is characterized by a deep exploration of experience, practice and knowledge. He concentrates on the connections between naturalistic/natural science instruments of knowledge and a philosophy of action and practice informed by Peirce and James. This is particularly obvious in his pioneer works on experimental psychology and his famous paper on “The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology” (1896). Similar to James, he accuses modern philosophy of generally ignoring functional thought. He contrasts it with an empirical theory of ideas that he holds up as one of the most important achievements in the history of ideas, able to bring about the true liberation of thought, because the “definition of the nature of ideas in terms of operations to be performed and the test of the validity of the ideas by the consequences of these operations establishes connectivity within concrete experience. At the same time, by emancipation of thinking from the necessity of testing its conclusions solely by reference to antecedent existence it makes clear the originaive possibilities of thinking” (LW 4: 92). For all pragmatists, and especially for Dewey and George Herbert Mead, Darwin’s evolutionary theory inspired and justified the importance of functionalism not only within the natural and the life sciences, but also for philosophy and psychology. The groundbreaking changes in the ways knowledge was acquired brought about by modern natural sciences and the consequent necessity of transcending the dualism of theory and practice are ideas Dewey explores in The Quest for Certainty. A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action (LW 4). According to Dewey, the dichotomy of practice and theory in which the identity of occidental philosophy was grounded stems from psychological and anthropological uncertainties which made the “quest for cognitive certainty” the most urgent task and can thus be seen as the origin of the development of theory divorced from practice and empiricism. However in the modern era, experimental empiricism and operational thought gained ascendency in the natural sciences and final leave was taken from the idea of a tangible reality beyond the realm of empirical fact or, as Dewey called it, from a “spectator theory of knowledge. ... For science in becoming experimental has itself become a mode of directed practical doing” (LW 4: 20). From this, Dewey concludes that

the consequences of substituting search for security by practical means for quest of absolute certainty by cognitive means will then be considered in its bearing upon the problem of our judgments regarding the values which control conduct, especially its social phases (LW 4: 20).

Knowledge is thus for Dewey a specific moment of experience (or “event”), similar to James’ pure experience; however neither, as in James, in a vitalist sense nor, as in Durkheim, in the sense of an ordering moment; for Dewey, knowledge is rather the cognitive equivalent to practical research (West 1989b: 188). At the same time, Dewey protested against all forms of naive positivism. Rather he pleads for “a philosophy of experience [which] may be empirical without either being false to actual experience or being compelled to explain away the values dearest to the heart of man” (LW 4: 86). Similar to James, experience and practice close the gap between rationalism and empiricism, however Dewey
preferences practice as an inexhaustible source of inspiration for knowledge, particularly in
its close tie to more empirical experience:

In reaction against the age-long depreciation of practice in behalf of contemplative
knowledge, there is a temptation simply to turn things upside down. But the essence of prag-
matic instrumentalism is to conceive of both knowledge and practice as means of making
goods – excellencies of all kinds – secure in experienced existence” (LW 4: 30)\footnote{In Art as Experience (LW 10) Dewey describes the aesthetic character of the “experience of thinking".}

As Andreas Hetzel has aptly noted, Dewey thus follows, similar to James, a “strategy of
degrounding practice” which rejects the “transcendental philosophical question of meta-
practical grounds for practice” (Hetzel 2008: 38).

Although he himself remains a philosopher, Dewey connects philosophical epistem-
ological ambitions with a sociological and genealogical perspective. From this Dewey con-
cludes that experience and practice are the categories par excellence for constituting reality
for “‘practical’ means the future responses which an object requires of us or commits us to”
(MW 4: 102). Hetzel remarks on Dewey’s and James’ use of the term practice: “Practice is
never completely itself; it acts rather upon something else and defines itself by means of
this effectiveness, by means of cause and effect. Theory is not the other of practice, but can
be described as a gestalt or figure of this self-difference of practice” (Hetzel 2008: 18-19).
This idea of practice is reminiscent of Karsenti’s analysis of Durkheim’s understanding of
practice, as opposed to knowledge, as being informed by a theory of differentiation. Practice,
because it does not only signify human action for futurity, but is also the expression of
the uncertain provisional nature of “active knowledge,” is two-sided – both durable and
permeable: “The realm of the practical”, Dewey wrote, “is the region of change, and change
is always contingent; it has in it an element of chance that cannot be eliminated” (LW 4:
16). Dewey’s concept of practice questions universalistic and reason-centered definitions of
knowledge in the tradition of his predecessor James’ radical empiricism, but he hones this
concept much more clearly than James in the direction of a social reformist theory of ac-
tion, a social philosophy of action concerned primarily with showing “how the actual pro-
cedures of knowledge, interpreted after the pattern formed by experimental inquiry, cancel
the isolation of knowledge from overt action” (Dewey 1930: 49). Dewey thus implicitly
takes up the holistic connection of knowledge and action criticized by Durkheim in James’
theory, by attempting to empirically connect them in the social Lebenswelt, in order to find
answers to social questions. Bourdieu also makes this empirical association.

Pierre Bourdieu’s practice theory arose as both an extension of and alternative to Durk-
heim’s sociologie de l’action. While Bourdieu shared Durkheim’s insistence on the power
of social structures, on objectivity and against all forms of spontaneous sociology as well as
his genealogical and relational methodology; he departed from Durkheim in his criticism of
a theory-practice dichotomy. If the social subject is inextricably connected to his environ-
ment, which in turn helps structure his bodily and historical socialization, then, in Bour-
dieu’s view, a conflict remains that Durkheim ignored: The social division of labor stems
not only from the “neutral” ground of differentiation and association, but also on the basis
of the epistemological conflict between theory and practice also criticized by Dewey. How-
ever Bourdieu’s concept of practice is oriented towards Marx’s critique of domination,
which studies the social division of theory and practice as a fundamental and antagonistic
contradiction of capitalist societies. For the anthropological Marx, this critique of domina-
tion means locating the constitutive heterogeneity of thought and action so as to create the conditions for overcoming them. In this way Marx also sees thought as another form of social practice, as a non-practice which led to the differentiation of social classes. But how can we grasp this contradiction between practice and non-practice?

Bourdieu’s critique follows Marx in the respect that he believes that to comprehend this antagonism, a theoretical construct of the structures which produced it is necessary. Therefore “a theory is needed that looks at the structures from which it comes and which have produced it, without which it cannot see what has caused it. This means that to truly think about social structures ... it is necessary to think about the preconditions for the separation of practice and theory” (Karsenti 2011: 109). This realization of the necessity of a theoretical construct is at the same time a distrust of its dominance. From this Bourdieu articulated his genetic or constructivist structuralism as opposed to the structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Similar to Durkheim, an emergence theory concept of structures can be seen in Bourdieu – structures in the process of becoming, dynamic “functional phenomena” which James associated with perceptual consciousness. This emergence theory perspective is exhibited in the interplay that Bourdieu sees between experiences (dispositions), practices, habitus and social structure: “The habitus which, at every moment, structures new experiences in accordance with the structures produced by past experiences, which are modified by the new experiences within the limits defined by their power of selection, brings about a unique integration” (Bourdieu 2002: 284). Experiences and practices can, according to Bourdieu, not only transcend the dualism between rationalism and empiricism (as Durkheim noted in his critique of James), but they are also subject to the fact of social inequality. Thus Bourdieu’s theory of practice, influenced by Marx, receives a critical function inherent in Durkheim’s practical model of differentiation by acting on the political level of “distinction”. Experience, practice and knowledge are, for Bourdieu, inseparable from the attempt to transcend the division of theory and practice in the humanities; he thus throws both Durkheim’s and Dewey’s critique of dualism into relief and adds a political dimension. Unlike Durkheim, who searched for a collective consciousness that first makes social reality possible, Bourdieu concentrates on the reproductive mechanisms of a reality that is not only contingent, but also, due to the dualism of theory and practice, highly conflict-ridden. Bourdieu agrees with Durkheim that knowledge and reality must exhibit a certain degree of homogeneity so that social experience and disposition can assert themselves as rules at all. But in contrast to Durkheim and Dewey, who both created interventionist theories within a social reform approach, Bourdieu understood the break with common sense not only as a methodological necessity, but also as a critique of domination.

The concomitant danger of a structural theoretical determinism is mitigated by the fact that Bourdieu’s concept of practice is not only Marxist, but also anthropological; practice originates in the body. In its practice theory dimension, “practice” means the meeting of the body with the world; a body that is both invariant and performative in its materiality. In this context, Bourdieu refers to the generative and performative principle of practices. The epistemological ambitions of this dynamic idea of practice become clearer in their close connection to the concept of habitus which stems from a specific idea of experiences – a dispositionalist philosophy of practice – an idea that can also be found in Dewey’s concept of experience.

13The interconnection of body and practice suggests epistemological parallels between Bourdieu and Marcel Mauss (Moebius 2009).
II.2 Experience/dispositionality/habitus

The central importance of experience to Dewey’s work is particularly clear in *Experience and Nature*. In it, he calls his philosophy not “pragmatism,” but “empirical naturalism” or “naturalistic empiricism” (LW 1: 10) and bases it on the preeminent position of human experience (LW 1: 11), a naturalistic, genealogical, fundamental principle already found in James’ radical empiricism. How does Dewey define experience differently from James and Durkheim? Which critique of consciousness and epistemological elements is it based on?

For Dewey, experience is both an imminent and an external phenomena, it is the foundation of things: “Experience thus reaches down into nature; it has depth. It also has breadth and to an indefinitely elastic extent. It stretches. That stretch constitutes inference” (LW 1: 13). In contrast to Durkheim, Dewey locates experience in the whole world – here too he links to James’ radical empiricist “pure experience” and to the connective relationships between objects, people and experiences. Dewey distinguishes between James’ psychological scientific philosophy and speculative philosophy (see MW 12: 203 ff.; LW 15: 3 ff.), but in contrast to James he emphasizes the sociological and genealogical importance of collective experience and association. He explicitly criticizes the contraposition of individual and society as an artificial opposition which obscures the true challenges of the modern era; the “reconstruction of the ways and forms in which men unite in associated activity” in times of rapid social change – a challenge located not between the individual and association, but within them (Dewey 1954: 191). Similar to Durkheim, Dewey concedes that there is a parallel between historical differentiation and association that are, in his opinion, relevant to a theory of practice: “A distinctive way of behaving in conjunction and connection with other distinctive ways of acting, independent of every else, is that toward which we are pointed” (Dewey 1954: 188).

While Bourdieu believed social distinction to be the society forming category *par excellence* and examined it as such, he locates experience more implicitly within his theories of disposition, practical sense and habitus, which he often used interchangeably and does not consistently distinguish from one another (see Bouveresse 1999: 52). Bourdieu gave up his more explicit term for the importance of experience to behavior and the contingent uncertainty of behavior, *hysteresis*, more or less completely in the course of his work for the more structurally-oriented concept of habitus. Because of its specific function, particularly relating theory and practice to one another, Bourdieu defines habitus among other things as “history turned into nature (see Bourdieu 1977: 78) and as a system of disposition. In this sense, the sens pratique, the relational praxeological knowledge expressed via habitus, locates experience/disposition, akin to James’ and Dewey’s theories, as an anthropological category in opposition to objectivism. Bourdieu defines disposition as the precondition to reflection and action based in experience, both psychologically/mentally as well as structurally and thus, as in Dewey, beyond the artificial dichotomy of individual and society. The term disposition “expresses first the result of a organizing action with a meaning close to words such as structure; it also designates a way of being, a habitual state (especially of the body) and, in particular, a predisposition, tendency, propensity or inclination” (Bourdieu 1977: 214). “Dispositions *are* acquired through experience” (Bourdieu 1990: 9).

Elsewhere, Bourdieu speaks of the “homogeneity of conditions, of conditionings, and thus of dispositions” (Bourdieu 1990: 129), or of the “dispositions of agents ... , that is their mental structures” experienced by subjects as the long-term occupation of a position (Bourdieu 1990: 130-131). In this last definition, the function of disposition within his “genetic structuralism” becomes clear: the long-term occupation of a social position, a social inher-
itance, becomes a disposition founded on Leibniz’s mode of relational thinking, which Bourdieu referred to repeatedly (see Bouveresse 1999: 47ff.) and which also influenced James’ definition of experience. Between habitus expressed as action and disposition Bourdieu sees an “ontological complicity” (Bourdieu 1990: 12) that anticipates structure; this expresses the function of the sens pratique and is reminiscent of Dewey’s definition of practice. The generalizing capabilities of dispositions are hereby not one of a transcendental subject such as found in the idealist tradition, but of an acting and creative agent (Bourdieu 1990: 12).

The terminological intersections of disposition, practical sense and practice subsumed by Bourdieu under the concept of habitus also however reveal the fundamental problem of his theory of structure and practice: It is difficult to know when a disposition is more likely to reproduce existing structures and has a stabilizing function and when it is the starting point for a change in what is structurally predetermined. The embodied, performative and transposable nature of habitus (“art of inventing,” see Bourdieu 2002: 279) that Bourdieu emphasizes as a defense against the accusation of structural determinism contradicts the duration, persistence and stabilizing tendency ascribed to the dispositions it is founded on. Is this an insoluble antagonism, tilted towards structural dominance?

To determine this, in the context of the definition for disposition Bourdieu himself gave, we must clarify the role of the critique of consciousness, which also motivated James’ and Durkheim’s epistemologies. In contrast to the importance of the social unconscious frequently stressed by Bourdieu, his social theories and in particular the practical sense are often, incidentally similar to pragmatism, understood as close to utilitarian theories (Honneth 1984, Joas and Knöbl 2004, Dalton 2004) – a reading that rests on the vagueness surrounding the position of consciousness in Bourdieu. Paradoxically, this arises from the creative, performative opening of the idea of habitus in contrast to structural determinism, which Bourdieu often brings into an inauspicious coalition with the strategic orientation of agents, as if agents acted strategically according to the logic of practice most advantageous to them. The equation of a practical sense founded on dispositions with “pre-logical thinking” (Bourdieu 2003: 49) led to further confusion, as this seemed to provide grounds for the conclusion that the sens pratique is located in the realm of the unconscious, a blatant contradiction to his writings on strategic action. It is worth noting that Bourdieu also states that dispositions ignore experiences in thought, but not in practice (Bourdieu 2002: 278), concordant with James’ and Dewey’s idea of the supremacy of practice over knowledge. From this however does not follow strategic action, but the idea that dispositions which inform the action – the sens pratique – belong in the sphere of the infra-conscious, as Karsenti has shown (Karsenti 2011: 122). For this reason alone, habitus is neither located completely in the conscious sphere or in the unconscious sphere, because it always operates on a specific level of consciousness, namely at an intermediate level. It is both a passive and an active category. The same is true of experience anchored in habitus. From this viewpoint, Bourdieu’s conceptualization of experience is the epistemological equivalent to William James’ criticism of the concept of consciousness widely held in his times. Although James posited experience in opposition to (metaphysical) consciousness, he did allow for consciousness in a practical sense – recognizing its function for knowledge. However this leads to utilitarianism just as little as Bourdieu’s sens pratique does. In this way, Bourdieu’s theory of disposition and practical sense, understood as working at an infra-conscious level, just as James’ theory of experience, could make the connection necessary to assign consciousness with an equally pre-logical epistemic value, manifested between the conscious and the unconscious, therefore decisively physical and mental.
Missing in Bourdieu however, and ubiquitous in pragmatism, is the search for explanations for structures of emergence and adaptation within social differentiation and the spaces of possibility they create. With the exception of his study on the sociology of art (Bourdieu 1992a) Bourdieu seldom discusses the interaction of specific practices and social structures regarding new or contingent experiences, action options or forms of practice. My thesis is that to do so, we need an emergence theory perspective to hone the practice theory and pragmatist concepts of “knowledge”, “experience” and “practice”, as I outline in my conclusion.

III. Conclusion: Social emergence theory as a point of convergence?

Bruno Karsenti’s aforementioned thesis – that Durkheim’s sociologie de l’action is the sociological counterpart to James’ radical empiricism – can be corroborated from the viewpoint of emergence theory. James’ radical empiricism poses the question of how experience and knowledge are constituted. His epistemological interest, building on the category of experience, is focused on objects in the process of becoming. According to James, the validity of philosophical scientific truth can only be seen in practice, in its empirical connection to the natural world. Emergence theory takes an ontological holistic approach to this issue; Durkheim takes a more social holistic approach. Durkheim’s sociologie de l’action thus positions itself as an emergence theory alternative to radical empiricism in which experience and consciousness are historically saturated due to their collectivity. It is distinguished by a process of differentiation characterized by the interdependence of evolving structures (social morphology) and practices (social physiology). Both vary accordingly between naturalist and constructivist motifs. Although James’ epistemological contribution to a grounding “experience” in practice helped bring sociological perspectives into philosophy14, his definition of practice remained epistemological and his understanding of experience was mostly individualist. Durkheim for his part did not see the dualism of theory and practice as an opportunity to connect his emergence theory understanding of the concept of “association” with a critique of consciousness grounded in practice theory. Dewey however does make this connection. Dewey continues James’ work by studying the non-causality of practice and its irreducibility to a rational or empirical subject. He expands James’ critique of consciousness by describing knowledge as a transactional process based on active, experimental experiences. His criticism of the dissociation of individual and society resulted in a concept of collective associations very close to emergence theory.

The critique of consciousness expressed by James, Durkheim and Dewey by means of the concept of experience is reformulated in the late modern era in Bourdieu’s sens pratique.15 In James and Dewey, experience – in the sense of mental, internalized infra-conscious knowledge – manifests itself through different series of associations (James 1922: 9 ff., LW 1: 266-267), while in Bourdieu’s practical sense, which also reproduces the experiences people have on an infra-conscious level, experience contributes to the dynamic organization of reality. The potential of Bourdieu’s sociology for emergence theory lies in his method of relating disposition, practices and social structures to one another; they enter empirical interdependencies and produce specific social experiences. However Bourdieu

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14This also explains Bruno Latour’s proximity to James and Dewey, however in his critique of Durkheim he completely ignores Durkheim’s emergence theory approach, which leads to a significant distortion of Durkheim’s social theory.

15It remains an open question whether Bourdieu might have been able to build this criticism more solidly if he had stayed with the term hysteresis.
failed to take the necessary step of emergence theory that explains how the interaction of specific practices and social structures lead to the creation of new social fields.

Here, James’ and Dewey’s emphasis on non-originality, the tendency towards unpredictability as well as the creative, optional and anticipatory character of practice is quite useful, as Bourdieu himself conceded with regard to the sens pratique. In this area, the concept of practice approaches a core concept of emergence theory with respect to its effect on experience and knowledge: Unlike the concept of action, the concept of practice, in Bourdieu’s Marxist-influenced terminology as well as in pragmatic philosophy, emphasizes, as Stefan Beck has noted, the “state of tension between stability and variation” which is of central importance to an emergence theory perspective. “Practice ... in Marxist anthropology and in Dewey’s pragmatic idea of action is conceptualized in terms of how it acts upon the self and upon the world (Selbst- and Welteinwirkung) whereby processuality and situativity represent two decisive analytic categories” (Beck 1996: 339). Similar to James’ notion of pure experience, the open-ended complexity of practice in the context of its development is revealed. The emergent characteristics of social phenomena produced by practice become empirically visible as externally aimed effects, typified by a tendency to be unpredictable. Darwin’s non-teleological argument concerning the evolution of life translated into the concept of experience by the pragmatists requires it’s full legacy here, as Menand stresses: “Relations will be more important than categories, functions, which are variable, will be more important than purposes, which are fixed in advance; transitions will be more important than boundaries; sequences will be more important than hierarchies” (Menand 2002: 124). Here we could dissipate some epistemological tracks of a pragmatism that became later on interactionism and ethnomethodology (Emirbayer and Maynard 2010).

This associative and collective character of practice and its basic performance arises from the interdependent linkages within the social fabric that goes beyond the idea of the self-organization dynamic of procedures quoted in the definition of emergence promoted by Krohn and Küppers. Moreover, it corresponds with John H. Holland’s understanding of emergence as a “product of coupled, context-dependent interactions” (Holland in Beck 2007: 124-125). Sawyer, in his study on social emergence, goes even further: “The science of social emergence is the basic science underlying all of the social sciences because social emergence is foundational to all of them” (Sawyer 2005: 189). At the same time, he protests against creating a new general theoretical paradigm: “The Emergence Paradigm does not propose any definite answers to long-standing sociological questions, but it has significant implications for how sociological theory and methodology should proceed” (Sawyer 2005: 229). Thus emergence theory offers a useful approach to the pragmatic development of practice theory as both concepts see themselves both as theories of knowledge and at the same time as empirical, experimental research methods. In an interview entitled “Fieldwork in Philosophy” in a reference to J.L. Austin, Bourdieu claimed it is necessary to have a pragmatic view of that “culture par excellence, namely philosophy” (Bourdieu 1990: 29)\(^\text{16}\). Perhaps now the time has come to apply this premise to Bourdieu’s theory of practice.

In Belgian philosopher Didier Debase’s etymologic definition, the affinity between ‘practice’ and ‘pragma’ is obvious: “‘Pragma’”, he says, “means both, ‘experience’ and ‘praxein’ which means ‘acting’, ‘doing’ or even ‘performing’” (Debase 2005). Nevertheless the epistemological dimensions and methodological consequences of the conflation of these categories as “experience”, “practice” and “performance” (in the sense of creative action) remain unclear as regards their meaning for cognitive and social freedom and the fi-

\(^{16}\)Curiously, this passage is missing in the German translation (Bourdieu 1992b).
niteness of human action. Following Debaise, ‘pragma’ includes practice, which is merely a specific expression of pragma accompanied by experience. So the difference between pragmatism and practice theory probably lies in the translation of experience into a performative interpretation.

Dealing with experience means for Bourdieu neither reduction, nor pure reproduction, but the limitation of creativity by the habitus as an integration system that gives experiences their intrinsic coherence. Experience in Bourdieu’s sense is a process of accumulation and integration. Innovation is immediately absorbed by the integrating activity of knowledge production. This process of accumulation and integration is in itself endlessly creative, as Bourdieu acknowledges following Chomsky’s model of generative grammar, but the practices it produces are greatly limited by social constraints. In contrast, in pragmatist thought, experience, and in particular “experimentation” describes an activity that is much more unstable, unpredictable and ambiguous. As Debaise points out: “Pragmatism presents itself as a technical reflection upon experimentation. This technique takes two forms: the evaluation of the propositions, utterances, and ideas through their effects; the construction and invention of new propositions in charge of accounting for experimentation as a continuous movement of changes and transformations” (Debaise 2005). The practices arising from experimentation are basically emergent, as they appear as qualitatively new forms of symbolic and material complexity empirically embodied in human action.

In this regard, I believe that sociological action theory should today focus more concretely on the empirical foundation of knowledge production in regards to actors specific dispositions, forms of experimentation and emergent practices. By stressing the idea of emergence, human action (or practice) could be understood as a dynamic that highlights and reflects the social persistence of established patterns of assumptions as well as possibilities for innovation and change. But in contrast to established social theories that have already developed around the social impact of emergence, such as those of Niklas Luhman, the conflation of practice theory and pragmatism forces us to recast emergence within qualitative and quantitative observation and methodological reflections on our proper practice as social scientists. Furthermore, both practice theory and pragmatism take a critical analytical stance which concedes a “relative autonomy” (Marx) to social agents as regards their ability to perform their life trajectories. Observing the dynamics of differentiation in contemporary Lebenswelten, we must deal with the concomitance of reproduction and emergence. More precisely, I suspect that a combination of practice theory and pragmatism shall show a dynamic interrelation between the categories sens pratique – disposition – reproduction – experience – emergence. Bourdieu’s anthropological category of sens pratique is as suitable for the study of social change as the emergent categories of association and experience formulated by James and Dewey, especially on the question of critical action. The problem of the dichotomy of reflective knowledge and practical knowledge could be resolved by a pragmatist approach without abandoning the methodological equipment of practice theory. In short, the particularities of acting by recasting models of specific dispositions in specific situations (or social fields) could be comprehended, depending on the degree of generalization, by applying both structural analysis and an analysis of emergent processes. Thus, it is possible to articulate the anti-deterministic perspective defended by Bourdieu’s sociology and by pragmatism in a manner that stops considering social reproduction and social emergence as mutually exclusive phenomena. By focusing on the idea of emergence in the sense of an empirically based process of knowledge, ‘practice’ could be understood as a fundamental social dynamic that highlights and reflects the persistence of
established social norms and patterns of assumption as well as the possibility of difference, critique, innovation and hence social change.

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The Social Scientist, the Public, and the Pragmatist Gaze. Exploring the Critical Conditions of Sociological Inquiry

Abstract. Although diverse and sometimes diverging, different approaches, from “pragmatic” to “pragmatist” to “praxeological”, have an important feature in common: the social order is said to be the practical accomplishment of ordinary agents who constitute and maintain in common the world they live in. After presenting the milestones of the main sociological version of pragmatism, that is, pragmatic sociology (sociologie pragmatique), initiated by Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, this paper will dwell on the complicated relationship between a pragmatic framework, centered on the insider point of view of agents and social critique, which apprehends the social world from the external point of view of the critical sociologist. To tackle such problematic relationship, we will dwell on two groundbreaking contributions to the “pragmatic turn” in the social sciences, that of Jeanne Favret-Saada’s work on contemporary witchcraft, and Michel de Certeau’s study on 17th Century possessions. They will allow us to show that the revival of the epistemological break is not a necessary step towards political awareness and that pragmatic sociology as such can be fully critical.

The public compose a tribunal, which is more powerful than all the other tribunals together.

J. Bentham ([1791] 1843), An essay on political tactics

Within the last decades, a “pragmatic”—if not “pragmatist”—turn has taken place in the French social sciences, bringing about new ways of inquiry to empirical fields such as religious conversion, judicial trial, scientific controversy, or media coverage. Although diverse and sometimes diverging, those approaches share an important common feature, already present in the classical pragmatism initiated, among others, by Charles S. Peirce, William James, John Dewey, or George H. Mead. Instead of starting either from the individual or the social structure in order to subsequently establish how both could be related, they take action itself as their point of departure. The social order is thus said to be the practical accomplishment of ordinary agents who constitute and maintain in common the world they live in. But this common focus on action is very vague—vague enough, at least, to give rise to the various interpretations that the profusion of different action-centered schools of thought makes explicit, from “pragmatic” to “pragmatist” to “praxeological.” In fact, each of the main schools favors one specific aspect of action that is worth dwelling upon: (a) the central part played by action in the production of social order and the indeterminacy of human agency, mostly stressed by ethnomethodology and praxeological sociology (b) the performative power of language and actantial schemes to structure and institute social action and relationships, mainly focused on by linguistic pragmatics (c) the epistemological primacy of practices and the importance, for the making of a public, of a common, “bottom-up” inquiry into the indirect consequences of transactions, mostly emphasized by philosophical pragmatism.

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Interestingly, several aspects of action that we shortly introduced above are found in \textit{pragmatic sociology} (sociologie pragmatique), the French fruitful research program initiated in the 1990’s by its leading figures, Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, which directly influenced a generation of young researchers.\footnote{Among others: Marc Breviglieri, Damien de Blic, Nicolas Dodier, Cyril Lemieux, Dominique Linhardt, Jean-Philippe Heurtin, Joan Stavo-Debauge, Danny Trom.} Pragmatic sociology will be our starting point not only because it is one of the most promising sociological schools which have emerged during the last decades, but also because it tries to reconcile a view that stresses the structural organization of the worlds of action with a view that emphasizes human agency and the formation of meaning in situation. Moreover, as will be seen, pragmatic sociology insists on the \textit{laypersons’ critical capacity} to call into question the norms and values that are supposed to be carried out in a given course of action.\footnote{See Bénatouïl (1999a: 2) and Lemieux (2007: 192).} In short, pragmatic sociology, which is also called “sociology of critique,” tries to leave aside the distant standpoint of critical sociology, such as that of Pierre Bourdieu, which entails the well-known epistemological break with commonsense and thereby the pre-dominance of the view of the sociologist over that of the social actor. Instead, pragmatic sociology tries to bring to light the “capacity to judge” and to criticize that ordinary actors themselves possess. Importantly, such capacity of critique is endogenous but also plural: whereas critical sociology aims at unveiling domination as if it were just one single, monolithic order, agents navigate plural orders of worth and hence have at their disposal different kinds of resources for criticism. So critique does not depend upon a unique operation of critical totalization, exerted from the external standpoint of the social scientist. Each order of worth is vulnerable to its own internal critique and to the constraints of justification that go with it.

Obviously, the attention, in pragmatic sociology, to the capacity of ordinary people to resort to critical judgment and to be concerned with the justification for the common good that is at stake in a given world of action, is in phase with the insistence of philosophical pragmatism on the role of doubt, inquiry and experience in human activity and, above all, in modern democracy – even if effective references to this philosophy are very scarce.\footnote{For notable exceptions, see É. Claverie (1994; 1998) and L. Thévenot (2011).} But despite this strong family resemblance, pragmatic sociology seems to remain at the threshold of philosophical pragmatism, mainly with regard to the issue of the making of a public and the status of public inquiry. Indeed, this latter emphasizes the moral and political necessity, for scientists, politicians and ordinary citizens, to take into account the indirect consequences of their own activities on others, and to allow those who are affected by these very consequences to launch a public inquiry. Philosophical pragmatism is thus underlain by a political model of the community as a whole whose normative dimension is central: only a demanding \textit{participative stance} can allow individuals to turn their private trouble into a public problem and to enrich both the individual and the community. But pragmatic sociology, somewhat paradoxically for a model which greatly values justification, insists so much on the \textit{variety} of the worlds of action and their internal worths and legitimacy that it tends to leave aside the very idea of a public sphere in which a political “\textit{meta-inquiry}” into the validity of the orders of worth, their mutual relations and their hierarchy is carried out.\footnote{The model of Thévenot goes in this direction, though.

It is maybe this absence of explicit normative stance and this lack of “meta” standpoint that explains why Luc Boltanski, in his recent book \textit{On Critique} ([2009] 2011), partially repudiates pragmatic sociology, which he initiated himself, and returns to his original fascination for Bourdieu’s critical sociology.}
Our paper aims at showing that such renunciation is not necessary and that pragmatic sociology, if it really takes seriously the legacy of pragmatism, can fully reconcile a pragmatic and a pragmatist way of doing sociology. Under the auspices of philosophical pragmatism, indeed, critical inquiry can be held without reviving the external totalizing point of view of the critical sociologist. As we will see, philosophers such as Dewey provide the normative tools necessary to value the social situations triggering the formation of a public, that is, the formation of a “community of those indirectly affected” which succeeds in becoming a “community of investigators.” Such tools allow distinguishing “public-triggering” configurations from “publicidal” configurations that eclipse the “bottom-up” and publicizing movement that should enable ordinary people to make sense of the systemic interdependencies they are entangled in (Dayan 2001).

To tackle the issue of critical inquiry, our investigation will make a detour via two French authors who exerted a great influence on the social scientists participating in the pragmatic turn. Thus Jeanne Favret-Saada’s work on contemporary witchcraft, and Michel de Certeau’s study on 17th Century possessions will prove astonishingly similar to, and compatible with, the perspectives advanced by pragmatist philosophers, especially John Dewey, about experience, action, and the constitution of the public. This detour will allow us to show that pragmatic sociology as such can be fully critical and that the revival of the epistemological break is not a necessary step towards political awareness. But before following the marvelous inquiries proposed by Favret-Saada and Certeau, we need to give a better account of pragmatic sociology.

I. Between action, pragmatics and pragmatism

By the late 1980’s, some French social scientists influenced by analytical philosophy, phenomenology, pragmatics, and ethnomethodology tried to rethink the relationship between the individual and the social structure in an altogether different manner. Instead of being an overhanging structure, the social order is said to be the practical accomplishment of ordinary agents. While being roughly along the same lines, the ground-breaking model of “economies of worth,” published in the 1990’s, which is the launching pad of pragmatic sociology, is particularly interesting. Not only does it draw from linguistic pragmatics but it also enters into resonance, in some respects, with the spirit of philosophical pragmatism.

Indeed, linguistic pragmatics has emphasized the fact that language, even when it is supposedly used to describe a state of affairs or to merely exchange information, is always a way of doing things (Austin [1962] 1975). Language is not a transparent representation of the world; it aims at modifying the world, not at giving way to it. Although always context-dependent, the use of linguistic utterances is nevertheless governed by constitutive rules, which establish the order of words (e.g. we cannot say “I my vegetables eat”), a system of places (e.g. “to give” involves, by definition, three positions, the given object, the giver, and the receiver), and a public, impersonal set of rights and obligations (e.g. if I promise to come to your party, then I have the obligation to come to your party). In short, pragmatics articulates syntactical structures and constitutive rules necessary for linguistic utterances to be intelligible with the context-dependence of enunciation that characterizes language-in-action.

Those social scientists came from different horizons, but converged on an editorial project, starting in 1990, a journal entitled Raisons pratiques [practical reasons], published by the École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS) of Paris. Daniel Cefaï, Bernard Conein, Élisabeth Claverie, Bruno Latour, Louis Quéré, Laurent Thévenot, Jean Widmer and others, have played a very important role in this enterprise.
In their theory of “economies of worth,” also called “theory of justification,” Boltanski and Thévenot do take inspiration from pragmatics: they aim indeed at laying out, in a grammatical form, the plural orders of worth (civic, commercial, and so on), the principles of evaluation and justification (equality, productivity, and so on), and the kinds of commitment (familiarity, justification, and so on) that allow the closure of what can be envisaged or, above all, argued in a given situation (Boltanski & Thévenot [1991] 2006; Boltanski 1990; Thévenot 1990). Just like linguistic grammar enables speakers to create and understand an unlimited number of utterances of their language, a “grammar-like” system of norms, modes of engagement and principles of actions enables agents to act appropriately in particular situations they have never encountered before. For instance, normally competent agents master the rules that a public denunciation of injustice must satisfy to be deemed relevant: such denunciation entails necessarily four actantial roles, that is, the ‘victim,’ the ‘prosecutor,’ the ‘denouncer’ and the ‘judge’—an actorial structure that reveals the influence of the works of Algirdas Greimas and Bruno Latour on pragmatic sociologists (Boltanski 1993). Moreover, to accomplish a well-formed act of denunciation, the plaintiff must relate himself in a credible way to a collective susceptible to support his version of the facts and to share his indignation (e.g. a civil association) (Boltanski et al. 1984).

So pragmatic sociology clearly draws from pragmatics and semiotics to highlight the ordered set of rules, the actantial relationships, and the context-dependent spectrum of possibilities for acting that constitute and map out ordinary modes of action and justification. But it is also in phase, although more tenuously, with philosophical pragmatism when it insists on the dynamics and indetermination of action. Far from being caught in a unified, highly integrated cultural and social system, people navigate plural and distinctive action frames, made of situational constraints, material arrangements, and above all, collective norms of qualification. Pragmatic sociology then focuses on the situated way people agree over a frame of reference, take hold of their environment, material as well as symbolic, and adjust their mode of engagement within the situation. In this indeterminate and pluralist view of agency, action depends on the full range of competences that persons are inherently endowed with, including the cognitive and moral ones necessary for critique and distanciation. Far from being the ontological dopes, submitted to the overwhelming forces of the social order, that structuralist social sciences have portrayed them to be, social actors are thus seen as competent and critical subjects who are able to reach agreement about the “action-that-is-suitable” and the corresponding “grammar” of values, categories and beings that go with it (Thévenot 1990). In case of disagreement or dispute, the interactants are able to switch from a familiar, unquestioned regime of coordination and communication to a reflexive regime of conflict resolution and argumentation—the so-called “regime of justification”—which allows them to reach a new social agreement (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1999).

Last but not least, the epistemological primacy of practices and the emphasis on human agency that characterize pragmatism also led sociological pragmatism to call into question, at least implicitly, the boundaries between knowledge and action, fact and value. Since conceptual schemes give intelligibility to all our epistemic and practical relations with the external world, direct knowledge of “what there is” turns out to be impossible: facts are only knowable through a system of representations and practices that determines the relevant level of their individuation and description. Similarly to the second Wittgenstein, who systematized insights very similar to those of Dewey or Peirce, pragmatism argues that it is

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9Latour himself defines his sociology as being “half Garfinkel and half Greimas” (2005: 54).
11About this primacy, see R. Frega & F. Carreira da Silva (2011).
impossible to escape from the legislation of language and to go outside our forms of life, governed by pragmatic rules of action and discourse. For a neo-pragmatist such as Hilary Putnam (1981), even a basic factual inquiry into the number of objects that are on the table in front of me cannot lead to one single truth; indeed, to describe how many objects are on the table, we have to determine first what counts as an object: the book as a whole or the pages that compose it? My pen or its constitutive parts? In other words, pragmatism goes necessarily with a kind of “internal realism” that recognizes that the world can only be described “from within” a common system of representations and practices. It is this very system that enables us to determine what counts as a valuable candidate for truth and falsity, relevance-and-irrelevance, or usefulness-and-uselessness (Putnam 1981). This being so, such internal or pragmatic realism does not deny, contrary to some relativist or constructivist approaches, the reality of external facts; the real world does causally contribute to our perception and action—otherwise we could not distinguish between what is the case and what seems to be the case. Moreover, practical dealings with the world necessarily obey to a reality principle: practical reasoning involves by definition the functional adaptation to real circumstances and the anticipation of the consequences of one’s own actions (Anscombe 1957; Ricœur 1977). The “obdurate resistance” and partial unpredictability that the world offers to the ordinary investigations of our surroundings do serve as strong reality tests. Still, for internal realism, an external fact is not a “thing-in-itself,” as Putnam puts it, it is endowed with an “objectivity-for-us” and depends, as such, on the conceptual frameworks which indicate us how we should qualify it and what we should do with it.

**Grammar, phenomenology, and the difficult status of critique**

This pragmatic framework has several interesting consequences for pragmatic sociology and, more generally, for social sciences. From a methodological point of view, only a fine-grained ethnographical approach can account for the concrete, practical adjustments, improvisations, micro-inquiries and critical disagreements that characterize the pluralist way persons deal with the world around them (Breviglieri & Stavo-Debauge 1999). Moreover, such a fine-grained approach reconciles a grammatical focus on the acceptable structures of action and discourse, which can be mapped out and modeled in a systematic way, with a phenomenological focus on experience. From this perspective, indeed, experience appears as a kind of two-sided entity. One of its sides is objective: it refers to the typical tests that pertain to such or such order of worth (e.g. art, industry, family) and that anyone has to experience and pass to be recognized as a normal, competent actor (e.g. creating an original work of art, being a good father, making a profit, and so on). Although typical, and “grammatically” expected in the different kinds of situations that people are deemed to encounter, such tests remain nevertheless pervious to the particularity of the course of action in which they occur and sensitive to the singularity of the persons that they are supposed to assess. The other side of experience is subjective: it refers to the plural ways people feel, experience, appraise, suffer, in short engage in, and are affected by, a given situation. Those “existential tests,” as Boltanski ([2009] 2011: 107) puts it, refer to what provokes suffering and to what affects, such as the experience of injustice or humiliation brought about by the contempt of those in position of power or the experience of emancipation created by rule transgression. In other words, on its objective side, experience is related to the fact of experi-

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9To our knowledge, Putnam is not quoted by pragmatic sociologists such as Thévenot or Boltanski; but it seems to us that his “internal realism” fits very well the ontological premises of their framework.

10 On this resistance, inspired by the work of Mead, see D. Franks & F. Seeburger (1980)
menting, of testing—and being tested by—a grammatical configuration, whereas, on its subjective side, experience is related to the phenomenological fact of experiencing “what it is like” to be in such or such grammatical configuration.

This pragmatic framework has also interesting consequences for social sciences from an epistemological and political point of view. It means indeed that social sciences have to relinquish the external point of view of the critical sociologist, whose “revisionary metaphysics” tries to correct the ordinary world-view that would supposedly mislead agents, mainly by hiding the overall structure of domination that would remain, as such, out of their reach (Bourdieu). Instead of establishing a strong asymmetry between social scientists and those taking action, pragmatic sociology adopts a “descriptive metaphysics” that takes seriously the point of view “from within” of agents and follows the possibilities of critique they actualize in the disputing activity that arises when a joint action goes wrong.\footnote{On these two kinds of metaphysics, see P. F. Strawson (1992).}

Although very heuristic, this perspective raises two important issues. First, pragmatic sociology focuses on the critical moments, from domestic quarrels to long-term judicial litigations, in which agents call into question the implicit order of worth they were used to uphold (Boltanski & Thévenot 1999). In so doing, this approach tends to overemphasize the situations of dispute and justification in which participants transform a disagreement into a reflexive object of public inquiry and become thereby a “community of investigators”, as Dewey would put it. Boltanski recently made more explicit the similarities of such an approach with pragmatism: “We can therefore more or less link to the spirit of pragmatism the way in which the sociology of critique undertook to describe the social world as the scene of a trial, in the course of which actors in a situation of uncertainty proceed to investigations, record their interpretations of what happens in reports, establish qualifications and submit to tests” ([2009] 2011: 25). From this kind of “juridical” view of the social, agents and, by way of consequence, the sociologist who study them, are thus very busy producing the discursive, argumentative accounts that will re-establish a justified, legitimate agreement and will keep, then, violence away. And yet, grammatical constraints are not exclusive to modes of justification; they are also inherent to other forms of reciprocal actions, including those in which a kind of rule-governed, “legal” violence is “encapsulated.”

The second issue raised by pragmatic sociology is its endogenous “challenge” and the underlying internal realism behind it: despite its attention to the internal resources for critique, such challenge might nevertheless render social critique difficult to sustain. Indeed pragmatic investigations avoid resorting to “beings” and values, such as class membership, social forces or symbolic violence, that the actors themselves do not explicitly bring into play. The problem is that, at least in certain situations that we will discuss later on, social scientists have to leave aside the insider point of view of the participant to adopt an external, reflective point of view that highlights and normatively assesses the grammatical structures of interaction in which agents are entangled without even knowing it.

It is precisely this issue that the recent book of Boltanski ([2009] 2011) addresses forcefully. Surprisingly enough, at least for scholars familiar with his previous works, Boltanski proposes a “pragmatic sociology of critique” that supports a dual approach of the social world: “pragmatic sociology” of critique focuses on “society,” that is, the “regimes of action” and the power relations, diverse, partial, local or transitory, that are in an immediate relationship with the preoccupations of actors and their insider point of view. By contrast, pragmatic “sociology of critique” focuses on the “social order”, that is, the world apprehended from the external point of view of the critical sociologist, who must shed light on
the overall, monolithic structure of domination that underlies the so-called “society” and remains invisible to the agent’s eyes. If we follow Boltanski, assuming an external standpoint that breaks with the “objectivity-for-us” of the world seen “from within” is imperative: only such standpoint can go beyond plural and superficial forms of power, which are readily observable, to unmask the profound, enduring asymmetries which, while assuming different forms in different contexts, are constantly duplicated to the point of colonizing reality as a whole. So whereas critique refers to the socially rooted, contextual forms of criticism to which ordinary agents and standard sociologists have access to, “metacritique” refers to the theoretical constructions that aim to unmask, in their most general, systematic dimensions, oppression, exploitation or domination—a domination which occurs in the semantic determination of “what there is” and in the normative qualifications and categorizations of beings.

As interesting as it might be, Boltanski’s framework and lexicon has a fatal weakness; it is strikingly dualist. Indeed, On Critique depicts a “double bottom” society: beyond the surface power relationships and insubstantial collectives that constitute the so-called “society,” there is the “social order” of domination, sort of big semantic Leviathan which structures and maintains, via a “top-down,” continuous process of totalization, the established order of beings. Unfortunately, such conceptual dualism between society and social order and thereby between pragmatics and semantics tends to bypass plural grammars of actions and self-qualifications of agents to better shed light on the deep, one-dimensional, transversal meta-grammar that pits dominant elite against dominated people. The “Précis of critique” that Boltanski proposes is thus as anti-pluralistic as politically radical: a true emancipation can be only reached through a revolutionary movement, necessary for rendering “the reality of the reality” in which agents are immersed unacceptable (Boltanski 2008). Revolution is indeed necessary to overthrow the overarching semantic institutions, including the Law and the Welfare State, that make the dominated unworthy and allows always the same privileged ones to win (Boltanski [2009] 2011).

In some respects, Boltanskian dualism is surprisingly similar, though more political, to the one advocated by one of the founders of French sociology, Émile Durkheim himself, in his critique of pragmatism. Indeed, in his Sorbonne lectures, given from 1913 to 1914, Durkheim severely criticizes pragmatism: “I can accept neither the statement of the idealists, that in the beginning there is thought, nor that of the pragmatists, that in the beginning there is action” ([1955] 1983: 67). For the so-called “father of sociology,” the problem with pragmatism lies in the fact that it conceives truth and reality as a matter of individual experience and fails thereby “to recognize the duality that exists between the mentality which results from individual experiences and that which results from collective experiences.” Instead, Durkheim advocates a dual perspective that distinguishes high-level, collective representations from low-level, individual representations, and posits that “what is social [including truth, morality, and reason] possesses a higher dignity than what is individual” ([1955] 1983: 68). According to Durkheim, such founding dualism has two important consequences. From an epistemological point of view, it allows the constitution of two autonomous scientific disciplines: whereas individual representations and instincts are the object of psychology, if not biology, the “laws of collective ideation” are the object of sociology. From an ontological point of view, society is not only a constraining whole which is more than the sum of its individual parts; society is also an ennobling factor which adds a necessary and universal dimension to the individual basic, primitive ways of thinking and acting.

Since, within Durkheimian dualism, truth, morality, and reason are exclusively social emergent properties, they can be grasped only if individual-dependent thoughts and representations are left aside. For Durkheim, the break with individual perceptions is thus a double requirement that pragmatism does not satisfy (Durkheim [1895] 1982).

As seen above, such break with individual perceptions is also at the heart of the metacritical or metapragmatic project of Boltanski. While building on the project of carrying out a sociology that does not give up on critique, this paper does not take up such dual view of the social. We will propose another pathway to social critique by taking more seriously the pragmatic assumption according to which the action and its consequences—and neither the agent nor the historical, social, or economical context—must be the unit of inquiry. We will argue that it would be preferable, for sociologists, to give up on an overhanging standpoint and to focus on the rules, both constraining and enabling, that constitute and structure the plural, multi-layered, and collective architecture of human actions. By unfolding the plural grammars that ordinary agents navigate and enact in the course of their daily life, sociological inquiry can foster a reflexive attitude that potentially increases their power of action. That is at least what we are going to argue in the following pages.

_Bewitched by social practices_  

To address the link between grammar, phenomenology and social critique, we are going to get back to the pioneering works of two very important scholars, the anthropologist Jeanne Favret-Saada and the historian Michel de Certeau, who have initiated in many respects the grammatical investigation that pragmatic sociology advocates. Each in their own way, their outstanding research on witchcraft and possession, published in the 1970’s, underlines the “dark side” of grammatical constraints that force agents into a logic of interaction which might be fatal. Their approaches have several features in common. Both struggle against the classical anthropology and history “from above,” which postulates the asymmetrical hold of the official authorities and talkative elite over ordinary people—an asymmetry that the condescending stance of social scientists towards “informants,” wrongfully transformed into the passive objects of their intellectual discourse, happened to step up. Both approaches thus introduced a symmetrical epistemology, systematized and extended later on by Bruno Latour, which acknowledges all “have-nots” as deserving a place in history and anthropology. Finally, Favret-Saada as well as Certeau favor a phenomenological standpoint that tries to do justice to the “thickness” of bodily experiences, emotions, and practical intelligence enabling anyone, including the uneducated persons, to make sense of the world around them. In so doing, both show that ordinary people do not blindly take up the public “institutions of belief,”13 they do not necessarily believe in what their culture induces them to say. So if public utterances and institutional rituals definitely delimit the official domain of the “believable,” they do not necessarily reveal the scope and intensity of the actual “believing.” To account for the beliefs that actually affect people, even when these beliefs look as unbelievable as witchcraft, the ethnographer or the historian must imperatively give up on the objectifying gap that distances the all-knowing “discourse on the other” from the mute, supposedly ignorant body that bears it.14

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14Of course, for an historian, the task is particularly challenging, if not impossible. For M. de Certeau ([1975] 1988a), the writing of history has to face the tragic loss of those practices, experiences and affects that, yesterday, were alive, and are dead today, a loss that the act of writing tries to ward off, converting what is lost into a text. Thus the text of archives is a first trace of the past that a second text, the text written by the historian, reinstates in a meaningful relationship with the present by imposing the—sometimes wrong—unity and
But to be in a position to better compare the implications of the research of de Certeau and Favret-Saada, we need to lay out the main features of the grammatical logics at work in witchcraft and possession that they have so brilliantly described.

II. Immersed in the Bocage

According to Favret-Saada (2009), the language of witchcraft is recruited to make sense of the extraordinary repetition of unexpected and inexplicable misfortunes that overburden a landowner and his possessions, whether they be human (wife, children), animal (livestock) or material (goods, production rate) (e.g., bankruptcy, child’s disease, wife’s miscarriage, heifer’s death, engine’s failure, etc.). Faced with all these misfortunes, the victim feels powerless, all the more as the official authorities, incarnated by the priest and the doctor, are of no help to him; whereas the unruffled doctor resorts to natural causes and bad coincidences for explaining his misfortunes, the priest just invokes faraway, immaterial beings on which he has no hold (Favret-Saada 1977). Above all, for the victim, neither the doctor nor the priest are able to explain why those puzzling events happen to him in particular.

Why this repetition and above all, why “me” and why “now,” wonders the person stricken by misfortune. But even if the victim starts suspecting that his ordeals could have an unnatural cause, he cannot initiate by himself an inquiry into his possible bewitchment without being taken for a half-wit. Such an inquiry must be initiated by an “annunciator,” either a friend or a neighbor, who, by dint of witnessing this unlikely series of misfortunes, asks the victim: “Should there not be, by chance, someone who wishes you ill?” This question has incontestably an incredible performative power, that is, it performs an action in saying what is said: it indeed modifies the status of its addressee, converting him from an unlucky person into a possible “bewitched” and converting his misfortunes into spell effects. This question, which also sounds as a diagnosis of mental sanity—you are not a latic or a misfit but a bewitched—gives rise to a quest, which will lead the victim and his wife to search for an “unwitcher.” Even though there are no symbolic guarantees that the unwitcher will be able to cancel the spell, the mere fact of attributing those misfortunes to an intentional cause, namely that of the “witch,” is the first step in a long process of recovery. With the help of the unwitcher, indeed, the bewitched will hopefully retrieve his life energy by fighting back against the enemy who allegedly wants his destruction.

In contrast to other studies on witchcraft, which mostly emphasize the details of the rituals, the exact wording of the phrases or the kinds of objects that are used to sustain it, Favret-Saada’s ethnography insists on the relational and actional aspect of witchcraft. To understand how really witchcraft works, it is not possible to draw upon the second-hand knowledge that anthropologists, psychiatrists, folklorists, journalists and official authorities produce contemptuously about it. As Favret-Saada forcefully shows, only first-hand knowledge or rather first-hand “grasp” allows to see, from “within,” that witchcraft is a war—a war of “deadly words” and daily struggles but, more fundamentally, a war of forces in which the bewitched, the unwitcher and the witch are caught in, whether they like it or not. But if witchcraft is a warfare, it is a very well organized, rule-governed one that strong-

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15 In 1970s, a Normand landowner is always a man for reasons related to the procedures of property transmission. Therefore, when evoking him, we will use the masculine.
ly constrains those who are involved in it. In fact, witchcraft necessarily involves an actancial system, composed of four interdependent places: the ‘annunciator,’ the ‘bewitched,’ the ‘unwitcher’ and the ‘witch.’ The ethnographer intensely experienced herself that it is not possible to escape this system of places and the expectations tied to it: uttering a single word on witchcraft is already getting involved in a power relationship in which one’s interlocutor is trying to determine one’s proper place, to evaluate one’s force or weakness, to assess one’s benevolence or malevolence, and so on.

In our own words, this grammar-like system of witchcraft is governed by constitutive rules that define the scope of what can be uttered and done by whom at which moment. Only the annunciator can “interpellate” the victim and turn him into a bewitched; accordingly, it is not possible to enter into witchcraft as a bewitched simply upon one’s own will: it is a place ascribed by others. But once caught in the place that others have chosen for “me,” there is no way out – besides leaving the area. Of course, the most striking hetero-ascription that forces some to get involved in witchcraft is that of which the unfortunate alleged sorcerer is subjected to. Indeed, the witch is not in a position from which it is possible to speak in the first person: he is reduced to a “third person,” that is, a “non-person” that those who are part of the witchcraft crisis “speak about” but “never speak to” (Benveniste 1966): he is spoken without being able to speak by himself. There is no need of confession from the witch: he is not an audible voice but a function in the system (Favret-Saada [1977] 1980: 24). As for the unwitcher, it is a powerful but also difficult place to take up, because only someone who is “strong enough” and ready to “take it all” on oneself can endorse it. What makes an unwitcher, hence, is not her knowledge but her force—–an enabling, “good,”“positive” force that she is nevertheless ready to use for rendering evil for evil in her fight against the witch.

More generally, this preexisting system of places is polarized between those who possess “the force” (the witch, the unwitcher) and those who are deprived of it (the bewitched) (Favret-Saada 2011). Insofar as this force can be at work in the slightest utterance uttered by one of the warring factions, decoding the meaning of what is said is far less important than understanding who is speaking to whom. Just as the whole person of the witch embodies a negative force that turns his most trivial gestures into deadly attacks, it is the entire being of the unwitcher that enters into action by way of the words that she utters during the cure. In short, the contents of the words themselves count less than the very fact of enunciation and designation that allows the third-party intervention of the unwitcher to deviate the witch’s spells from his victim and to draw them towards an opponent worthy of himself.

*Performing a new social contract?*

Favret-Saada’s research on witchcraft is fundamentally pragmatic, in the two senses we have unfolded above. First, it is pragmatic in the sense that it reveals the performative force of the language in action, which manifests itself in the inaugural act of instantiating the rule-governed system of witchcraft that the annunciator’s suggestion accomplishes (e.g., “Is there someone who wishes you ill?”). This inaugural act, which is a first step towards the normalization of the misfortune, starts the progressive restructuration and control of the unlimited, malevolent performative force of the sorcerer. In other words, two conflicting performative forces, of different kinds, are present in witchcraft. The performative force of the evil encapsulated into the deadly communicative acts of the witch is totally unbridled, im-

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16Usually, Favret-Saada describes women in the position of the unwitcher. Therefore, we will use a feminine pronoun to designate that role.
mediate and unexpected, bursting from nowhere and without any reason. Put in our own words, such brute performative force constitutes a massive process of desinstitutionalization.

Indeed, Favret-Saada marvelously shows in her recent book, *Désorceler* (more explanatory and social-centered than *Deadly Words*), that the alleged witch is a kind of free rider, who gets rich at the expense of others, monopolizes the goods of the others, and shows himself impervious to social and moral rules (Favret-Saada 2009; 2011). The witch shakes the common world that the bewitched shares with his fellow creatures and jeopardizes the social equilibrium by refusing the minimal symmetry of conditions necessary to hold society together (Favret-Saada 2011). The witch also jeopardizes social relationships at large since the very possibility of his existence creates a climate of mutual suspicion and mistrust: insofar as he is endowed with the power to cast a spell on anyone he wants to despoil or destroy, anything can happen at any time, anyone who speaks to you can prove fatal for you.

From this perspective, witchcraft can be seen as the symbolic reinstitutionalization of the basics of the social contract, unduly jeopardized by the naked force of the witch but also by the vulnerability and weakness of the bewitched (Favret-Saada 2011). The unwitcher breaks off the direct and unequal confrontation between the culprit and his victim by imposing herself as the inescapable figure of the Third: her force is regulated and mediated, allowing the resocialization of the negative, unregulated power of the witch by forcing it into a rule-governed system of preestablished places. Because the unnamable is absolute and asocial, one of the most important acts of micro-institutionalization that witchcraft performs is naming. Indeed, the apparently boundless force possessed by a witch is a sort of black hole whose existence can be only inferred from its destructive effects. “Naming the witch is an attempt to enclose within a figure something which, in itself, escapes from figuration” (Favret-Saada [1977] 1980: 74). The act of naming someone from the circle of acquaintances, carefully prepared during the unwitchment sessions, forces the witch into a system of names that turns him into a singular, recognizable individual, accountable, as such, for the harm he has done.

So witchcraft progressively restores the social equilibrium by working as a system of communicating vessels that draws the force from the witch and awakes the force, if not the violence, of the victim. Indeed, the vulnerability of the bewitcher is due to his difficulty to take on the legal, institutional violence that his social function of landowner involves, from the dispossession of siblings to the exploitation of his wife to the competition with neighbors. Witchcraft therapy is a pedagogical undertaking that awakes his aptitude for violence while keeping the appearance of a right, justified and necessary fight between the principles of the Good against those of the Evil (Favret-Saada 2009). Thus what the unwitcher Mrs. Flora brings into play in her therapy sessions is not only the salvation of the singular person of the bewitched; it is more fundamentally the “ethical order of the world”: the bewitched is entrusted with the upholding of social and moral principles that transcend his singularity.

If witchcraft is pragmatic in the sense of the performative force of enunciation, which has the power to do what it says, it is also pragmatic in a second sense: the partial indeterminacy of the course of action and the phenomenological intensity of the experience of those who are “caught in.” Actually, as will be seen below, individuals portrayed by Favret-Saada are not re-enacting some learned scripts or actions; they are affected by the way things appear to them in an unpredictable or uncontrollable fashion.
Believe it or not: from grammar to phenomenology

Favret-Saada (2009) describes the grammar-like system of witchcraft basically as an essential *therapeutic* device operating at the margins of public knowledge and institutional beliefs. By granting the victim a central place in an actancial system where what happens to him seems to make sense, and proposing him an intelligible narrative, witchcraft restores the unfortunate to subjecthood. To use our own words, witchcraft is a dialogic process of empowerment that opens up, for the victim, a hopeful, enabling but also constraining, field of action. He is no longer the patient of a series of untoward happenings but an actor who can and must fight back the obscure, evil forces of the alleged witch (Favret-Saada 2009). According to the anthropologist, the series of action that the unwitcher Mrs. Flora prescribes the bewitched to accomplish are like so many steps in a ritual whose real efficiency lies in its capacity of forcing the patient to leave his position of passive victim.

Interestingly, this process of resubjectivation does not require from the bewitched *to believe* in witchcraft, which remains rationally unbelievable for everyone, including those who are caught in it against their own will. Rather such process requires from the bewitched to suspend disbelief and, above all, to be ready *todo* anything that could bring his ills to an end. This requirement is not epistemic but pragmatic: what matters is to do something. As philosophical pragmatists have pointed out, belief, unlike knowledge, is fundamentally a propensity and a power to act. When one has “the death at one’s heels,” Favret-Saada says, one cannot afford to launch an epistemic inquiry, to make a cultural fuss or to search for symbolic guarantees: only the result counts, in this case the end of hardship (Favret-Saada 2009). From this perspective, belief in witchcraft, if any, is not a stable state of mind that one possesses and entertains in one’s inner world. On the one hand, indeed, people, including uneducated peasants, have the cognitive flexibility to believe and not to believe at the same time, to navigate a mobile and ambivalent world of shifting realities, in short to envisage, for the temporary sake of the situation, that bewitchment is not an impossible hypothesis. On the other hand, belief is not a proposition in the head: instead it is a way of being concerned with, or *affected by*, which remains vague enough to pass reality tests but involving enough to restore life energy.17 So as Favret-Saada powerfully suggests it, if the conducts adopted within the witchcraft world might possibly be “without beliefs,” they are incontestably with affects.18

Drawing from the work of Favret-Saada, one can surmise that what one could call “*pragmatic beliefs,*” if one can still speak of belief—which is far from obvious for this author—do not involve any epistemic stance: practical commitment suffices to lead temporarily the “affected” to leave behind the ordinary way of life to enter a world in which the insufferable can be turned into a series of words and actions. Inside this world of actions, present and future, the strange beings which are part of the witchcraft arsenal tend to be endorsed with an “objectivity-for-us” that escapes from scrutiny and ordinary reality tests. Importantly, the “objectivity-for-us” of witchcraft is neither the object of a “referential contract” that would place it in the empirical order of things that really exist, nor the object of a “fictional contract” that would defuse its empirical implications by specifying “it is only a story.” The “objectivity-for-us” of witchcraft is rather the object of a “deferential contract” that allows participants to “validate on credit” the strange creatures, such as witches, bewitched, evil, etc., which do not satisfy the usual demands of reference—validation that they accomplish by referring not to a state of affairs but to the belief of others (Kauf-

17One finds the same idea in the work of the anthropologist Albert Piette (2003).
18 On the “conduits without beliefs”, see the well-known paper of Paul Veyne (1988).
mann 2006). Of course, in the world of witchcraft that Favret-Saada describes, the actual “others” who guarantee the holding of pragmatic beliefs are more than scarce since they are mainly the announciator and, in a second step, the unwitcher. But as Michel de Certeau (1981) points out in his comments on Favret-Saada’s research, the peasants of the Bocage do back the “indefinite plural” of those others who might believe in witchcraft: “there are people who believe in it,” the interviewees say, the alleged belief of indeterminate others vouching for the conceivable, if not the believable, in spite of its lack of institutional support and public maintenance.

If witchcraft in the France of the 1970’s is deprived of institutional support and public maintenance, this is obviously not the case in the France of the 1630’s: the series of demonic possession that Michel de Certeau dwells on is characterized by the support of the centralized religious authority, at least at the beginning of the “case”, as well as by its public reach. As will be seen, comparing a crisis which lies under the seal of secrecy and a crisis which gives rise to a public dramaturgy raises differently the issue of the inquiry, social and scientific, that cultural practices can trigger. So after addressing Favret-Saada’s remarkable fieldwork on witchcraft among Normand farmers, let us consider Michel de Certeau’s magnificent study, written a few years before Deadly Words, about a crisis of possessions that took place, in the south of France, during a century plagued with wars of religion.

III. When evil becomes public: the torments of possession

The possession at Loudun ([1970] 2000) narrates in a subtle way the contest that occurs between exorcists, physicians, and the king’s representatives as they try to characterize and put an end to the demonic deeds that bedevil an Ursuline convent from 1632 to 1638. In a chapter published subsequently, “Language altered: the sorcerer’s speech,” the author briefly recapitulates the perspective he adopted in his historical monograph: “Loudun is successively a metonymy and a metaphor allowing us to apprehend how a state policy [une “raison d’État”], a new rationality, replaces a religious reason” (Certeau [1975] 1988b: 246).

To account for this historical shift in the relation between the sacred and the profane, religion and science, Certeau adopts two distinct but correlated and complementary perspectives. The first perspective tries to apprehend the diabolical spectacle as a social phenomenon. Indeed, the historian proceeds through a close examination of the social positions located in the prevailing fields—mainly the religious, the medical and the political ones—which work, sometimes agonistically, within the Loudun society during the possession crisis. Such careful examination allows Certeau to infer, from the alterations happening in the different logics at work, the shifts in the collective imagination of the time. The second perspective focuses on the discourse spoken by the possessed women—or, perhaps better, the discourse being spoken through them—with two complementary lenses, one grammatical, and the other phenomenological. The grammatical investigation aims at uncovering the act-ancial systems and the places of enunciation that constitute social activities such as exorcism. As for the phenomenological investigation, it digs up the experience of the possessed, deeply buried in, even under, the archives that document it. Reaching deeper into the pre-discursive strata of the subject’s experience, the analysis tries to account for an experience that shakes the system of social positions by playing with the assigned places of enunciation. In Certeau’s conceptuality, indeed, the subversion of discursive reason, whether theological, medical, or legal, takes place as the nuns’ enunciation [énonciation] plays with, and within, the interstices inherent to any social system of statements [énoncés].
Our discussion of Certeau’s study will follow those two moments of analysis: the first moment focuses on the way the social fields advance diverging claims to adjudicate the crises of possessions whereas the second moment focuses on the grammatical and phenomenological aspects of those same possessions.

The Theater of the Possessed as a social phenomenon

According to Certeau, possession cases and witchcraft trials are both diabolical manifestations occurring contemporaneously in post-Reformation Europe, but differ in some important regards. Though waves of witchcraft trials spread across northern countries between 1570 and 1685, they remain relatively rare in the South. On the other hand, possessions are a southern phenomenon that stretches from 1559 to 1663, their typical form being the well-documented Gaufridy trial that took place in Aix-en-Provence (1609-1611) and provided the plot for the events of Loudun. Furthermore, witchcraft happens in rural settings and has a distinctive binary structure that pits a sorcerer against urban judges. In that context, witchery discourse works as a way to frame and conceal a fight among protagonists of asymmetric social statuses and thus secret trials functions as an effective procedure for lettered elites to contain and crush popular unrest. Conversely, possession cases share a ternary structure, with the public attention focusing on the victim (the possessed), and not on the judge or the sorcerer. Contrary to witchcraft trials, those cases lead to an overt confrontation where central participants share a similar social status and urban setting.

Since the Reformation and until 1632, Loudun has been a Protestant vanguard in a predominantly Catholic territory. The arrival in town of diverse Catholic religious orders protected by the king (Jesuits, Discalced Carmelites, etc.), since 1606, and the creation of convents indicate that the Counter-Reformation is on its way. Possessions have played a great part in this process, for the Catholic confrontation with the devils is a very effective way of confirming, in a supernatural manner, which of the contending persuasions is the true Christian faith. Yet, religious divisions are losing their power to define the line of confrontation between the parties. More and more, the dividing line will pass among defenders of, and opponents to, local privileges, threatened by the royal prerogatives of the centralized authority. Religious truth is losing ground, as reason [raison] and right are becoming an attribute of the State.

The Loudun possessions start by the end of September 1632 within a context fraught with tension, as a plague episode that wiped out 3’700 of the 14’000 inhabitants is about to end—a tragic reminder of the epidemic which already afflicted the city in 1603. Interestingly, demonic afflictions are said to propagate just as the Black Death is thought then to disseminate, that is, by way of smell. Thus, the nuns present to their exorcists three thorns from a hawthorn and a bouquet of musk roses as a proof of the sorcerer’s enchanted misdeeds. The enchantment supposedly works through a scent that captured and obsessed the Ursulines in a supernatural manner. The enchanter—a sophisticated and handsome priest by the name of Urbain Grandier—is gradually designated, during the exorcisms, by the demons speaking through the possessed.

19 Cases are documented in Denmark, England, Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland, and, for France, mostly in its northern regions. Spain and Italy will be spared (Certeau [1970] 2000: 5).
21 The discourse of possession turns on an absent figure whom it gradually renders more precise: the sorcerer. Contrary to what one might suppose, the theatre at Loudun is not provoked by that formidable or fantastic figure. It is not determined by his approach or his visibility. It needs him in order to function. Thus, as it organizes
At Loudun, possessions are an utterly serious matter, for they will determine which reason—religious, scientific or political—will prevail against the devils that take hold and agitate the nuns. And in this confrontation, publicity plays a crucial role. As long as the demonic deeds remain enclosed within the convent, in the prioress’ room, the exorcists’ religious language provides an indisputable description of what is happening. But as soon as the phenomenon enters the public place, it becomes a spectacle that everybody duly attends according to his or her rank. The whole society, starting with aristocracy and bourgeoisie, come to see and to be seen, in an increasing publicity that has a corrodng effect on the credibility of the exorcism, turning the combat with the demons into a disputable matter.

As possession cases go on, “His Majesty’s” superintendent is sent to settle the possession affair by lending the clergy a hand in order to secure the sturdiness of the social order. Of course, this order is sustained by a certain kind of public credibility, always entangled with credulities, which draws the boundaries of what is considered credible, trustworthy, and sharable in the whole society. As the old organization of certainties breaks apart, social critique steps into the breach. The king’s intendant tries to keep up appearances by ordering the magistrates sitting in court to regularly attend mass, so that they can adore the Holy Sacrament and listen to the exorcists’ homilies. Even so, rumours continue to spread. To silence the skeptical voices and put an end to the doubts taking over the population, the superintendent forbids, with a banning proclaimed and displayed on the streets, any malicious gossip against the afflicted nuns or their exorcists. But the placards will not last for long: their tearing up illustrates the kind of adherence they will meet among the public.

Admittedly, the libertine priest accused of sorcery, Urbain Grandier, will be tried, tortured and burned at the stake, and the royal order of things, apparently still based upon religious foundations, restated. Still, the public, pluralistic turmoil that shakes Loudun bears witness to the decreasing legitimacy and credibility of an order on the point of vanishing: that of a religion that used to unify the experience of being in the world and provided a homogenous worldview to a unified political community. In spite of appearances, the Loudun crisis has thus resulted in a new distribution of powers and prerogatives: politics will grant its unity to a society more and more pluralistic; science will administer a natural truth; and religion will be left with the “spiritual,” the supernatural, that area, in a secular world, which stretches on the margins of human affairs (Certeau [1969] 1987).

Loudun is a theatre where the possessed bodies are publicly exposed and where a public competition, discursive and practical, takes place for getting them back in the grip of normality. On the Theater of the Possessed, divergent claims to administer the truth and to provide a foundation for the common ground on which society stands are made visible, discussed and contested. The confrontations about the naming, by men of power, of what is really happening to those possessed women, reflect what is happening at the level of collective representations: the troubles that bodily affect the nuns somatize the disturbances that run through the whole social body. Of course, the proliferation of dissonant discourses from the main actors of this theatrical drama, mainly the Catholic Church, the royal court, law courts, academies, medical schools, the Ursulines and the Jesuites, mostly affects the different fields, mainly religious, medical, and political, that they are supposed to represent itself for itself, developing and refining its procedures, it defines the silhouette, the name, the misdeeds of the ‘possessor,’ upon whom possession depends” (Certeau [1970] 2000: 52).

2Credibility is a key concept in Certeau’s thinking that has to do with the machinery of representation”. In The Practice of everyday, the author states: “The credibility of a discourse is [both] what moves believers and leads them up the garden path” (our translation)—and not, as the English translation puts it: “what first makes believers act in accord with it [the discourse]” (Certeau [1980] 2011: 148). There is always an ambiguous element in credibility, especially when that credibility works as a foundation for the social order.
and incarnate. Even if devilries will be the transitional solutions to the erosion of certainties, the public spectacle of the overt dissent that divides the authorities acts in a transformative manner on the social structure.

If the long-lasting crisis of possession in Loudun has definitely transformed the social positions and the links of interdependence between the different fields that sustained the ancient social order, it has also transformed the semiotic order that upheld it. If we follow Certeau, the relevant locus to investigate the transformative character of discourse is not only at the level of the social organization; it is also at the level of action and experience, whether they be individual or collective, as will be shown in the following pages.

Diabolical enunciation: the phenomenology beneath the grammars of possession

Certeau’s pragmatic and phenomenological conceptions of discourse, especially in his paper “The sorcerer’s speech” ([1975] 1988b), merge into his characteristic enunciative approach, which is influenced in particular by Lacanian psychoanalysis and Benveniste’s linguistics of enunciation. In Certalian conceptuality, discourse is a public action that depends and acts in a transformative manner on the social structure.\(^\text{23}\) Importantly, discourse is always enunciated from a place [lieu], which in turn coordinates two dimensions closely related to one another, even though they obey in part their own logic: the first dimension is social, referring to a location in society; the other is semiotic, referring to a position in discourse, that is, an enunciative position. Though Certeau’s concepts are extremely efficient in grasping the intricate links that relate, impact and transform both local interactions and social structures by way of discourse, they remain relatively vague. While drawing inspiration from this author’s insights, we will use more specific conceptual tools, mainly the concept of grammar, in order to approach the power of discourse to establish and to transform enunciative positions and, more generally, the social order.\(^\text{24}\)

Indeed, the concept of grammar allows to better specify the transformative power of discourse over the social order. As it can be seen, the selection of the relevant grammar, either religious, medical, or political, supposed to define the crisis of possession, has serious consequences for the organization of the social order and, potentially, for society as a whole. In particular, the competition between the religious and the medical grammars, which try both to make sense of the experience of the possessed, is a major social and political issue. For exorcism is one of the privileged grammars of the religious field, even if it starts to be called into question by some prominent priests, whereas medical diagnosis is the central grammar of the growing reason-oriented field of science. Of course, the victory of one of these grammars over its rivals positively affects the social positions of those who are particularly concerned with its enactment. Inversely, the lack of currency—the loss of credibility\(^\text{25}\)—of a given grammar has downgrading effects on the positions closely related to it, as shown by the erosion of the religious language during the Loudun events and the closing supremacy of the political reason over its competitors. But to understand the transforming

\(^{23}\) For a similar approach in sociology deeply influenced by ethnomethodology, see the work of Jean Widmer (2010).

\(^{24}\) Certeau does not systematize nor make an important use of the concept of grammar. Nonetheless our utilization seems consistent with his way of understanding it: “What makes the discourse of possession possible […] is that the nun must not remember what happened, that no personal element be permitted to compromise the automatic functioning of the diabolical grammar” (Certeau [1970] 2000: 40; emphasis added).

\(^{25}\) As Certeau (1981) reflects on trust and credibility, he will resort on the etymological properties and the semantic field of “credit,” with its economic overtones. See also Chapter XIII of The practice of everyday life ([1980] 2011) originally entitled “Political credibilities” [Crédibilités politiques]. “Believing and making people believe” in English.
impact, at the social level, of the selection of a given grammar from among the available grammatical repertoire of the time, we need to dwell more precisely on the normative and semiotic work of grammar.

If we extrapolate from Certeau’s analysis, the order of action and experience has, at least in part, a grammatical status: it constitutes both a system of rule-governed participation and a way of symbolization or, stated differently, a way to represent and make sense of what is happening in a given context and, further, in the social body. A grammar operates as an actancial system, which defines a system of places (e.g. exorcist-possessed, doctor-patient, and so on), opens up a field of action and delimits the enunciative positions that those who are involved in it can endorse. For instance, medical diagnosis, which is particularly threatening for the authority of the priests in charge of curing the possessed, entails two complementary, structural places of enunciation, that is, the doctor and the patient’s body. By contrast, exorcism entails four places of enunciation, namely the exorcist, the sorcerer, the victim, and the evil spirit. Thus, the exorcism that a priest performs on an afflicted body leads to count this latter as a possessed, whereas the same person treated by a doctor will count as a patient suffering from a disease. Of course, those different systems of places render possible different kinds of activities. When the exorcist names and addresses the evil spirit speaking through the possessed, he is awaiting from the demon to confirm that the suggested name was a correct guess – confirmation that would grant the priest a binding authority over the demonic entity. The words uttered by the afflicted nun, as a possessed body, are central to the unfolding of the exorcism. On the other hand, the nun’s speech, even demonized, is unnecessary, if not unwanted, during a medical encounter with a 17th century physician: the symptoms affecting the patient’s corporal surface (e.g., sweat, pulse, etc.) are readable as a proof not of the presence of a supernatural entity but of a natural illness.

We arrive then at the heart of possession and are able now to elucidate how that phenomenon weaves together the social, grammatical, but also phenomenological dimensions. As mentioned briefly, a central aspect of exorcism has to do with naming: “exorcism is essentially an enterprise of denomination intended to reclassify a protean uncanniness within an established language” (Certeau [1975] 1988b: 255-256). The nun’s identity is altered by a subterranean affliction that needs to be expressed in a shared language to find its etiology and cure. This process of symbolizing, deeply inspired by Certeau’s psychoanalytical conceptuality, is a way of stating what is evil and reinstating the afflicted person within an official grammar and, more generally, within the social order – a social order that is thereby reestablished: “naming simultaneously posits a linkage and a place. It functions at once as participation in a system and access to the symbolic” (Certeau [1975] 1988b: 262). Interestingly, both exorcists and physicians, in spite of the competing, exclusive explanations that they advocate, rely on the same naming procedure to tame the (d)evil that lurks within the afflicted woman. As Certeau puts it, doctors and exorcists agree enough to “eliminate an extra-territoriality of language” and to ascribe the possessed nuns to a determinate place, simultaneously a place of enunciation and a position within a social order. “What they are fighting through acts of naming is a text-off, a writing of otherness, where the possessed woman is located when she presents herself as the statement of something that is fundamentally other” (Certeau [1975] 1988b: 247).

This “verbal imperialism” leaves very few opportunities of resisting to the possessed, who have locked themselves into the tautological, “magical circle” of possession. Still, the hetero-ascription of an enunciative place does not tell in advance how an actual person will feel, experience, nor fulfill or experiment the social role she is subjected to. Here, then,
grammar intersects with phenomenology, that is, with concrete experience. Such intersection leads Certeau to make two claims.\(^2\) The first claim is that there is a gap between the lettered, systematic discourses on possession and the unarticulated, tentative experience of the possessed. The second claim is even more radical: the possessed cannot articulate a discourse before encountering the symbolic systems proper to the grammars of exorcism or disease; there is just an altering disturbance.

For Certeau, such inarticulate disturbance leads us to the cause of the trauma, which has to do with the afflicted person’s incapacity to state, and account for, her own identity. A rift is opened between the speaking subject and a definite proper name, a rift expressed by the paradoxical utterance that Certeau quotes from Rimbaud, “Je est un autre,” or “I is another” ([1975] 1988b: 255). As the possessed speaks, her “I” is always unstable, changing. Therefore the naming performed by the exorcist (or the doctor) “aims at restoring the postulate of all language, that is, a stable relation between the interlocutor, ‘I,’ and a social signifier, the proper name” ([1975] 1988b: 256). Exorcism tries to solve this enunciative aberration by giving the possessed woman a proper name taken from a definite and cultural list of demons. Thus, as she recognizes the action of a particular devil within her, the name standing for a character and a set of specific attributes (Asmodeus, Leviathan, etc.), the nun reoccupies a place, though an intermediary one before full recovery, within discourse and social organization. The process works then as a kind of re-calibration of her social coordinates. The ascription of a stable proper name, even a demonic one, permits her rehabilitation among society by ascribing to her determined and reliable properties.

Though powerful, the naming procedures calling the possessed to order can still be twisted, at least momentarily. To take up Certeau’s latter terminology ([1980] 2011), even if the strategic definition of the prevailing grammar does belong to the subjects of will and power, in this case the authority representatives, seemingly powerless agents such as nuns can use tactics to resist this definition. In fact, the possessed women can be said to use two different tactics to escape from the strategies of symbolization and nomenclature confinement that cultural authorities impose upon them. A first tactic is to refuse to enter the grammar of exorcism. By becoming mute or begging to be left alone, the possessed nuns display a glimpse of the first-person authority that is supposed to disappear from the diabolical grammar of possession. In so doing, the nuns transgress the constitutive rules of demonological experience and draw the investigators on uncertain ground, forcing them to attend a more obedient possessed. A second tactic is to play with the grammar of the exorcism, the Ursulines navigating through the predefined places offered to them by the catalogue of demonic proper names. Instead of occupying a definite place of enunciation, they would constantly wander from Astaroth to Balam to Behemoth to Isacaron, and so on, in an infinite diabolical dance. Such a move, which seems at first to corroborate the effectiveness of the exorcism, ends perverting and undermining it as the exorcist keeps repeating the same naming operation, like a desperate parent tries in vain to impose one’s authority on a mischievous child by repeating incessantly the same ultimatum.

This reveals how the religious grammar was unsettled from within. The refusal to cooperate that some nuns oppose to the public eye, whether medical, clerical or ordinary, does not take the form of an articulated discourse. Instead it takes the form of a fragmentary, stealthy “art of opportunity” that momentarily twists the force-relationships that are imposed upon them. The fact that even the oppressed can find refuge in the “makeshift creativity” proper to tactics shows that the structural, strategic power of the grammatical places

\(^2\)Certeau draws those postulates from the relationship between the modern psychiatrist and the insane, a parallel that the author applies to the cases of possessions.
of enunciation is never wholly determining; it is always negotiated and potentially resisted by the subjective, particular way in which agents hold, and are affected by, the place of enunciation they are supposed to take up.  

As the exorcist tries to capture the devil and prove the truth of the Catholic faith, the nuns’ enunciative moves turn the horrific confrontation with the supernatural into an edifying show staging the appearance of civilized demons and—as Certeau summarizes it bluntly—where snacks are served to the spectators that come to fill the churches ([1970] 2000: 3). The crumbling of the religious empire upon consciences, starting with the possessed, necessitates an urgent action from another power, that of the State. “Since enclosure within the religious onomastic checkerboard does not work, it will be replaced by another grid, that of the police. Thus will end the story of Loudun. Laubardemont, Richelieu’s clerk, will assign places to possessed women—no longer in onomastic squares, but now in the confinement of cells. State policy now classifies by means of walls—another problem” (Certeau [1975] 1988b: 260).

Thus, the circle comes to an end. Certeau’s analysis brilliantly demonstrates how grammar and phenomenology, social order and the individuals experience are intricately interwoven. The same affection that shakes the possessed unsettles the whole city. The possession at Loudun is then an “existential test” [épreuve] for the nuns and their interlocutors, but also at test for the society as a whole, the principal orders of credibility on which society rests being fully investigated. The nuns’ bodies become the locus where the troubles of Loudun are somatized and exposed. Simultaneously, those same bodies are the place where available grammars are explored and put to the test in order to re-form the social body around other means of symbolization.

IV. At the heart of public critique

As we have tried to show, the works of Jeanne Favret-Saada and Michel de Certeau share common features, even if they address empirical fields situated in very different epochs and cultures. Both approaches focus on how, at a social, grammatical and phenomenological level, witchcraft and demonology enhance and constrict the scope of possible actions that actors can appropriately undertake. After emphasizing the main meeting points of those approaches, we will discuss on which aspects they diverge. Those divergences, we will see, are mainly due to the different nature of their fieldworks, which are situated in various spaces and times and raise differently the issue of the social and scientific inquiry.

The “grammatical correction” of unspeakable troubles

Favret-Saada reconstitutes the actantial scheme of witchcraft by experiencing it in the first person. Indeed, her brilliant ethnography was made possible because—and only because—she was “caught up” in it herself. For solely those directly affected by actual witchcraft situations can grasp the logic of being bewitched and unwitched. By dint of investigating her own experience, the anthropologist succeeds eventually in unearthing and reconstituting the grammar which shapes it in depth: the grammar of an actantial system which unites both the bewitched and the unwitcher against a designated common enemy, in this case the sorcerer. By definition, this system only allows two enunciative positions, that of

27In Certeau’s framework, thus, experience is definitely the two-sided entity that we have outlined in our introductory part: the structuring, objective power of grammar, both enabling and constraining, does have a phenomenological, subjective counterpart, mostly revealed in singular “ways of doing”.

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the bewitched and the unwitcher, thereby silencing the unfortunate sorcerer whose point of view, we will get back to it, is made literally impossible to hear.

As it summons magical forces, witchcraft therapy provides a sense of coherence to the disruptive events that have affected the bewitched, and endows him with the power to overcome the evil tricks plotted by the sorcerer. But while treating the alleged victim at a supernatural level, the same therapy simultaneously distorts ordinary social relationships and usual communication between neighbors within the community—let us recall, indeed, that the suspected sorcerer must be a landowner from the neighborhood. At the social level, witchcraft thus appears as a survival fight where the capacity of the bewitched to become a landowner is put to the test: he must become able to exert the legal and social violence that is involved in the monopolizing of his familial inheritance and thereby in the despoliation of the share of his siblings. Thus, Favret-Saada proceeds in an ascending way: beginning from her phenomenological experience, she moves to the grammar of witchcraft and finally unveils the social stake that the inheritance of a familial patrimony represents in the rural context of the Bocage.

Also dwelling on the interplay between social, grammatical and phenomenological dimensions, Certeau’s research covers an analytical spectrum similar to that of Favret-Saada but starts from the opposite pole. Indeed, his analysis begins with the three contending social fields, religion, science, and politics, that the possessions of Loudun unsettle, leading to a redistribution of the influence that those fields exert in society. As seen above, this shift is triggered by the grammars invoked to make sense of the disruption caused by the possessions. Thus, the religious grammar of “exorcism” configures the respective roles of the protagonists (‘exorcists,’ ‘possessed,’ etc.) and their possible actions in a way different from that of the medical grammar of ‘disease.’ Whereas the scientific grammar does not need an external help, its explanations being founded on the natural order of things, the religious etiology will hold out only thanks to the political raison d’État, which goes to its rescue in order to secure the (Catholic) religious ideology that provides the divine law of the French king with its symbolical foundations. But Certeau does not stop his inquiry at the grammatical level; he also reveals how the experience of the nuns operates with and within the antial system of exorcism, undoing it from the inside and thereby participating to the deconstruction of the homogenous religious order. Importantly, even though the social, grammatical and phenomenological dimensions keep a relative autonomy, they are none the less interwoven, not only descriptively but also ontologically speaking: social structures and individual experiences are closely interrelated by normative grammars of description and action.28

Strikingly, both Favret-Saada and Certeau thematize the central role played by the act of naming in witchcraft, exorcism and diagnosis. Naming contributes to defining the situation and ascribes definite roles to the participants. Here, the pragmatic dimension of discourse is inseparable from its meaningful counterpart: a grammar provides concrete possibilities for action but also a reason, an order, to what is happening. Extending a psychoanalytical approach to social issues, both studies show how naming participates in the symbolizing of a disruptive trouble. By resorting to the symbolic features of a shared language, symbolization reintegrates the troublesome event or person within the bounds of the community. In other words, symbolizing has a socializing effect: it reunites society around a common etiology and attributes to each participant a role in the grammar selected to make sense of the situation.

Reviving public inquiry

Beyond their striking convergence, the works of Favret-Saada and Certeau have also important dissimilarities that deserve to be addressed. Those differences revolve around the conceptions of publicity and the role of public inquiry, in their practical and normative dimensions. Indeed, the phenomena studied by those authors have a different relationship to publicity and publicisation and are differently open to third parties.

Thus, witchcraft seems to be unspeakable for two reasons. First, it cannot be the object of declarative discourse or propositional knowledge from those that are involved or have been involved: within witchcraft, speech, beliefs, and experience have no “aboutness;” not only are they pure acts, but also potentially deadly ones. Secondly, witchcraft must be kept secret because it is publicly despised and held up to ridicule, by the medical, political and clerical authorities as well as by the ordinary inhabitants of the Bocage themselves. By contrast, the cases of possession that Certeau dwells on are characterized by their public reach. For the troubles afflicting the nuns quickly give rise to a public inquiry where different reasons, mainly religious, scientific, political, are tested. Whereas witchcraft is deprived of any endogenous publicity and condemned to secrecy, the exorcism is, right from the start, conceived as a public “spectacle” or “theatre,” to take up Certeau’s words.

From an epistemological and normative perspective, comparing the way witchcraft and possession deal with publicity is very informative. Since the events of Loudun have an endogenous propensity towards publicity and publicisation, it suffices, for the analyst, to unfold the public disputes and to follow the actors in their exchanges and critiques. So if Certeau can adopt a descriptive stance, this is because the phenomenon that he investigates, which is a public, pluralistic inquiry into the critical transformation of religious values and practices, is so to speak doing the “normative job” in his place. Even if this public inquiry progressively turns into a collective, fatal dramaturgy, which leads to sentencing to death the alleged sorcerer, the doubt about what or who to believe has been cast, the religious criteria have been dislocated, and a more pluralistic and open order has replaced the monistic “closed” one.

By contrast, the system of witchcraft described “from within” by Favret-Saada is neither public, nor pluralistic: it is a private interlocution, an individual therapy performed in camera to restore the strength of the bewitched, supposedly drawn away by the witch’s spell. The problem, here, is that the ethnographer, as pragmatic as she may be, cannot count on “folk” resources for critique, which are strikingly absent from her fieldwork. In the Bocage, indeed, a public, critical inquiry into sorcery cannot possibly exist because witchcraft is not an official resource or a public theory of misfortune that would allow natives to attest to their status of competent members of community. On the contrary, witchcraft needs secrecy to survive—a secrecy that the peasants have no interest in disclosing given the symbolic benefits that witchcraft is likely to provide. In the Bocage, witchcraft is sustained by the vicious circle of pragmatic beliefs which are incorrigible because, as we saw, they are shielded from reality tests, but also because they escape from the critical plurality of points of view, a plurality that is a constitutive feature of social and scientific inquiry.

30See Arendt’s phenomenological account about how objectivity and reality are closely tied to publicity: “[public] means, first, that everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity. For us, appearance—something that is being seen and heard by others as well as ourselves—constitutes reality” (Arendt [1958] 1998: 50). Arendt clearly distinguishes between the political plurality of opinions and the multiple tests that a scientific statement or fact must pass in order to be established as true:
Now, when the actors themselves do not perform critique and normative distanciation, we can wonder whether the “endogenous challenge” of pragmatic approaches can be held to the end, even if it means leaving aside the tragic consequences of magical therapy for the unfortunate witch. Indeed, the micro-politics of witchcraft, if it looks like a valuable process of resubjectivation when it is seen from inside, allowing the bewitched to shift position from the status of patient to that of agent, looks very different when seen from outside. Even without endorsing the condescending view of the official authorities or the rational-like, distant stance of the peasants when they are prompted to speak theoretically about it, witchcraft-from-the-outside appears not very commendable. In fact, it is a secret, non-public inquiry which responds to a kind of “schmittian logic,” in the rather negative sense of Carl Schmitt: the recovery of the “bewitched” relies on the old trick of the “enemy within.” The deadly opposition between “me” and “him” enables the landowner and his family to act again as a collective body. In short, witchcraft is governed by an exclusion principle and a process of boundary making whose price is very high: the sacrifice of the scapegoated witch, who bears the brunt of the whole cure.

Paradoxically, after powerfully criticizing the objectifying discourse stated by external “authorities” (State, science, church) about natives, the endogenous ethnography of Favret-Saada cannot avoid taking up the violence exerted against the alleged witch whose tragic experience of ostracism remains desperately unspoken of. “No need to listen to him,” the bewitched, the unwitcher, if not the ethnographer, say, “his death speaks for him.” Reduced to the status of a “third person,” the alleged witch is excluded from the space of the interlocution, he is never an “I” or a “you,” including for the ethnographer. Now, as a lot of commentators inspired by Benveniste (1966) have emphasized, the moral and political significance of a system can be measured by its capacity to extend the number of people who can say “I” and then refer to themselves in a self-actualizing manner.

It goes without saying that, from a normative point of view, this “schmittian-like” logic of witchcraft is at the opposite of the public inquiry which, for pragmatic philosophers such as Dewey, allows people to distance themselves from institutional systems and to recover the individual and collective power of determining the orientations of the common life. But is this normative appreciation of the moral and political implications of witchcraft compatible with the symmetrical anthropology pioneered by Favret-Saada? This question, very close to Boltanski’s reflections on critique where we started from, raises a fundamental issue: the comprehensive description of a social phenomenon, based upon the “experience-near” stance which is essential to understand what the “affected” go through, cannot take into account its moral and political implications. As fine-grained and demanding as they are, descriptive accounts seem then to be only the first step of social and scientific inquiry. Sooner or later, they should be followed by a second step, that of the normative assessment of the moral and political implications of the phenomenon under scrutiny.

If we follow John Dewey ([1927] 1991), such second-step, normative stance is fully necessary in a social and scientific inquiry, which is ideally governed by what he calls “the method of democracy”—a method aiming at bringing conflicts, interests, and experiences out into the open where they can be publicly discussed, judged and improved. Here again, this method is particularly well—and unintentionally, of course—illustrated by the case of Loudun. Indeed, the “great public trial” which turns the relation between the sacred and the profane into an object of collective inquiry continually expands, up to and including the

“Truth in the sciences is dependent on the experiment that can be repeated by others; it requires general validity” (1982: 40). See also her important essay on “Truth and politics” ([1961] 2006).

About “experience-near”, see Geertz (1975).
Princes of the Church, of the State and inquisitive laypeople. As the voice of the Devil makes its own’s way through the social circles, more and more wide-ranging, it changes status: from an impromptu, destructive, violent force, it slowly becomes a civilized figure of speech. “With the possessed, the Devil speaks, he writes. If I dare say so, he publishes” (Certeau [1970] 2000: 8). The overcirculation of the words of the demon takes them away from their authoritative sources and diminishes their value: as an unsteady currency, they become more uncertain and, above all, more human. Torn apart by divergent intellectual systems, indeed, they no longer belong to the supernatural language, but are downgraded to human language and disputations. The progressive weakening of the initial force of the Devil illustrates fantastically well the potential emancipatory effect of publicity: it erodes the power of totalization that enclosed phenomena tend to entail. Once open to public scrutiny, the force of totalization can hardly endure, and this is why public inquiry, either social or scientific, is the mainstay of democracy in the normative, ideal sense of the term.

As seen above, witchcraft in the Bocage appears as an anti-democratic problem solving, an “anti-public” grammar that is not held accountable for its moral and political consequences by the actors themselves. So, in this case, some sort of “external” standpoint of the social scientist is needed: only such standpoint can show that witchcraft is not solely the site of validation of the social fate of the alleged victim, but also the site of exclusion of the ostracized witch. How is it possible, then, to critically reveal the ill-formed moral and political constitution of witchcraft without giving up on the endogenous stance of the ethnographer? How to reach, in this context, the “broadened way of thinking” or “enlarged mentality”, based upon the possible or actual judgment of others, which ensures a publicly-minded, universalizing form of political judgment (Arendt 1982)?

**Complex exteriority or an eye for publicity?**

The latter Boltanski ([2009] 2011) distinguishes two kinds of critical processes. The first process, called “simple exteriority”, is internal to the activities of the social actors and able, at best, to address power issues; to produce it, the social scientist simply follows and describes what the actors are doing and how they assess their doings. The second process, called “complex exteriority”, is external to the point of view of the people involved in social action; as such, it is able to unveil domination, not by assessing some local activities, but by producing a theoretical critique of the social order. For, unlike power, domination is invisible to the social actors and can only be revealed by the technical and theoretical skills of the (critical) social scientist. Boltanski defines then this second operation as metacritical in that it is able to produce a totalizing—as opposed to a partial—point of view on reality (which is his concept for “social order”).

We reach here the heart of the disagreement between Boltanski’s metapragmatical approach to critique vis-à-vis the more pragmatist one we tried to lay out by commenting on Favret-Saada’s and especially Certeau’s work. Rather than opposing a simple exteriority to a complex one, we would like to stress, along the lines of Dewey’s pragmatism and Arendt’s phenomenology, the continuum between the internal points of view about an action or event, and more external ones. Such a continuum is a feature of the phenomenon itself, which is always open to both internal and external gazes and, by way of consequence, to a plurality of perceptions—a plurality that is thus intrinsic to the whole phenomenon. Interestingly, in Arendt’s phenomenological language, the distinction between the internal and external gaze matches up with the distinction between the stance of the actor and that of the spectator: “only the spectator occupies a position that enables him to see the whole; the actor, because he is part of the play, must enact his part—he is partial by defini-
tion” ([1961] 2006: 55). Of course, the position of the spectator varies and can go from that of the impartial judge attending an event to the judgment of history but, in any case, it is the spectator’s view that “carries the ultimate meaning of the event.” Such understanding is very similar to Dewey’s experimental conception of the public: the public arises when individuals, indirectly affected by the consequences of others’ actions, perceive those effects and gather together in order to secure or avoid them. Even though Arendt’s spectator seems less politically active than Dewey’s public, both authors posit that the nature of a phenomenon exceeds the internal point of view of the actors, and that the third party perspective is consubstantial with it.

It is precisely this “openness to the third” that allows the inquirer to remain faithful to the nature of the phenomenon without automatically endorsing the actors’ commitments. Since the critical point of view is already built in the phenomenon, normative critique does not require radical exteriority, contrary to what Boltsanski’s approach problematically suggests. Indeed, the dichotomy that Boltanski posits between simple and external exteriority breaks the unity of the phenomenon and separates the direct elements of the phenomenon (the actors’ points of view) from their indirect counterparts (the public’s points of view). This leads to a second difficulty: since direct and indirect elements have been disconnected, the third point of view linked to the indirect consequences of the phenomenon has been obliterated, forcing Boltanski to reintroduce it under the form of an alien critical point of view: that of the metapragmatic critique. The problem is that, as Dewey put it, such critical move, far from being emancipating, is alienating, for the ideological—hence, dogmatic—critique that it advocates is disconnected from the real consequences of the phenomenon. Paradoxically, such disconnection severs the link between the phenomenon and social action, and prevents the actors or the public from acting upon its effective consequences. Rather than empowering people, such critical stance deprives them of their capacity to act in an appropriate manner, and replaces social inquiry with an ideological construct.

But there is a third—and somehow more disturbing—criticism that can be addressed to Boltanski’s position. According to the author, a metacritical point of view, which provides a totalizing perspective on reality, is necessary to deconstruct the reigning social order. However, it is far from certain that such a totalizing perspective is neither needed nor desirable, for it might rapidly degenerate into a totalitarian point of view, hostile as such to a critical pluralism. A totalizing perspective—especially one that severs the link between

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32 “The spectator, because he is not involved, can perceive this design of providence or nature, which is hidden from the actor. So we have the spectacle and the spectator on one side, the actors and all the single events and contingent, haphazard happenings on the other. In the context of the French Revolution, it seemed to Kant that the spectator’s view carried the ultimate meaning of the event, although this view yielded no maximum for acting” (Arendt [1961] 2006: 52).

33 “We take then our point of departure from the objective fact that human acts have consequences upon others, that some of these consequences are perceived, and that their perception leads to subsequent effort to control action so as to secure some consequences and avoid others. Following this clue, we are led to remark that the consequences are of two kinds, those which affect the persons directly engaged in a transaction, and those which affect others beyond those immediately concerned. In this distinction we find the germ of the distinction between the private and the public. When indirect consequences are recognized and there is effort to regulate them, something having the traits of a state comes into existence” (Dewey [1927] 1991: 12).

Dewey provides a point of method about the use of theory: “Political theories have shared in the absolutistic character of philosophy generally. By this is meant something much more than philosophies of the Absolute. Even professedly empirical philosophies have assumed a certain finality and foreverness in their theories which may be expressed by saying that they have been non-historical in character. They have isolated their subject-matter from its connections, and any isolated subject-matter becomes unqualified in the degree of its disconnection” ([1927] 1991: 194-195).

35 Again, see J. Stavo-Debauge (2011) and L. Kaufmann (2012).
the direct and indirect consequences of a phenomenon—risks turning into a unique, arbitrary claim that bypasses the pluralistic composition of society and the multiplicity of opinions.

Our criticism to Boltanski’s new sociology allows us to better specify the more pragmatist approach we advocate here. The puzzle produced by the articulation of the internal description of a phenomenon with its normative assessment, which make it accountable vis-à-vis the rest of society, can indeed be solved through pragmatist means. In concrete terms, the solution, ethnographically and normatively correct, is to follow the direct and indirect consequences of a phenomenon, to lift the ban of enunciation and to map out as many points of views as possible—including, in our witchcraft cases, the point of view of the alleged sorcerer (or witch) and that of the official authorities. This is the only way to increase the range of the possible views of the phenomenon and, thereby, to render the scope of the thought as general and pluralist as possible. Such a way to proceed will preserve the unity of the phenomenon: while acknowledging the diverse—and critical—perspectives that it offers to scrutiny, from the actors to the public to the social scientist, it nevertheless embraces them with an overall pragmatist account.

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Section II. Law, Power, and the prospects of a pragmatist social theory
Christoph Henning*

Naturalistic Values and Progressive Politics. A Missing Link Between Pragmatism and Social Theory

Abstract. The paper argues that Dewey’s ethics is based on a naturalistic theory of value. This unusual interpretation questions the anti-naturalist reading of Dewey in the wake of Richard Rorty and other neo-pragmatists. In order to defend this interpretation, I develop a genealogy of Dewey’s pragmatic naturalism: It has a ‘father’ in the progressivist movement, and a ‘sister’ in the Chicago Sociology. A closer look at Frank L. Ward, Albion Small, W.I. Thomas and Robert Park helps to reconstruct the political dynamics of the progressivist programme of naturalistic values. This contextualization may also correct some of the shortcomings of Dewey’s own version: Some pragmatic sociologists spelled out the nonconformist individualism more clearly than Dewey’s philosophy did. Finally I suggest that this approach is still relevant today.

What is Sociological Pragmatism?

In 1921, major contributions of the Chicago School of Sociology had already appeared. Nevertheless, in the same year Charles Horton Cooley noted in his Journal: “A social, or perhaps I should say, a sociological pragmatism remains to be worked out”. This seems to be a strange judgment: Not only is Cooley himself often considered both a sociologist and a pragmatist who, as a father of the interactionist paradigm, is mentioned together with G.H. Mead and John Dewey (Schubert 1995). There is also an understanding that the Chicago School was strongly influenced by the pragmatist philosophers and psychologists Dewey (who taught in Chicago from 1894 to 1905) and Mead (who came with Dewey and taught there until his death in 1931). Burgess and Park 1921, for example, extensively quoted Dewey in their influential work; others like Charles Ellwood (1873-1946) were even Dewey’s direct students. So what could this odd statement mean?

A closer look at the context reveals that Cooley attributed this to William James’s Psychology (1890). What Cooley missed in James was this: “he saw men as separate individuals”. Now one may wonder, how else should we look at ‘men’? To understand Cooley right, we have to consider his own ideas: “Although William James had insight into the social nature of the self he did not develop this into a really organismic conception of the relation of the individual to the social whole”. So it is not enough to consider the “social nature” of individual selves, which I would here interpret as a social origin or pro-social attitudes (that is: a genetic or ethical claim). Cooley was after an ontological claim: an organismic theory, which understood individual and society not as separate entities, but – in a quest for unity reminding of Hegel and Dewey – as two ‘poles’ of a larger whole. European 19th century organicism had already developed similar ideas, with Spencer and Schaeffle being

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2 Park 1915, Thomas and Znaniecki 1918-20, Burgess and Park 1921, Thomas 1921.
4 Lewis and Smith (1980: 167). They also describe pragmatism’s impact on W.I. Thomas and Herbert Blumer.
Cooley himself had developed a weakly organicist view almost 20 years earlier, holding that “society and individual denote not separable phenomena but different aspects of the same thing” (Cooley 1902: 37). So the sociological theory he asked for was there already. This, however, can only mean that in this quote he did not consider his own writings pragmatist. That leaves us with an unagitated reading of Cooley’s quote: since he did not consider himself a pragmatist here, his own writings did not count. And since many sociologists were skeptical about organicist metaphysics of society, this does not tell us much about sociological pragmatism. Just as stated before, the Chicago school could still be counted as a qualified candidate for a ‘sociological pragmatism’, even if Cooley himself did not see one around.

In a classic paper, Hans Joas thought otherwise. He reads this quote as evidence that certain elements of the pragmatist philosophy had not been properly ‘translated’ into sociological theory. Interestingly, he extends this claim not only to Cooley (Joas 1992: 33), but also to the cherished G.H. Mead, Robert E. Park: “it can not be claimed that Park and his students succeeded in transforming pragmatism into a satisfactory theory of society (Joas 1992: 48). Now, this leads to a peculiar situation: it almost looks like a game of naming and shaming, where the accusation to be ‘not social (or sociological) enough’ can be passed on forever: Cooley claimed it about James (and Spencer); Mead 1930 claimed it about Cooley, now Joas claims it about Mead and Park. (Ironically, today one might say this about Joas, who now has become a philosophical and religious writer). So again we have to ask what this accusation could mean.

Where ‘sociology’ designates an empirical science, based on a reliable theory of modern society, the accusation can either mean that said authors were not sociological enough. This is the case when Joas criticizes Mead: his “ideal of democratic self-government … is not used to elaborate a theory of society that could also be put to sociological use” (Joas 1992: 35; “use” I here take to mean: used as a theoretical guide for empirical research). The same interpretation is at work where Joas compares W.I. Thomas’ theories not to sociology, but to “humanistic psychology” (Joas 1992: 43; like Karen Horney, Erich Fromm or Abraham Maslow). Likewise, he claims that Park and his students had nothing to say about class, bureaucracy or international relations (Joas 1992: 48). But the accusation can also mean something else: Since we are looking for a sociological pragmatism, it can also mean that a certain sociology is not pragmatic enough. We find this understanding in Joas’ text, too; for example when he criticizes Cooley for relying on emotions instead of actions (Joas 1992: 33); or when Mead is accused of becoming an “utopist” (Joas 1980: 207; see below).

This leaves us with a dilemma: If we are looking for sociological pragmatism where we expect to find it: in American academia of the 1920s, we find sociology as well as pragmatism. But we also perceive a gap between them. It seems to be difficult to find a proper “sociological pragmatism”. However, this problem only arises from a certain perspective. Only if we look at sociology and pragmatism as two unrelated things we have to search for a link in order to build a synthesis. But this narrow focus is not necessary. Once the perspective is broadened a little, they appear as two branches of the same tree. Then we no longer have to

For Cooley’s verdict on Spencer see Coser (1971: 319). For Joas Mead remains a sociological champion. Lewis and Smith 1980 made the stronger claim that Mead is no sociologist at all: he was interested in ethics and empirical psychology, but has never conducted sociological research or taught sociology (the same is true for Dewey, Peice and James).
construct’ a link, for the two branches are linked already. To cut a long story short, the larger stream that carried them both was the progressivist movement.

**Progressive Politics in Pragmatism and Early Sociology**

A *History of Sociology* from 1948 distinguishes two different “sociologies” throughout the history of the discipline:

Comte, Morgan, and Ward believing that the main purpose of sociology is to facilitate planned progress, while Spencer, Sumner, and Gumplovicz held that the great practical service of sociology is to warn against the futility and danger of the notion that man can facilitate and hasten social progress through deliberate action (Barnes 1948, ix).

A similar distinction between proactive and cautionary social theory could be made between Max Weber, who rejected value judgements in sociology, and ‘valuing’ sociologists like Franz Oppenheimer; between self-proclaimed ‘critical’ theorists in the wake of Max Horkheimer and positivists following Karl Popper; and even the debate between Jürgen Habermas and Niklas Luhmann in the 1970s could be framed this way. One party is in favor of progress; the other one is not against it, but only against planned progress, for such a planning could prove wrong-headed or illiberal. Their position rather is that progress is happening anyway (“naturally”, as an evolution), so it is not for citizens or sociologists to decide which direction it should take.

Now, it is important to see that the aim to facilitate and direct progress was exactly the program of the progressivist movement in the USA. As a political movement, it is usually dated from 1890-1921 (Allerfeldt 2007). As an intellectual movement, however, it started earlier, with Henry George’s *Progress and Poverty*, written in 1879, being a landmark publication to stir the debate. By the late 1870s, the United States witnessed rapid and tremendous changes. But whether this was a “progress” was an open question. With industrialization came inequality and poverty, and with urbanization came a growing anonymity and a sense of alienation (Sandel 1996: 201ff.). From the beginning the debate had a clear economic focus – more precisely, it was clear regarding the criticism of the “rugged individualism” of the Gilded Age, but not so clear about the alternatives. Henry Carter Adams, Richard T. Ely and John Bates Clark (soon to be called the “ethical economists”) were contributing to an economic critique of unfettered capitalism by the mid-1880s already. But as liberal economists they were torn between full blown socialism and traditional market liberalism. In the 1930s John Dewey still tried to find some *via media* (LW 11; cf. Kloppenberg 1986); even though he was in favor of “industrial democracy” as early as 1888, he rejected efforts of his students Max Eastman and Sidney Hook to draw him towards Marxism or Trotskyism (Phelps 1997: 55ff., 148ff.). To be progressive meant to be in-between, even if it was not immediately clear what that meant concretely.

Likewise, the emergence of American Sociology since the 1880ies was motivated by a need, deeply felt by many, to ‘do’ something about the social disturbances which accompanied the rapid industrialization and urbanization. It did not necessarily mean that progress needed to be made. Progress was manifest anyway. What it meant was that the socio-

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7 Concerning the “supposed tendency of democracy toward socialism, if not communism”, Dewey proclaimed: “there is not need to beat around the bush in saying that democracy is not in reality what it is in name until it is industrial” (EW 1: 246; see Feffer 1993: 142ff.). For Mead’s position on “socialism”; see Shalin (2011: 37ff., 51ff.).
economic and cultural changes needed to be directed into a “desirable” direction (to use Dewey’s moral term). Using a language of fields inspired by Pierre Bourdieu, one might say that the (economic) liberalism early American Sociologists attacked was neither the emerging large-scale capitalism directly, nor its justification in the new economic theory (the marginal revolution was only just underway). Rather, they had the sociological version in mind which dominated the sociological field of this period: the theories of Herbert Spencer and their American complement, William Graham Sumner⁸. In a Nietzschean move worthy of later liberals like Hayek, Sumner had radically ruled out any third-wayism:

Let it be understood that we cannot go outside of this alternative: liberty, inequality, survival of the fittest; not-liberty, equality, survival of the unfittest. The former carries society forward and favors all its best members; the latter carries society downwards and favors all its worst members (Summer 1914: 25).

This theory posed the following difficulty: if capitalism would have been pictured as one ‘culture’ amongst others (which seemed possible, given that the changes were quite recent) it would have been easy to beg to differ. However, this was not the way the debate was framed. Rather, capitalism was perceived as a ‘natural’ thing to have, since it was based on nature. Sumner wrote in 1883 already:

Certain ills belong to the hardship of human life. They are natural. They are part of the struggle with Nature for existence. We can not blame our fellow-men for our share of these. My neighbor and I are both struggling to free ourselves from these ills. The fact that my neighbor has succeeded in this struggle better than I constitutes no grievance for me (Summer 1883: 17f.).

Once this underlying socio-natural philosophy was hegemonic, this claim could be made in a ‘neutralist’ scientific fashion that was not open to debate. You cannot argue with natural forces, as German Neo-Kantian Rudolf Stammler (1896: 430ff.) had insisted against socialism. (Confronted with this ‘naturalizing’ power of ideological discourse theories of social and participatory democracy still look week today).

In this situation, the progressivist agenda to ‘do’ something about the situation was facing a dead end. Of course, proponents of reform could try to bring their voice out into the public – and for years Robert E. Park did just that when he worked as a journalist. (At one point he planned a weekly magazine with John Dewey in order to inform the public better)⁹. However, as long as demands for, say, more real freedom and equality appeared as efforts to argue with ‘nature’, this had a similar effect as barking at the moon had – none. So in order to be heard, the naturalistic hegemony of “laissez-faire” liberalism needed to be broken first. Karl Marx tried to do this in his economic writings for Europe. This is also what early American Sociologists set out to do. Frank Lester Wards Dynamic Sociology (published 1883, the year Marx died) was attacking the laissez-faire school head on, too¹⁰.

The clue to this effort, however, was that it had to start with nature (just like Marx had done in his German Ideology, Henning 2009). This was not just a matter of taste of authors like Ward or Thomas who happened to be interested in biology and botanics. Dewey spelled out the dilemma most clearly. If nature was left aside and progressive theory

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jumped to a normative view of society immediately, this remained pure articulation of subjective taste without any moral force:

There will be one philosophy, a realistic one, for mathematics, physical science and the established social order; another, and opposed philosophy for the affairs of personal life. … But philosophical dualism is but a formulated recognition of an impasse in life; an impotence in interaction, inability to make effective transition, limitation of power to regulate (LW 1: 186).

If a “continuity” between nature and society (LW 1: 6) could be demonstrated, however, then arguments from an analysis of society could no longer be neglected with recourse to nature. They had to be taken seriously. This explains why social sciences were crucial to the progressive movement; a “Reconstruction of Society by Social Science” was needed (Barnes 1948: 173ff.). But it had to be a social science that could explain itself over and against the dominance of the natural sciences and naturalistic ideologies. For this reason the botanist Ward was extremely important for the birth of progressive sociology: his attack on the laissez-faire doctrine (Ward 1883 I: 31ff.) was no naïve Social Gospel or remote moralism. It was based on a firm philosophy of nature, which was as informed about Darwin as Sumner was.

It is no coincidence, then, that Wright-Mills’ early search for the link between Sociology and Pragmatism perceived a “tradition from Ward, through Dewey, to W. I. Thomas and Mead” (Wright Mills 1964: 448; written 1941). “Many passages of this book [Ward 1883] could almost have been written by John Dewey” (Wright Mills 1964: 462). I agree. What allowed for this continuity not only between nature and society, but also between Ward and Dewey – and that is: between early Sociology and Pragmatism?

It begins with a similar philosophy of science. Science needed to prove itself for practical purposes, or it was pointless. Describing a similar dualism between a meaningless natural science and subjective moral judgments, Ward (who quoted Peirce in this work already) wrote 42 years before Dewey:

The real object of science is to benefit man. A science which fails to do this, however agreeable its study, is lifeless. Sociology, which of all sciences should benefit man most, is in danger of falling into the class of polite amusements, or dead sciences (Ward 1883: xxvii).

As we saw, sociology did not just aim at a random benefit, but at a planned social progress (Wards sociocracy: “the rule of society by society”)11. How did Ward prove it was possible? His main argument was that the “stational” perspective taken in biological theory and sociology was not enough. Sociology needed to take “dynamical action” into account: “it is not what men are, but what they do” (Ward 1903:15). The following passage foreshadows Dewey’s distinction between “habit” and action guided by “intelligence”:

Dynamical actions are distinguished from statical actions in proceeding according to the indirect, or intellectual, method of conation instead of the direct, or physical, method. … In statical actions the movements of the agent are made in straight lines toward the end. In dynamical actions, they are not so made, but may proceed in any other direction (Ward 1883 II: 378).

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11 Ward (1883 I: 60); cf. Chugerman (1939: 319ff.).
Dynamic action was defined by a conscious purpose. Now, if individuals may define and pursue a purpose, then societies should be able to do this, too. At least in Europe they did, by developing social insurances, a welfare state and municipal services, for example. Experiencing this European ‘progress’ was crucial for progressive writers, many of whom had studied in Germany. Mead, e.g., was deeply impressed “how cities sweep their streets, manage their gas works and street cars, their Turnvereins” etc. Being able to set a purpose both individually and collectively (“collective telesis”, Ward 1898: 260ff.) distinguished humans from other natural beings. But then doing this no longer is a mistake. It does not mean to mess with mother nature if setting collective purposes is our very nature.

Saying this with scientific intent, however, leads to the question which the purposes in question are. Nature can be studied. Even if there is a difference between humans and (other) animals, we should be able to say more at this crucial step. Indeed, Ward had an idea here: he suggested to use human emotions as a key: “What function is to biology, feeling is to sociology” (Ward 1883 II: 123). Feelings are particularly human. At the same time they are natural enough to be a “force” in human conduct. Hence, Ward called them “social forces” (1883 I: 480ff.). One of them – the notion of “sympathy” which already appeared in Adam Smith – made a special ‘career’ in later progressive writings: “Reform should be based on Sympathy” (Cooley 1909: 13f.)13. This sociology believed it could define naturalistic values in order to direct the social progress. “Today men think for a purpose. The purpose is one: the elevation of men” (Ward 1883 II: 123). Or, with Dewey (1920: 141): “Growth itself is the only moral ‘end’”.

This idea of naturalistic values defined by social forces was handed on to other sociologists. It is still visible in the writings of Albion Small (1854-1926), progressivist and institutional father of the Chicago School. Small saw an “impulse to improve ways of improving the world” incorporated in sociology (1916: 828). As early as 1893 (according to Barnes 1948: 782) he formulated his objective list of human interests: “health, wealth, sociability, knowledge, beauty, and rightness”, which he deduced from basic emotions (Small 1905:196, 682)15. Interestingly, Small quoted Dewey for these interests (Small 1905: 433).

And like Ward, Small perceived that there was evolutionary progress in society anyway (“Natural life is conflict, but it is conflict converging toward minimum conflict and maximum co-operation and sociability”, Small 1905: 371). This progress needed conscious planning and direction, which made it the aim of sociology to provide the proper ends or values. Considering the methodic question how such naturalistic values might be discovered, Small – who is often described as a minor theorist – was influenced by Peirce, foreshadowing K.O. Apel’s and Habermas’s writings of the 1960s:

The most reliable criterion of human values which science can propose would be the consensus of councils of scientists representing the largest possible variety of human interests, and co-operating to reduce their special judgments to a scale which would render their due to each of the interests in the total calculation. This declaration of principles … would not be the abdication of science. It would be science with stripped of cant. … It would be science with its decks cleared for action (Small 1910:260).

12 Mead in a letter from 1890, cited in Shalin (2011, 46). As many will remember, Lenin was impressed, too; especially by the German post office.
14 See Lewis/Smith (1980, 155ff.); Schubert (2010, 80ff.).
15 The “health interest” is subdivided into “Food”, “Sex” and “Work interest”.

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Even if this sounds like the technocratic elitism later developed by Walter Lippmann and others, this was not the issue for Ward and Small. They rather asked for public discussion of societal issues, based on the best knowledge available. Hence the need for a functioning media, which was so important to Park and Dewey. Hence, also, the stress on education. It became an eminent political end (in-view or not) to provide good education for everybody. Dewey and Tufts called this “equality of opportunity”, Ward even more pointedly “intellectual egalitarianism” (MW 5: 490 f.)\(^\text{16}\).

The idea of the social forces moved even further, from Ward to Small, and from Small to W.I. Thomas (1863-1947). In his terminology “four fundamental wishes” remained (Thomas 1921: 27): the desire for new experience\(^\text{17}\), for security, for response (or affection by members of the in-group) and for recognition (distinction, or a certain status within the larger group). This anthropological base – which was later modified, but never given up completely\(^\text{18}\) – was sometimes criticized as un-sociological. Wrongly, I think: Its function was not to put empirical investigations aside by ‘deducing’ something from a fixed concept of nature as “supreme reality” (MW 12: 92). Social sciences do not have to assume that humans can do without nature (that would be an absurd claim). To the contrary, an anthropological base allowed for a better sociology. It served two purposes: First, in order to compare different cultures or their mutual impact, what the Polish Peasant (Thomas and Znaniecki 1918-20) did masterfully, one has to know what is to be compared in the first place. In order to understand local differences or historical changes, something needs to be fixed (a tertium comparationis). Otherwise we would only see drift and fluidity, which teaches us nothing:

What distinguishes societies and individuals is the predominance of certain attitudes over others, and this predominance depends, as we shall see below, on the type of organization which the group has developed to regulate the expression of the wishes of its members. … We can, therefore, gain a better understanding of the heritages of the immigrant groups … by examining briefly the nature of the human wishes and the form of the social organization which control the wishes of our immigrants at home (Thomas 1921: 25f.).

So considering these fundamental wishes allows for better comparisons. And what is more, they also carry a (weak) normativity. They often are “repressed” to a great extent (Thomas 1951: 117, written 1918), but they should not be repressed altogether: “We may assume also that an individual life cannot be called normal in which all the four types of wishes are not satisfied in some measure and in some form” (Thomas 1951: 144, written 1925). Thomas and Znaniecky had a ‘pragmatic’ understanding of values which bound together objective (social) values and subjective valuations (attitudes) in a larger practical unity. To quote the ‘famous’ phrase from the Polish Peasant: “The attitude is thus the individual counterpart of the social value; activity, in whatever form, is the bond between them” (Thomas 1951: 50, written 1918). Those actions are neither embedded in a transcendent set of objective value, nor in a transcendent set of subjective attitudes (in Deweyan terms, they do not presuppose “fixed ends”), but in a “situation” in which values and attitudes come together. “Every concrete activity is the solution of a situation” (Thomas 1951: 57). So in order to understand human action, we need to understand the situation.


\(^{17}\) Schubert (2010: 81) sees an influence of Peirce here: creative action is not necessarily a response to an external problem, but may also result from a desire for play or creation.

\(^{18}\) Thomas (1951: 111-144) documents versions of this theory from 1917 to 1925. Park and Burgess (1921: 435-504) have a long chapter about “social forces”, with many authors.
And consequently, in order to bring about “progress” in the course of action, the situation needs to be changed – which includes the environment as well as attitudes.

Obviously this situationist approach is very close to Dewey’s take on ethics. This parallel has three aspects: methodological, concerning the material, and in regard to “progressivist” conclusions:

First, in the general understanding of morality Dewey replaced what seemed to him “a single, fixed and final goal” in traditional theories with “individualized goods and ends” which depended on the situation. This way, “every moral situation is a unique situation” (MW 12: 173). In order to understand the moral dimension of an act, we need to understand the concrete situation first, withholding the inclination to subsume it under general principles to quickly (Dewey and Tuft 1908: 197ff.).

Secondly, this level of concretion did not lead Dewey to give up ethical theory (a possible conclusion if only “changing, moving, individualized goods” remain, 132). Instead, his ethics exemplarily analyzed the general “situation” of the United States in 1908 and again in 1932. In a good progressivist fashion Dewey and Tufts (MW 5: 457) primarily describe the “economic situation”. Ironically, the most concrete level of analysis Dewey ever got to in terms of social theory was in ethics.

Thirdly, the normative conclusions drawn do not refer to the morality of individuals (as in Victorian efforts to legislate morality), but to the social conditions. For example, Dewey and Tufts (MW 5: 390ff., 470ff.) elaborated the notion of “effective freedom” and “equality of opportunity” which were already common in the progressivist literature. Comparable to Thomas’ logic of the situation, it included both: working on external (e.g., freedom from want) as on internal conditions (e.g., freedom from fear).

These two schools of thought, pragmatism and the Chicago School of Sociology, found a way to escape the accusation of a naturalistic fallacy (Bohmann 2010). Unfortunately, though, both poles of the “naturalistic values” – nature and value – become increasingly difficult to articulate in the process of professionalization of a social science. Values become the object of social science the more it is confronted with pluralism (a parallel to Max Weber in European sociology). To pursue one against the others would be partial and naïve. Hence, Park believed that “a moral man cannot be a sociologist” (cited in Lindner 2000, 217). However, as long as sociology claims to be a progressive force in society, it must enable others to make better value judgments. And even Park “saw sociology as ultimately useful and practical”:

“Applied sociology is not concerned with uncovering mechanisms and devices for reform, but with exposing the broad setting of social organization and human nature which policy-makers must take into account” (Turner in Park 1967, xvi).

Sometimes sociology may even articulate new and more reflective values itself. One biographer of Park describes his ideal, which resembles Simmel and Habermas’ Peircean normative social philosophy, the following way:

the task of communication … becomes a cultural ideal which transcends traditional bonds, in order to arrive at a common universe of discourse. … Communication enables individual experiences to be integrated, but not sublated” (Lindner 1996, 112, cf. Lindner 2000, 225).

Consequently, human nature is not simply a “given” which may be stored in a scientific box. In the 1920s this was shown by the critique of instinct psychology by Faris (1921), a

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19 Green (1881); Ward (1883 II: 233: liberty is “the power to act”); Cooley (1902: 433ff.).
Chicago scholar, and Bernard (1924)\textsuperscript{20}. Nevertheless, the concepts of nature and “human nature” remained crucial ones, in both pragmatism and Chicago sociology. As Mead had anchored his symbolic interactionism in an organic perspective and Dewey (MW 14) developed an anthropology of habit and impulse, Park (1915: 583) held that the study of the city would “reveal to us human behavior and human nature generally”. Later studies relied on a “biotic” vocabulary even stronger (Park et al. 1925), laying foundations for the discipline of ‘social ecology’.

Systematically, therefore, these underlying naturalistic values do not mark the difference between pragmatism and Chicago Sociology. They can be found in both branches of the progressive tree. Before I elaborate where a crucial difference between them lies which is often overlooked in the literature, I would like to elaborate in some detail how Dewey, the most systematic of the progressive thinkers, explained naturalistic values. He was quite aware of the criticism of naïve conceptions of human nature and values. Nevertheless he spelled out a normative anthropology himself.

\textit{John Dewey on Naturalistic Values}

European sociology could not easily ‘digest’ the evaluative approach in social theory (Tenbruck 1985). The reason was epistemological: The fact-value distinction was very relevant in a European Kantian framework. However, since American progressivists were influenced more by Hume and Darwin than by Kant, they were less concerned about normative ‘valuing’ in science\textsuperscript{21}. This motivates a deeper look into the normative implications of the naturalism typical for progressive thought from Ward to Dewey and Park. Clearly, their naturalism was not reductionist (Bohman 2010, Gale 2010). They did not try to belittle the impact of culture and history, or even of mind and free will (“intelligence”, in Dewey’s terms). Rather, they looked at the way their nature allowed human beings to act and interact in different ways, creatively changing their natural and social environment where possible.

As we have seen in Ward and others, starting with a natural perspective does not preclude arriving at social or cultural phenomena. Rather, this avoids the “dualism” described by Dewey which would make these theories vulnerable to a criticism from the hegemonic laissez-faire naturalism.

Dewey was highly critical of two different ways of thinking: as we have seen, one was the ideological liberalism which was based on an abstract individualism. The other one was traditionalism, based on a rigid intersubjectivism. (Both are still with us today.) Both of them tell stories about foundations: the first one disembeds the atomistic individual from its social settings and remodels everything in its image. Even if the model aims to be purely formal, it is still based on a particular conception of the individual: a market-type consumer who ‘chooses’ norms according to his interests (MW 5: 77, 478). The second model relinquishes individuals to the social powers around them (families, tribes, local customs etc.). This social constructivism implies an ontological claim about the foundation of norms in certain social communities. Ironically, today it is particularly popular with readers of Mead like Habermas, Joas or Honneth. But if normative claims are only (quasi-)based on local habits (“folkways”, Sumner 1907), on the way we do it, this has very limited normative

\textsuperscript{20}This is a parallel to German “philosophical anthropology” of the 1920s, which also maintained that there is a human nature, but it neither determines nor predicts human behavior.

\textsuperscript{21}Dewey clearly acknowledged his Darwinian influences several times. In the foreword to \textit{Human Nature and Conduct} from 1930, he also endorsed Hume (see Bohman 2010: 191).
power in different contexts with different local habits. Neither is it a promising prospect for a deeper and non-conformist individualism, as it was one of Dewey’s main aims.

Here is the dilemma Dewey faced: basing norms on an abstracted concept of the market-individual (“liberty”) is ideological and over-abstract; whereas an ethics based on the self-conception of pre-industrial white middle-class Mid-west American town-life (“community”) is limited to this particular context. Basing ethics on the individual or the social lifemay therefore both be dead ends, at least for progressivists. But not basing them on anything is not a way out, either, for that would leave it adrift in practice, and prey to whatever ideology comes around in theory. So where do we go from here?

Dewey’s criticism of both theories is based on human nature. Even though both theories claim to represent human nature, neither of them is reaching down to it. Any particular community is historically and geographically contingent, and so is “rugged individualism”; it is an abstractification of another section of the same community – the role taken in economic transactions (at least in their textbook representation). Both claims are taken for granted (as natural) by their followers, yet they only represent contingent and particular facts which are open to change. Consequently they cannot be legitimized with reference to human nature. Saying so, however, presupposes that there is something like human nature we may refer to. (To see this, note that in order to say ‘a is not an x’, we need to know first what the characteristics of x are.)

Today many philosophers and social scientists abhor naturalist claims (Pinker 2002), for all too often they petrify contingent facts and try to end all discussion. However, for Dewey this was different. If Dewey’s main interest, which attracted him to Hegel, was the overcoming of dualism, then the dualisms of body and mind, or nature and culture, are among the most important ones. For Dewey being at home in the world also implies to beat home in one’s nature, both as an individual (Dewey was a nonconformist) and, more generally, as a natural being. So we should expect a more positive approach towards human nature then the neo-pragmatist allows for. Indeed, Dewey describes human nature as “raw materials” (MW 14: 78) that can take different shapes. It is cultivated in many different ways, with habits as a second nature guiding most of our actions. These habits are contingent and forever changing. Consequently this conception cannot prescribe a certain way of being, like theories of natural law used to do. Dewey does not even try to define a fixed set of instincts, for even they may change (MW 14: 144). This concept of human nature is quite liberal. In an ingenious reversal, Dewey claims that illiberal consequences rather have to be feared if we base our norms on culture and tradition:

As a matter of fact, it is precisely custom which has the greatest inertia, which is least susceptible of alteration; while instincts are most readily modifiable through use, most subjective to educative direction (MW 14: 76 f.).

Even if this is so, taking humans ‘first nature’ (as I call it, Henning 2009) into account is not morally empty. The biotic base, which is always present in action, is both an enabling condition and a limit: “The natural, or native, powers furnish the initiating and limiting forces in all education; they do not furnish its ends or aims” (MW 9: 121). The short title for this dimension in Dewey’s thought is “impulse”. To a certain extent, it reflects Mead’s concept of the “I”, which transcends the socialized roles a person can “take over” in so far as it is the organic source of motivation (“The ‘I’ is the response of the organism to the atti-

22For Rorty 1977, Dewey’s naturalism was a lapse. In German political philosophy this interpretation is still relevant (Honneth 2000).
tudes of the others”; Mead 1934: 175). As a source of motivation, it is also a source for creativity and values:

“The possibilities in our nature ... are possibilities of the self that lie beyond our own immediate presentation ... It is there that novelty arises and it is there that our most important values are located” (Mead 1934: 204).

Two non-redundant aspects need to be considered here: First, if all the different cultures emerge from the same human nature, we have something in all plurality and difference that unites us. Every human being is equal in this respect. We all share this common organic nature, this humanity. For Dewey this common nature is best understood as a human perfectibility: “Not perfection as a final goal, but the ever enduring process of perfecting, maturing, refining is the aim in living” (MW 12: 181; hence the desire for growth without “fixed ends”, MW 14: 159). Everybody can do this and is doing this in fact (remember Thomas’ fundamental wish for new experience). Without this shared human nature, claims for equal respect, equal dignity etc. would not make much sense. They would be ‘unfounded’.

The second normative aspect is dignity: Human nature has a certain normative power because it is so fragile. Cultural forms and types of subjectivity develop from this base, but they may also squeeze this potentiality or pose obstacles to our “growth”. Here this anthropology strongly relates to social theory. If we cannot develop ourselves, both individually and culturally, human nature will sooner or later revolt:

At critical moments of unusual stimuli the emotional outbreak and rush of instincts dominating all activity show how superficial is the modification which a rigid habit has been able to effect (MW 14: 72).

Now, if under certain circumstances such outbreaks of emotions have to be considered natural, but this “natural” dimension is the source of value, people should be given a right to behave in this way. Thus, freedom is founded upon our first nature: “impulse is a source, an indispensable source, of liberation” (MW 14: 75). Hence, protecting this universal human nature by moral and legal norms is protecting cultures as well as individuals. It is well founded, and it also includes both, liberalism as well as communitarianism. Moreover, it is even cosmopolitan: Protecting this “nature of freedom” (8; vgl. 306) is protecting a fundamental human potential that can be found in every culture. In short, this theory is not redundant because it does not permit everything: as soon as a certain culture (a rigid habit) starts to curtail the development of its own people, they have a good reason to oppose this from their own context. Then, we have a reason to share their concerns because our common nature makes us natural allies in this respect.

Against the strong intersubjectivist who may claim with Mead (1934: 167) that the “only way in which we can react against the disapproval of the entire community is by setting up a higher sort of community” it is only part of the story that this would be “the voice of reason” (168). It would also be the voice of our nature, which is an even stronger one. There is not only one “reason”, as Isaiah Berlin has rightly stressed (especially if we bind reason to situations, as Dewey and Thomas did). But there is only one human nature. “Eth-

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23 Put traditionally: Ultra posse nemo obligatur.
24 Whereas Dewey traveled to China, Japan, Turkey, and Russia, members of the Chicago school (Thomas, Park, and Faris, e.g.) later turned to migration and so-called “race relations” in the USA in order to promote some progress there.
ics is a part of our nature and needs no justification” (Gale 2010: 73). This is why the old Dewey could still say:

naturalism finds the values in question, the worth and dignity of men and women, found-
ed in human nature itself, in the connections, actual and potential, of human beings with one another in their natural social relationships (LW 15: 54).

So for Dewey, the voices of reason and nature are not so far apart at all: In a dialectical move almost resembling Schelling, Dewey speaks of a “stimulation of reflective imagination by impulse” (MW 14: 121). We only get to intelligence through impulse: if habits face an “interruption” or “disturbance” (MW 14: 125), impulses are set free and call for a new direction. So reason (“an effective relationship among desires, rather than a thing opposed to desire”, MW 14: 135) is firmly based in nature. But this is a nature that is not coextensive with what natural sciences say about it.

Even if it may lead us astray, to underpin this point here is another, even more striking reminiscence to Schelling. It comes up when Dewey describes a feeling of unity between reason and nature in artistic activity:

In creative production, the external and physical world … is subject-matter and sustainer of conscious activity; and thereby exhibits … the fact that consciousness is … the manifest quality of existence when nature is most free and most active (LW 1: 293).

This indicates that for Dewey not only moral values are deeply rooted in our (first) nature. We touch the same sphere in aesthetic experiences; a trait that connects Dewey with Adorno. Having mentioned Adorno, let me now come back to the issue of sociology.

Another Gap Between Pragmatism and Sociology

So far I have shown that there are several traits shared by pragmatism and the Chicago school of sociology, which have a common source in the progressive movement. The progressive creed was based on notions of sympathy (as opposed to “atomism”), the common good (as opposed to individual desires) and the “social self” (as opposed to egoism). It strongly linked theory to an ameliorative practice, and reconstructed theory in order to reconstruct society. Normatively this new theory was founded on naturalistic values. These points were elaborated by sociologists like Ward, Small or Park as well as by Pragmatists such as Mead or Dewey. With the continuous topics came a shared methodology: these middle range theories no longer searched for general theories or fixed ends. They constrained themselves to analyze concrete situations, helping to find means for the ends-in-view. In these “situations” and corresponding activities, objective and subjective factors were bound together. Therefore, explanations could not be had by a reduction to either subjective (psychological) or objective (structural) factors alone.

In all of this, no clear “gap” has yet appeared between sociology and pragmatism. Does this mean that Joas’ and Cooley’s assumption was wrong? Yes and no: they were right in noting a gap. They differed, however, in the way this gap is described. With Joas’ rigid criterion in mind, hardly any author would count as a sociologist; at least not the authors using the “renaissance” of pragmatism for social theory, like Habermas, Honneth, or Joas himself: they neither undertake empirical research, nor do they have much to say on issues of
class conflict or international politics. As we have seen, this could even be said about the Chicago sociologists. So instead of explaining the gap, this criterion only mentions another commonality.

But there is a gap nevertheless. This gap has to do with two of the common themes: the social self, and naturalistic values. As will be seen, they are interrelated. Counterintuitively, the more we allow for nature, the more individualism we allow, whereas a stress on sociality transports conformist ideas. In terms of nature the difference may be described thus: There are two ways in which values can be naturalized: either we project mind back into matter, or we follow nature reaching into the minds. Either way, we overcome dualism and get a higher ‘unity’. However, these are two different ‘wholes’: in Schelling’s terms, one is a subjective subject-object, the other one an objective subject-object. Likewise, Marxists distinguished between idealist syntheses and materialist ones. This seems to be philosophical hairsplitting, but following the pragmatic maxim to look for practical consequences, it makes a tremendous difference in practice. The first is moralizing nature, the second is naturalizing morals.

This, finally, is a real difference between the two schools: In spite of all its criticism (cf. LW 1: 295 ff.), pragmatism always remained a philosophy; whereas sociology left behind its speculative phase and professionalized itself into science. As philosophy, pragmatism was inclined to solve problems on the conceptual level already. However, if a problem disappears conceptually, we may no longer perceive it in reality (whereas perceiving problems is the main job of empirical sociology). To us, it will rather seem as a “mistake” or false consciousness in those who claim there is a problem. Imputing mind into matter, or morals into nature, is doing just this: once accomplished, there no longer is a conflict, if only we perceive the world the right way (the only problem left is how to educate the other people, which was one of Dewey’s main aims).

It is not a new approach to interpret Dewey as an idealist who spiritualized nature, so I can be brief here. Scholars have shown that Dewey kept his spiritualist beginnings all his life, transforming it into a language in line with scientific modernism, but maintaining that “mind is implicitly present in matter” (Gale 2010: 66). As Andrew Feffer has argued, it survived a reshaping into empirical psychology, as visible in the well-known essay on the reflex-arc from 1896:

As in his earlier expositions on the New Psychology, in his reflex-arc article Dewey sought to demonstrate, incontrovertibly and scientifically, the thoroughgoing immanence of mind in the neurological functioning of the body and the presence of telos in the biological functions of human existence (Feffer 1993: 148f.)

But this continuity is not limited to the early Dewey. It was made to last:

When Dewey made the transition from absolute idealism to what he called alternatively pragmatism, instrumentalism, or experimentalism he merely changed the name of this background unity from ‘universal consciousness’ to experience, this being a case of pouring old wine into new bottles (Gale 2010: 60f.).

25 Apart from commenting on pragmatists, neither are they pragmatistic (which is not a shame, no one has to be); their philosophy does not analyze concrete situations, but aims at general theories and highly abstract concepts like communicative action, recognition, or value.

26 “One thing Dewey accomplished through his reconstruction of psychological terminology was to claim the mantle of science for a philosophical tradition in danger of being closed out of the experimental laboratory” (Feffer 1993: 149f.).
Richard Gale claims that especially the later terminology of experiments and “experience” carried a ‘unitarian’ and mystical philosophy:

The reason why no one ever understood what Dewey meant by ‘experience’ is not because he was a poor writer, as is commonly claimed, but rather because he was formulating a mystical doctrine (Gale 2010: 62).

Now, if nature is tamed conceptually, there is nothing to fear from it. As a force (to cite Wards) it no longer is ‘alien’. This is certainly a good thing for individuals – in spite of his reservations to psychoanalysis, Dewey is quite close to positive psychology here. However, when it comes to social matters, there is a danger of abstracting away the crucial conflicts that arise in and from nature. Yes, the struggle for life Darwin had focused on (“eat or be eaten”) became an ideology when everything social was read in its image. But it also referred to something quite real in nature itself. For authors following the other path of combining nature and values, this meant that even in society there were “natural” conflicts (over territory, food, mates, access etc.). For example, when Ward (or Marx) pointed to cut-throat-competition on the market or Park to the biotic processes in the city, ideology would consist in not seeing this.

Read in this way, the accusation cited above – not to be social enough – acquires a whole different undertone. No longer it means that the criticized author is not sociologist (that is: empirical) enough. Rather, it is a conceptual accusation, implying that there is too much of a dualism at work: as long as there is antagonism, or even a duality of nature and culture, the theory is said to be ‘not social enough’. (Remember that this is what Cooley said about James, Mead about Cooley, Joas about Mead, and Schubert about Park – the list could go on.) But then, being ‘social enough’ only means to claim that conceptually everything is social through and through (or, in Germanic terms, ‘intersubjectively constituted’). This, however, is not a sociological position, it is metaphysics. Pragmatistic philosophers complain about sociologists who still work with a conflict between nature and culture. Ward, for example, argued that “natural forces” like competition were still powerful in society, so “social forces” needed to counteract them:

All human institutions – religion, government, law, marriage, custom – … are, broadly viewed, only so many ways of meeting and checkmating the principle of competition as it manifests itself in society (Ward 1893: 262).

In a review of Ward, Dewey argued against the “sharp break between culture and nature” which he attributed to a conceptual mistake (Dewey 1894, 201ff., cf. Rafferty 2003, 107). Park, to give another example, believed that we can not simply assume that people will cooperate, just because “cooperation” is in some way also natural. As an empirical scientist, he had to concede that in real cases competition often came first, and very powerfully. It needed a lot of energy in order to (successively) arrive at conflict, accommodation, or “assimilation” (acculturation). He even spoke of a “natural history” here (Coser 1971, 362). However, philosophers of intersubjectivity later complained that this is a conceptual “dualism” (Schubert 2010: 91f.; cf. Joas 1992, 47f. Lindner 2000, 223f.). I would like to

27 Peirce and James were open to mysticism, too (Prier 2008).
28 To quote the order of chapters in Burgess/Park 1921, cf. Coser 1971, 359f.
29 To readers of Walter Benjamin this sounds familiar. Probably the link is Wilhelm Windelband, with whom Park wrote his Dissertation in 1905.
defend the sociological scholars against this Hegelian pressure to achieve reconciliation at a conceptual level already. If the problem is real, we only achieve progress if we acknowledge the problem first, and as clearly as possible. Otherwise, if our theory is seeking harmony from the start, we end up criticizing the critics instead of the problem.

This difference in locating nature theoretically also has an important impact on the range of individuality a theory can afford. In the second – sociological – interpretation where nature extends into society, we have a clear view on the Hobbesian dimension in society (without necessarily totalizing it, which would lead to Sumners laissez-fairism). As we saw, this creates some philosophical discomfort, since conceptual unity can not be achieved so easily. However, for the image of the individual this means that he or she is never fully under “social control”. Apart from all their entanglements with society, they remain an autonomous actor, a potential troublemaker – a nonconformist who is able to use his different roles (“masks”) strategically. This qualitative individualism was one of the main topics of the Chicago school: only to mention the unadjusted girl, the Hobo, or the “marginal man”. For W.I. Thomas, for example, exactly this constant infighting was the object of sociological investigation:

> There is, of course, no pre-existing harmony whatsoever between the individual and the social factors of personal evolution, and the fundamental tendencies of the individual are always in some disaccordance with the fundamental tendencies of social control. Personal evolution is always a struggle between the individual and society – a struggle for self-expression on the part of the individual, for his subjection on the part of society (Thomas 1951: 164, written 1918).

Now if a theory is overly intersubjectivist, it loses sight of this very fact; and with this, it ceases to be a critical theory (Whitebook 2001). This is the second crucial difference between pragmatism and Chicago sociology: for the latter, individuals are social entities who also have their own, partly anti-social drives; for pragmatists and neopragmatist social philosophers, however, everything is “always already” intersubjective – or at least it should be. This makes these theories rather smooth.30 Whereas the sociologist Albion Small stated: “All social factors are combinations of individual facts” (Small 1905: 3), the philosopher G.H. Mead argued against Small’s fundamental “interests”. They were – which comes as no surprise – not social enough (Small 1905: 472). To Mead, even individual desires were socially constituted. However, this uplifting sociality was a philosophical idea, not social reality as experienced by normal people and investigated by the social sciences. Where Mead mentioned society, he talked about an “ideal” that resembled spiritual community; and the “Great Community” Dewey invoked was wishful thinking, at best. Not without irony, therefore, could the cultural critic John Patrick Diggins claim that even in modern American literature there was more social knowledge then in this ‘sociological imagination’31:

> One can read almost the whole corpus of the literature of the ‘lost generation’ as a counter-current to modern sociology. ‘Primary group’ associations hardly seemed nurturing to Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood Anderson, and other novelists in flight from small-town life; technology and organization, the inventions of the modern industrial age that Cooley looked to to revitalize ‘face to face’ relationships, led John Dos Passos to depict in the

30 Axel Honneths latest book from 2011 is an example for this tendency.

31 For the relationship of literature to sociology see Lepenies 1985.
very structure of his narration the facelessness and homelessness of the modern condition (Diggins 1994: 377).

Even conservative Diggins was troubled by the loss of critical perspective that came as a price for Dewey’s premature conceptual reconciliation:

Dewey used the institution of ‘marriage’ as an example of how ‘union’ with others brings new levels of awareness and responsibilities. A curious example. Contemporary playwrights like Eugene O’Neill saw the family as a sick institution of mendacious dialogues, repressed thoughts, ironic confrontations, hidden meanings, and neurotic personalities. ... And where Henry Adams had traced the disintegration of unifying principles to the eclipse of classical values at the birth of the republic, Dewey claimed that ‘American democratic polity was developed out of genuine community life’ (Diggins 1994: 300f., citing Dewey LW 2: 304).

The real irony is that while Dewey and Mead saw social interaction as the answer to private individualism, Scottish philosophers saw the social self as the basis for the rise of modern capitalism. … Dewey believed that pragmatism had extirpated dualism for good, dissolved into social relations every absolute, and demonstrated how truth can be made and values created when desire experiences satisfaction. So did capitalism (Diggins 1994: 379).

Not by chance did Diggins (1994: 381) invoke Lionel Trillings Opposing Self: “that one may live a real life apart from the group, that one may exist as an actual person not only at the center of society but on its margings” (Trilling 1956: 107) – this was at risk in an over-inclusive intersubjectivism. So the conceptual strategy proves to have a tremendous impact. Ironically, besides departing pragmatism from contemporary sociology, it also broke with the pragmatic creed when it came to politics. As discussed above, the road of reform was a “third way” between revolutionary and conservative strategies. If taken by heart, a pragmatic politics could only test by “experiment” which strategy would work best. Mead and Dewey, however, stopped short of this when it came to politics:

the limits the Chicago pragmatists put on social reconstruction belied the democratic principles they simultaneously espoused.... The Chicago philosophers advocated self-expression but believed it should follow a gradually progressive evolution from less to more rational social organization. If radical impulse played an increasingly important role, it did so within the confines of conservative habit and constructive working hypothesis (Feffer 1993: 180).

Joas directs a similar criticism at Mead himself: where Mead talks about society and politics, he ceases to be a pragmatist and comes up with “utopian” notions how people should behave in society, regardless of context (Joas 1980: 207f.). This leaves us with the irony that even G.H. Mead, the master-thinker for the “sociological pragmatism” developed by Juergen Habermas, Axel Honneth and Hans Joas himself, was neither sociological nor pragmatistic enough. Something similar may be claimed for Dewey32. Even in Thomas’ typology of the Bohemian, the Philistine and the creative man it is clear from the start ‘who wins’: the creative man, role model for the piecemeal-approach of progressive reformism,

32. For Diggins 2005, Dewey ceased to be a pragmatist when it came to democracy: It was no longer an “end in view” that could be falsified by future experience; it was as firmly based and deeply rooted in human life as anything has ever been in traditional philosophy.
is of course superior to the blind revolutionary furore and the phlegmatic conservatism (Thomas 1951: 161, written 1918; cf. MW 14: 156).

The aim of this paper was to show the common ground between pragmatism and social theory. Hence, I do not want to over-stress these differences. The philosophy of Dewey still has a lot to offer, especially when it is read in a way that transcends the historical context. An ―opposing self‖ which neither finds support in a current culture, nor in given types of subjectivity, may still find normative resources in referring to its own nature, as described in Dewey’s philosophy. This naturalistic non-conformism may also be found in Mead, Thomas, or Park. Therefore, my suggestion is that the next round of re-reading pragmatism (including the Chicago School) will have to rediscover another dimension beneath the topics of contingency and intersubjectivity; namely their moral perfectionism, the sophisticated ethical anthropology. Especially normative theories of recognition have read Dewey too much as a conformist. In part, this is a correct representation of what is there in Dewey. But in part it is also an unnecessarily purificatory reading.

Outlook: Pragmatism and Critical Theory On Politics

Contrary to the neo-pragmatistic understanding, I do not believe that pragmatist ethics are necessarily post-foundational. It would be a misreading that pragmatism only has to offer an experimental method and a situationist ethics (let’s see what helps best in every single case). There is much more to discover. Dewey, in particular, should be read as a ‘Critical theorist’ of his own kind. Especially with the stress on habits, already prominent in both Hume and James (1890), but essentially an Aristotelian ethical term, progressivist writers developed an early exponent of modern perfectionism or Neo-Aristotelianism as later articulated in Martha Nussbaum and others. Following Derek Parfit, today those theories are called “objective list” theories of happiness. In the social forces-approach of Ward, Small, and Thomas we indeed found such objective lists. Consequently, progressivist social theory needs to be reconstructed neither from a Darwinian nor from a Kantian, but from an Aristotelian perspective (Chugerman 1939; Henning 2010).

However, the link of pragmatism to politics seems to be a complicated issue, so will touch it one more time. We have seen that Dewey’s and Mead’s politics were not fully in line with their philosophy. Joas attributed this to an inconsistent translation into sociology. The social theory of the day itself had, or so I argued, developed a more consistent way of allowing for naturalistic arguments in social theory. However, due to their professionalization they ceased to forge bridges to politics; leaving it to politicians to draw the conclusions. How to get from naturalistic values to progressive politics remains an open question. Would they have lead to a different political agenda, with more experimentalism in politics? Consider Dewey’s relation to socialism. Karl Marx had developed a radical political theory that was based not only on his economic theory, but also on naturalistic values quite similar to the ones guiding progressivism; only to mention the ethos of self-realization by way of creative activity or the communal self-governance, including “industrial democracy”; a goal Dewey and Mead basically shared (fn. 7). Why, then, did pragmatists not embrace Socialism (as one of the main “European social theories”) more openly?

33 A wish for recognition was already present in Thomas’ four wishes, but only as one among many. Since it is based on social distinction, it has rather anti-social effects (sometimes bordering on neurosis, see Horney 1937). So looking back at these debates may help contemporary theory to sharpen its critical teeth.

34 Remember that Karl Marx had claimed philosophy needed to be overturned (into science) and realized (into practice; the German terms are “aufheben” and “verwirklichen”).
Applying pragmatism to this question gives a surprising answer: it was not due to a difference in principle, for neither pragmatism nor Marxism dealt with principles that much. In fact, both schools aimed to think in a more mundane way, analyzing facts and guiding action without descending into scholastic debates. The answer rather lies in the situation. In the late 1930s, the situation of the day, especially within the leftist New York intellectual scene, was already one of a growing — but painful — disentanglement from Stalin’s Russia in the 1930s. Nevertheless, Frankfurt School theorists attacked pragmatism as “positivist”, again implying that it was not political and ‘social enough’. Either this contextualization had completely escaped the Horkheimer circle (as had the debates about Hegel, Marx, and Lenin between Eastman and Hook)35, or their own “political alignment” was very questionable, as Joas (1992: 104) implies. So in retrospective Sidney Hook (“Dewey’s bulldog”, who rushed to defend pragmatism) has clearly won this encounter. His strong link of science and practice allowed him a clear stand not only in theory, but also in politics; e.g. towards communism – a topic avoided by Critical theory for a long time. Hook was aiming at a social theory both critical and pragmatic. He had already lost his Hegelian spillovers due to an earlier encounter with Max Eastman, another former student of Dewey. For years Eastman and Hook had quarreled in public about the proper way to apply pragmatism to Marxism, and both of them to politics. Both had tried to draw Dewey into Marxism, without much success (at least, he helped defending Trotsky). Ironically, both of them became decisive Cold War-Anticommunists some years later. In any case, this confrontation between two of the most influential schools of social theory – pragmatism and Critical Theory – has certainly not contributed to solving the question how natural values could be applied to politics36. It could only be answered with respect to a concrete situation.

Therefore, this question remains to be asked today. It is no coincidence that many of the progressive topics resurface today – human sympathy in the new moral sentimentalism, the larger mind in phenomenological theories of we-intentionality, and progress in the efforts to ‘direct’ an unregulated global capitalism. Currently evolutionary psychologists again argue in favor of empathy and cooperation, against ideologies trying to naturalize the market egoism of contemporary capitalism (Tomasello 2009, de Waal 2010). The suggestion I made in this article is that in order to ask these questions anew, it is desirable to reconsider the theory of naturalistic values implicit in the progressive movement, including Dewey, but also including American sociologists preceding the Chicago school. Many arguments pragmatists have made can be found there already, in a way that was less sophisticated, but more open to real life situations than Dewey and Mead were in some of their writings.


36 Despite obvious parallels, especially between Marcuse and Dewey. Marcuse had actually read Dewey and even contributed some reviews (see Dahms 1994).
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American Pragmatism and European Social Theory: Holmes, Durkheim, Scheler, and the Sociology of Legal Knowledge

Abstract. Max Scheler followed American pragmatism in viewing knowledge as residing in concrete human acts, and both emphasized the role of social or community inquiry. How, given this insight, is knowledge to be understood? The answer must be sought within specific realms of inquiry, like science, where a sociology of scientific knowledge has emerged in the wake of Kuhn’s Structure of Scientific Revolutions. What about law, if seen as another form of community inquiry? We may find a sociology of legal knowledge implicit in the work of pragmatism’s classical legal theorist, Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. Unlike Durkheim, Holmes does not hold that categories of thought reflect features of group organization and social solidarity. The nature and modes of legal classification emerge against a historical background from resolution of conflicts among disparate interests. Holmes’s model is more skeptical of progress than Scheler’s, but accepts a role for meliorative intelligence in revising embedded habits and paradigms.

Kenneth Stikkers has illuminated the convergence between Max Scheler’s phenomenological sociology and a central theme of nineteenth century American pragmatism: their joint break from both Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy through the insight that knowledge neither precedes our experience of things (ideae ante res), as in Platonic idealism, nor follows from experience in an empirical correspondence with an objective world, the Aristotelian model (ideae post res). Scheler followed American pragmatism’s insight that knowledge resides in concrete human acts (ideae cum rebus), where it becomes functionalized. Chicago pragmatists, in turn, recognized the importance of Scheler’s pioneering statement of the “sociology of knowledge,” and its commonality with pragmatism’s emphasis on community inquiry. (Stikkers 2009: 80-82)

How, given this insight, is knowledge to be understood? Two features stand out in the functional model that are hidden by the classical Platonic and Aristotelian approaches: the dynamic and changing nature of knowledge and its products, and their intimate connection with human conduct and experience. Both of these are obscured by synchronic tendencies of analytical theory, and have been brought to light within specific realms of inquiry, as in contemporary science studies, where a burgeoning but controversial “sociology of scientific knowledge” has emerged in the wake of Kuhn’s Structure of Scientific Revolutions (see Barnes et al. 1996).

Stikkers recounts the influence of the pragmatist William James on the German scholars Wilhelm Jerusalem and Max Scheler, and notes that Charles Peirce had already suggested, prior to Dilthey and Durkheim and without any apparent benefit from the insights of Marx, that the forms of human knowing are fundamentally forms of social life, without reducing the latter to the forms of economic life. This radically naturalist insight became central to early writings in the sociology of knowledge, and has influenced post-Kuhnian science studies.

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What about law, if indeed it can be seen as another form of community inquiry? Given the convergence of American pragmatism and this strain of European social theory, it should not be surprising to find something comparable to a sociology of legal knowledge in the work of pragmatism’s classical legal theorist, Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. Pragmatism grew out of the Metaphysical Club, and it is well known that half of the original members of the Metaphysical Club were lawyers.

Bruce Kuklick and others have recounted the common influences on all the members of the Club such that we might expect parallels in the conception of law (Kuklick 1977; Kellogg 2007). I will focus here on the early writings of O.W. Holmes Jr. Holmes is conventionally interpreted principally as a forerunner of empirical legal realism. I suggest that his pre-judicial writings sketched the outline of a socialized epistemology of law, and an evolutionary formation and maintenance of legal rules and concepts.

I. The Unlikely Comparison of Holmes and Durkheim

In 1899, two years before the publication of Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss’s Primitive Classification, Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. made the following comment in an address later published as “Law in Science and Science in Law”:

It is perfectly proper to regard and study the law simply as a great anthropological document. It is proper to resort to it to discover what ideals of society have been strong enough to reach that final form of expression, or what have been the changes in dominant ideals from century to century. It is proper to study it as an exercise in the morphology and transformation of human ideas (1899: 212).

This extraordinary passage, emphasizing “morphology” over the dominance of fixed analytical and conceptual theories of law, reflects research twenty-five years earlier, in the period 1873-6, when Holmes turned from an earlier influential version of analytical jurisprudence (the Lectures in Jurisprudence of John Austin) to writings on legal history, anthropology and primitive culture, to consolidate a theory of legal transformation.

In an 1876 essay, “Primitive Notions in Modern Law” (1876), Holmes observed that many of the rights and duties recognized in Anglo-American law were “survivals” of “the primitive notion, that liability attached directly to the thing doing the damage.” Moreover, “the various considerations of policy which are not infrequently supposed to have established these doctrines, have, in fact, been invented at a later period to account for what was already there—a process familiar to all students of history” (1876: 423). He would go on to apply this insight to an account of case-by-case “growth” of legal liability, eventually extending it to all areas of law. Thereafter he drew on this transformational scheme for insights into developing legal doctrine throughout his influential judicial career (Kellogg 2007: 118-56).

In comparison, Durkheim and Mauss asked, in Primitive Classification, the more general question, “[W]hat leads men to classify?” For them it seemed that the answer lay in the most rudimentary forms of organization in the development of society. They concluded that “[T]he first logical categories were social categories; the first classes of things were classes of men, into which these things were integrated. It was because men were grouped, and thought of themselves in the form of groups, that in their ideas they grouped other things, and in the beginning the two modes of grouping were merged to the point of being indistinct” (1963: 82-3). “Thus the history of scientific classification is, in the last analysis,
the history of the stages by which this element of social affectivity has progressively weakened, leaving more and more room for the reflective thought of individuals. But it is not the case that these remote influences which we have just studied have ceased to be felt today. They have left behind them an effect which survives and which is always present; in it is the very cadre of all classification, it is the ensemble of mental habits by virtue of which we conceive things and facts in the form of coordinated or hierarchized groups” (88).

While for the past century the intellectual legacies of Holmes and Durkheim have occupied separate academic worlds, both drew a similar demarcation between what they saw as a primitive “affective” stage of civilization and a modern “rational” stage, while insisting on the continuing influence of the former upon the latter, itself incrementally transformed by increasingly “reflective” intelligence. Thus there are common elements in both: transformational change with surviving vestigial elements, suffusing logical method and undermining logical essentialism, the bedrock of analytical thinking. For both, a community- or society-focused historical process is at the root of the existence and management of ordered conceptions. For both also, the ongoing role of classification in human intelligence is a fundamental concern. The main difference is that Durkheim and Mauss set out to discover the origins of human classification in general, finding them in social structure and the evolving nature of solidarity, while Holmes’s interest was drawn to its operation in Anglo-American law.

In that sense Holmes began his study of legal classification in medias res, focusing on his own 19th century context. Having in 1869 taken over the editorship and revision of the principal American legal encyclopedia, Kent’s Commentaries on American Law, he equipped himself to compare the varieties of developing legal doctrine with the recent and influential analytical system of John Austin’s Lectures in Jurisprudence, published in London in 1861. The Lectures first came to his attention as he left Harvard College to join the Union Army at the onset of the American Civil War. His focus on Austin continued after returning to Cambridge in 1864, where he attended Harvard Law School, engaged in philosophical discussions with his peers, became the editor of Kent’s Commentaries, and wrote critical and formative essays for the American Law Review.

By 1876-7 he had been drawn into the examination of legal history and early culture and institutions, “to prove the historical truth of a general result, arrived at analytically . . . five years ago” (1877: 641). That result involved a reconsideration of the Austinian project of universal classification and it is intimately connected with his famous opening line in The Common Law: “the life of the law has not been logic, it has been experience.” This turning point is fundamental to understanding his thought and career.

From introductory courses on jurisprudence, American law students are still familiar with Austin’s famous command definition of law. Less familiar is the detailed character of Austin’s Lectures, embodying an attempt to establish a universal arrangement of law, which he outlined as a system of rights (Austin 1861). Holmes first explored this thesis by advancing an alternative system based on the concept of duty (1870). An intensive comparison of categories with cases, extending over several years, eventually led to rejection both of Austin’s command definition and his logical arrangement of law as a system of rights, and indeed of any universal analytical scheme.

This highlighted the question—prompted by his observations of the continuing influence of historical anomalies—of how the ordered hierarchies of legal classification and their manifestation in a structured system are arrived at. Looking at the process of change within the existing system, and in the context of a course taught to Harvard undergraduates,
Holmes characterized his own definition of law as “prediction” of judicial decisions (1872: 92).

After his general study of classification with Mauss, Durkheim would later move more specifically to law. In *The Division of Labor in Society* (1933) he hypothesized an evolution of diminishing reliance on criminal in favor of civil forms of legal liability and procedure, and interpreted this as supporting the thesis of transformation from “mechanical” to “organic” social solidarity. Durkheim now distinguished criminal and civil liability as reflecting distinct forms of social solidarity. Holmes, immersed in the case-law of his revision of *Kent’s Commentaries*, would instead bring the two forms together in a uniform theory of criminal and civil liability.

Holmes would characterize historical change (he avoided the term “evolution”) as having universally transformed standards of legal liability from “moral” to “external,” intending by these terms to highlight the gradual de-emphasis of an element of subjective blame rooted in primitive revenge. Equally important, he saw the actual process of transformation—and here lies his insight into the cumulative mechanism of legal classification—rooted in the response of legal institutions to ongoing social conflict. It would inform both his thought and later judicial practice.

The legal sociologist Roger Cotterrell has illuminated the continuing influence of Durkheim on socio-legal studies and social theory in general (2010a). We might compare this to the relative lack of influence, or even interest, in Holmes’s transformational theory. Over the years since his death Holmes has rarely been mentioned among accounts of socio-legal theory or legal sociology. He is missing from Peter Stein’s overview of *Theories of Legal Evolution: the Story of an Idea* (1980), as well as from Alan Watson’s *The Evolution of Law* (1985) and Norbert Rouland’s, *Legal Anthropology* (1994). While his theory of liability qualifies as a contribution to legal anthropology, it is not widely recognized as such.

This has obscured the contemporary relevance of Holmes’s 1899 comment on the law as “a great anthropological document,” worthy of study “as an exercise in the morphology and transformation of human ideas”. The remark suggests that, with Durkheim (Cotterrell 2010b: 4), he saw the development of law as illuminating basic moral concerns. His recognition of a deep influence of conflict, and the survivals of a primitive past, puts a somewhat darker cast on the prospects of society than the visions of his contemporaries Peirce and James. While he is considerably less optimistic than Durkheim about reform, he came to recognize a place for meliorative intelligence in the common law that would gain the interest of John Dewey.

Nevertheless, Holmes is conventionally interpreted as a legal positivist and as a forerunner of legal realism. Early twentieth century legal realism was influenced by then contemporary social and behavioral science. It emphasized legal reform, motivated by a reaction against the false certainty of “formalist” and “mechanical” jurisprudence (see White 1984, 1986). As noted, Holmes (1872a: 92) had defined law as prediction of what courts will decide and enforce, which was too readily identified with judicial behaviorism or instrumentalism. In essence, it was entirely different.

Critical evidence is found in two formative papers that Holmes wrote in the 1870s. In the first (1870), he notes that Anglo-American common law “decides the case first and determines the principle afterwards,” in a process of gradual cumulative classification and generalization that he called “successive approximation”. He cautions here against judges giving premature reasons in deciding unfamiliar cases, and advocates highly particularized decisions in the early stage of inquiry into new classes of dispute. The judge should simply apply a standard of prudence or the foreseeability of harm under novel conditions.
Citing a comment by Lord Chief Justice Mansfield, Holmes drew on John Stuart Mill’s criticism of the syllogism, which Mill (citing the same comment) saw as reasoning not from general to particular but from “particulars to particulars”. In his famous System of Logic (1843), which Holmes read in 1867, Mill declared that the general is simply used as a guide. But for Holmes in 1870, the relevant general cannot be used as a guide for new particulars, because it does not yet exist. How does it come to be? As new problems arise and new disputes are decided, gradually a pattern emerges. “It is only after a series of determinations on the same subject-matter, that it becomes necessary to ‘reconcile the cases,’ as it is called, that is, by a true induction to state the principle which has until then been obscurely felt. And this statement is often modified more than once by new decisions before the abstracted general rule takes its final shape. A well settled legal doctrine embodies the work of many minds, and has been tested in form as well as substance by trained critics whose practical interest it is to resist it at every step” (1870: 1).

This conception is open to the recognition that legal generalization is influenced by feedback from and adjustment within society. In later essays Holmes makes it plain that he drew on the reliance of 19th century courts upon jury decisions for deriving, in successive judgments, the applicable standards of care in a given jurisdiction for a particular form of tort liability. (Holmes 1873; Kellogg 2007: 98, 161). These early observations—made in the period during which he was still considering Austin’s universal analytical taxonomies—already lead away from the path that analytical legal theory followed toward conceptual jurisprudence in the twentieth century, and instead toward a focus like that of Julius Stone on the influence of social factors and the relevance of precedent to a system of incremental legal classification (Stone 1985). Despite the association of Holmes with legal realism, they also lead less toward judicial behaviorism and more toward a sociology of legal knowledge, acknowledging the social context that connects the formation of legal rules and principles directly with resolution of clashing patterns of conduct. This emphasis on conflict over solidarity further distinguishes Holmes from Durkheim’s approach to the source and morphology of concepts within the legal system, if not within society itself.

The early Holmes essays suggest a distinctive vision of the 19th century common law process, whereby normative inquiry, and normative knowledge, begins with disturbances in the social fabric channeled into systematized and participatory dispute resolution. It was participatory in that Holmes gave the jury a critical role in this picture and recognized the influence of discrete geographical communities on the formation of variations in the general standards of liability (Holmes 1872: 119). Thus, the repeated “series of determinations” was in actual practice an accumulation of judgments in matters to which the courts were open as a matter of jurisdiction, coming in under categories of liability defined by the pleadings, which assigned legal claims a preliminary form of classification. Thereafter they gained further juridical characteristics by reason of successive judgments for or against the injured parties, which were cumulatively organized as judges and scholars “reconciled the cases.”

To illustrate, we may take an example of liability for damage resulting from a collision of ships under sail. With the vagaries of wind and tide, repeated collisions brought ship owners into the courts claiming money for loss of cargo and damage. We might envisage a detailed account unfolding in the courtroom of how two ships collided, perhaps at night. When did one crew see the other ship, what did the crew do then? Sailing is tricky and complicated, and in the absence of a clear error, we may assume a fair hearing so that the judgment goes against the vessel that, perhaps on a slight preponderance of the evidence,
appeared least prudent under the circumstances. Can we fairly say the early case was decided by a rule of law?

Over time, similar collisions occur and prudent practices develop to the point where the courts can and will say, yes, this ship or that was burdened and failed to display a certain light or post a lookout or douse a certain sail to avoid the collision. An illustration of this might be the display of colored lights on ships at night, identifying sailing ships, anchored ships, tugboats, barges. Their first introduction presumably led to cautionary practices and thence to legal standards and rules. Thus does the class of “collision cases” develop into general standards and rules, over time. We should note the participation of multiple communities of actors, sailors and ship owners as well as lawyers, judges, juries, scholars, and legislators.

Under this scenario, legal normativity emerges as a web or network of standards stemming from disparate practices and woven together by professionals whose mission it is to impose coherence, predictability, and consistency. This is not, I hasten to say, a precise historical account, but rather a rough simulation drawn from the early essays by Holmes, which in turn is the product of several influences: a close study of 19th century English and American cases, broad reading in philosophy as well as law, an attitude toward knowledge shared with his friends in and around the Metaphysical Club, and the influences on them from the Scottish Enlightenment, applied to their readings of Kant, Hegel, and Darwin. This mix of influences has been said to have led pragmatism toward a radically naturalized reading of Kant and Hegel. (Margolis 2010)

You may see elements of a Darwinized Hegel in Holmes’s approach to rule-making, influenced perhaps by another member of the Club (and his only admitted mentor) Chauncey Wright, who in 1873 published an influential essay “The Evolution of Self-Consciousness,” written at the encouragement of no less than Charles Darwin himself. Holmes appears to have absorbed Wright’s attitude, and he took it in a different direction, toward the development of legal intelligence, as part of a socialized ordering process. And now we can sense what he implied in defining law as prediction of what courts will do. Law is not an already-set system of rules with a preexisting answer for every new case. It is a constantly developing system of classification, influenced by multiple communities of inquiry.

Three years later Holmes wrote another important essay (1873). Here he addressed the issue of cases that arise in the context of conflicting authorities. Legal cases reaching the appellate stage emerge within an elaborate context of preexisting law. The more difficult cases appear uncertainly placed between two (or more) opposing precedents or general principles. An example in the 1873 essay is the conflict of nuisance with property rights, as in disputes between neighboring landowners over the placement and height of a wall. Upon repeated instances, in the absence of local legislation, the courts eventually work out a formula for placement and height. Thus are opposing generals reconciled over time, again through fallibilist inquiry. Holmes had by now moved a considerable distance from Austin’s analytical approach.

Analytical theory in jurisprudence has viewed law as an authoritative and comprehensive body of doctrine. The assumption that it is comprehensive is disturbed by the persistent difficulty of close or “hard” cases. Thus the analytical attitude gives rise to skepticism; the difficulty is seen as a deficiency residing in the body of doctrine itself, or in the law’s “nature.” Many legal realists went to the opposite extreme in seeing uncertain cases as “legally indeterminate”. The idea of indeterminacy invites the explanation of judicial behaviorism or instrumentalism—law is the sum of subjective influences on judges, or their immediate
sense of the “best” consequences. It also opens the conversation to the presumptive legitimate judicial appeal to “moral” or “fundamental” principles.

In the problem of the doubtful or difficult case we find the distinctiveness of Holmes’s theory of law. Holmes sees the doubtful case as a stage of inquiry and classification. In his 1873 essay, Holmes elucidated an alternative to the analytical model. In the doubtful case, opposing generals are not reconciled either by analytical logic or judicial behaviorism or instrumentalism, but again by a social process of experimental, successive approximation. He applied the earlier cumulative model of 1870 to the problem of resolution of conflicts among rules and precedents. Again, his approach was, “particularize first, generalize later.” Here is the key passage:

The growth of the law is very apt to take place in this way: Two widely different cases suggest a general distinction, which is a clear one when stated broadly. But as new cases cluster around the opposite poles, and begin to approach each other, the distinction becomes more difficult to trace; the determinations are made one way or the other on a very slight preponderance of feeling, rather than on articulate reason; and at last a mathematical line is arrived at by the contact of contrary decisions, which is so far arbitrary that it might equally well have been drawn a little further to the one side or the other. (1873: 654)

Holmes suggests here a process whereby new experience falls into a grey area between existing generals, eventually revealing a new pattern which he describes as a “line,” ultimately refining or redefining the generals themselves.

Given the historical background that drew his attention in 1876, the context within which new cases arrive is yet more complex. Holmes’s account of the survivals of primitive vengeance was drawn from contemporary law. In his “Primitive Notions in Modern Law” (1876), Anglo-American maritime or admiralty law offered an example of the phenomenon of “survivals,” in particular of “the primitive notion, that liability attached directly to the thing doing the damage”. The aggrieved ship owner whose own ship suffered damage in a collision could not recover more than the value of the defendant’s own vessel. Holmes saw this as influencing later rationales for the limitation of liability, observing that “the various considerations of policy which are not infrequently supposed to have established these doctrines, have, in fact, been invented at a later period to account for what was already there—a process familiar to all students of history.” (1876: 423)

Contemporary Law.

Do rules of law still emerge from meandering patterns of individual judgments, as Holmes suggested 140 years ago, or is everything handled by legislation and administrative rulemaking? How about a new problem like assisted suicide? This class of dispute started out as a series of criminal prosecutions of doctors for murder, until the opposing claim of patient autonomy got some traction, from constitutional language, applied to changing medical circumstances. The problem soon found its way to the appellate courts. In 1999 Professor Cass Sunstein wrote a book called A Case at a Time: Judicial Minimalism on the Supreme Court, in which he cautioned the same thing as Holmes did in 1870: decide the cases one at a time, it’s often premature to lay down a sweeping general rule. Ultimately, we may need legislation, but even that can’t come too soon, before the exploratory stage, which includes a process of feedback and adjustment from non-lawyers. Legislation is itself a stage in the process of inquiry.
An implication of this is to qualify the classical model of democratic social choice, famously criticized by Kenneth Arrow. Social choice through law is ongoing outside the electoral cycle, for good or ill, in the process of conflict resolution, influenced by feedback from relevant communities. As with assisted suicide, each successive decision may respond to feedback from diverse communities of interest, including medical, legal, and academic professionals, senior citizens, lobbying groups, and so on. Decisions are also influenced by social adjustment and the adoption of new practices, from medical procedures to living wills.

What are the key elements here? 1. We are looking at legal cases not singly, as raising an isolated question of existing law against a synchronic analytical background, but as stages of inquiry into social problems, and against a diachronic background. 2. Notwithstanding the role of “great judges,” the guiding intelligence is not individual but social—hence it implies a socialized epistemology of legal rules and concepts. 3. Inquiry itself is generated not solely by pure dispassionate analysis, but also by the urgency of conflict and the need for resolution; the legal “conversation” is messier than any ideal model of dialogue. 4. Inquiry takes place in a context of preexisting generals to which legal institutions look back even while plotting new cases in relation to them. 5. The judicial role of comparing and contrasting can be viewed as an incremental and cumulative line-drawing, influenced by many factors over time. 6. Judges are members of a community of inquiry, but acting within a network of other communities, both expert and lay. 7. The interaction between disparate communities operates during the line-drawing process as a “feedback loop” from judicial decisions to their effects, which feeds new experience into the judicial system.

Contemporary science studies

These elements outline a view of law, albeit one drawn from Anglo-American experience, as both a process of social inquiry and a specialized system of classification. A comparable view of the development of natural science has become increasingly evident since the appearance in 1962 of Thomas Kuhn’s Structure of Scientific Revolutions—although Ludwik Fleck’s Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact had already offered such a view in 1935. In their book Scientific Knowledge: A Sociological Analysis (1996), leading representatives of the “Edinburgh School” of science studies outline an approach to contemporary science as another specialized, moving system of classification (46-80). Scientific research responds to social problems; its major figures draw more heavily on research traditions than on brilliant insights; it often involves conflicts among separate research traditions, and seemingly incommensurable principles, like the notions of particle versus flux in electricity; experiments can be seen as exercises in classification; and scientific theorists are members of a professional community of inquiry, acting within a network of other communities, both expert and lay (See e.g. Kellogg 2010).

II. Scheler and the Sociology of Knowledge

These observations concerning common law method, comparing early writings of Justice Holmes with themes of Emile Durkheim, and touching on recent studies of science, may seem far afield from Max Scheler’s wide-ranging interests and speculations. Nevertheless I suggest that they may be useful in filling out the notion of “functionalized knowledge,” which characterized both classical pragmatism and Scheler’s phenomenologi-
cal sociology. It is in the exploration and comparison of concrete studies in disparate fields that any promise of a unified sociology of knowledge may lie.

What precisely does it mean to speak of a sociology of knowledge, and hence of a sociology of legal knowledge? The phrase has a different emphasis from the much-discussed sociology of law or (more generally) of “socio-legal” studies. Whereas the latter generally refer to diverse social science perspectives directed to the subject of law, whether as institution, system, practice, or history (Freeman 2006), the former would appear directed more toward the social component of the knowledge element, cognate with a similar study of knowledge in general. While the literature of socio-legal studies is vast and much of it relevant to this topic, there is surprisingly little specific discussion of a sociology of legal knowledge.

There is, however, a considerable literature on the general sociology of knowledge. While its first formulations are Scheler’s, its main influence may be owed to Karl Mannheim, in particular his *Ideology and Utopia* (1929), which was translated into English in 1936 and found its way into American university curricula. Scheler’s work on the subject, in particular his essay “Probleme einer Soziologie des Wissens,” or “Problems of a Sociology of Knowledge,” was not translated until 1980, by Manfred A. Frings. Both of these works in German were pioneering ventures into the subject, and both were highly speculative, especially compared to Holmes, who of course did not consider his own research to be within any such field, as it had not yet been defined.

That speculative nature caused problems of understanding on both sides of the Atlantic, which remain today. Critics have interpreted both Scheler and Mannheim as advancing a radical form of deflationary anti-foundationalism, reducing all thought to its social origins, regardless of a constraining world. Mannheim had cautiously defined the field as follows: “The principle thesis of the sociology of knowledge is that there are modes of thought which cannot be adequately understood as long as their social origins are obscured.” (1936: 2). In fairness to him, the relevance of social origins made but a modest demand on the already developing naturalism of western philosophy, already begun with Hume, Kant, and Hegel (Stikkers 2009: 67). But the main currents in western philosophy turned elsewhere.

In the years following World War I, western philosophy sought a renewal of secure foundations in a turn toward rigorous reductive analysis. Analytical philosophy came to dominate American universities even as strains of “postmodernism” seeped in from Continental sources. The late resurgence of pragmatism in this context transformed the environment. Drawing on W.V.O. Quine and Donald Davidson, Richard Rorty made pragmatism fashionable among analytical philosophers, welcoming rigorous analysis into themes explored by James and Dewey, reconciling them with postmodern anti-foundationalism. The early emphasis on fallibilism, with its tentative, social, and experimental aspects, has been downplayed.

Pragmatism’s post-Rorty renewal has scattered it in several directions, such that discussion of a historic mission or essential insight may be impossible, notwithstanding the heroic efforts of pragmatists like Joseph Margolis to establish a contemporary position and chart a future course (2010). The widest gulf would seem to be that between the analytical neopragnatism now carried forward by Robert Brandom and others influenced by Rorty, and the historicist, fallibilist tradition emergent from Peirce, James, and Dewey, the non-analytical strain that influenced Scheler. This essay brings Holmes under the latter umbrella, suggesting a connection with recent empirical and historical studies in the sociology of scientific knowledge.
With this purpose in mind, Kenneth Stikkers’s (2009) recent account of the early association of Scheler with American pragmatism, in the published proceedings of a conference on pragmatism and constructivism, is a welcome contribution. Stikkers had previously published an introduction to Frings’s translation in 1980 of Scheler’s “Probleme einer Soziologie des Wissens” (1980). There, Scheler outlines its relation to a range of topics, including science, religion, politics, international relations, and other speculative themes of his phenomenological sociology. Writings of the early pragmatists provided Scheler with an important resource for his systematic understanding of the post-war period of crisis and its global relevance. He credited pragmatism with disclosing the fundamental practical basis of knowledge and offering the first genuinely novel alternative to rationalist and empiricist epistemologies. Citing James, knowledge for Scheler was a function of the dynamic human creative interaction with the world; ideas do not merely report or mirror reality, but emerge within practical human engagement, and in doing so transform the world (James 1975: 104-6).

In his opening to “Problems of a Sociology of Knowledge,” Scheler summarized the overall context:

The following studies have a limited goal. They are an attempt to point out the unity of a sociology of knowledge as a part of the sociology of culture, and above all to develop systematically the problems of such a science. . . . They attempt to bring about some systematic unity in the rhapsodic and disordered mass of problems at hand, some of which have already been taken up in detail by science and others only half met or barely suspected, problems posed by the fundamental fact of the social nature of knowledge and of its preservation and transmission, its methodical expansion and progress (Scheler 1980: 33).

He went on to include within this “the relationship of the sociology of knowledge to the theory of the origin and validity of knowledge (epistemology and logic), to the genetic and psychological studies of knowledge as it evolves from brutes to man, from child to adult, from primitive to civilized man, from stage to stage within mature cultures,” to “the positive history of various kinds of knowledge”.

Holmes, drawing on a common perspective with the early pragmatists, had already cast light on the social nature of legal inquiry, the origin of liability in revenge, and its genesis and transformation in evolving from “brutes to man”. Scheler’s postwar interest in the role of conflict in the emergence of values is shared in Holmes’s 1899 comment, calling law a resource “to discover what ideals of society have been strong enough to reach that final form of expression, or what have been the changes in dominant ideals from century to century”. While Scheler is a more speculative thinker, Holmes, as a veteran of an earlier bloody conflict, came to share similar concerns from a particularist and historical focus. Having rejected a strictly analytical approach to law before writing his major work, which led directly to his judicial career, he would anticipate Scheler’s focus on transformation in his 1899 comment that law provided “an exercise in the morphology and transformation of human ideas”.

III. Conclusion

In comparing such disparate sources, a purpose of this paper has been to advance an approach toward a sociology of legal knowledge that brings the subject into a coherent rela-
tion with a general sociology of knowledge, as well as with recent studies in the sociology of scientific knowledge.

In this paper I have compared Holmes’s evolutionary theory, set forth in *The Common Law*, with Durkheim and Scheler. Unlike Durkheim, Holmes does not hold that categories of thought reflect features of group organization and social solidarity. The nature and modes of legal classification primarily emerge against a historical background from resolution of conflicts among habitualized conduct of groups and interests, eventually giving rise to rules and principles, embodied not in pure language but also, necessarily, in general patterns of conduct. It is more particularist than Scheler, rooted in conflict resolution as informing a discrete form of dialogue. While deeply skeptical of progress, Holmes’s model allows a role for emergent meliorative intelligence in revising vestigial habits and overcoming established paradigms.

Transformation is a key theme to which I have alluded throughout this essay. Transformation is the element in human experience to which both Holmes and Durkheim looked in their studies of law. It is the attribute of human experience which, to sheer analysis of concepts and language, however rigorous, remains obscured. It is an aspect of philosophy and social theory that continues to influence the traditions of pragmatism and the sociology of knowledge, even while both have made it an essential focus of their own self-understanding; that is, the two traditions have seen their own guiding perspectives reflexively, as themselves subject to transformative experience.

References


Joel Wolfe

*Does Pragmatism Have A Theory of Power?*

**Abstract.** Asking if pragmatism, and John Dewey in particular, has a theory of power poses the question about the intellectual resources that pragmatism has to offer the social sciences. Pragmatism stands accused of being naïve about power and presenting the specter of an overly soft program for doing social science. Yet, Dewey’s philosophical method provides a distinctive transactional theory of power and untapped resources for advancing social science. Dewey’s melioristic philosophical vision develops a theory of praxis that is a tacit theory of power. Explicating his concerns with experience, inquiry, and social life show how they converge into his theory of praxis and power. Developing this theory, next, enables distinctions to be outlined between Dewey’s transactional view of power and the mainstream interactional view seen in the work of Dahl, Lukes, and Mann. Furthermore, the theory of praxis establishes analytical categories for deconstructing the structure of transactional power, the patterns or modes of conjoint activity. Dewey’s pragmatist theory of power stands in marked contrast to interactional models and provides the analytical tools for the critical assessment of power.

Power is one of the key concepts in the social sciences (Clegg and Haugaard 2009: 1; Stoker 2010: 19). In political science, concepts of power have a long and rich heritage, from Machiavelli and Hobbes to Robert Dahl, Steven Lukes, Michael Mann, and Michel Foucault. Usage of the concept indeed pervades political science, though the scholarship that explicitly discusses a concept of power is small in comparison to studies of political phenomena that use implicit and unexamined notions of power.

Attempts to classify these usages into analytical traditions point to the importance of various meta-theoretical traditions in determining the meaning of the concept of power. Stewart Clegg (1989) highlights the agency, disposition, and facilitative conceptions of power, linking them to Hobbesian and Machiavellian traditions in political thought. In a not dissimilar vein, Mark Haugaard (2002: 2-4) points to four “language games” commonly used to analyze power: the analytical conceptual type clarifying terms, the non-conceptual type adopting notions that fit research purposes (agency), modern social theory (dispositional) and postmodern social theory (facilitative). What is notable about these characterizations is that the different approaches to power reflect the philosophical traditions of empiricism, realism, and interpretivism. Visions of power, in short, develop from different theoretical starting points.

The absence of recognition of pragmatism’s contribution to conceptions of power stands out. Its contribution to the social sciences was substantial during the first decades of the twentieth century in America, influencing the progressive movement, debates about democracy, the sociology of the Chicago school, the symbolic interactionism of Herbert Blumer, and the institutional economics tradition of TB Veblen, JR Commons, and JK Galbraith. It then lost its impetus from WWII until a revival in the 1990s (Wolfe 1998; Baert 2003; Manicas 1998). Today pragmatism inspires and animates a growing movement among philosophers and social scientists.

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Furthermore, pragmatism is often accused of ignoring the analysis of power or even worse assumes a view of power that is overly idealistic and airy fairy. Dewey’s emphasis on consensus, cooperation, and social improvement may at first seem vulnerable to such interpretations. Critics charge that pragmatism is simply naive about power. Typical is C. Wright Mills’ claim that John Dewey’s focus on discussion and consensus ignores the reality of conflict over values and elite domination. Similarly, John Diggins (1994: ch 7) rebukes Dewey for refusing to discuss power and seeing it as an aberration. Even the prominent pragmatist social theorist Han Joas writes that “…it may be true – as many critics say – that pragmatism is in need of a theory of power…” (Joas 1998: 194).

Efforts to challenge this negative claim are few. One is Roudy Hildred’s (2009) article, “Reconstructing Dewey on Power”, in which he presents a well-argued case debunking the idea that Dewey ignored power. After thoroughly surveying those denouncing Dewey, Hildred elaborates how key Deweyan concepts implicitly contain a concept of power. His careful analysis concludes that Dewey’s view of power is a complex version of the agency notion of power as capacity, the probability of an agent imposing her will against resistance, enriched by consideration of “…social customs and habits, and relative to the transactional fields of experience” (Hildred 2009: 782, 799). This interpretation sees Dewey as consistent with the widely accepted agency conception of power, often identified with Max Weber (1958: 180) and Robert Dahl (1968).

A second is my own article, “Power: A Pragmatist View” (Wolfe 2002). This agrees that Dewey’s philosophy implicitly contains a concept of power but argues that Dewey’s pragmatism offers multiple views of power. Dewey’s most basic idea of power, I explain, refers to making differences through conjoint action within a social medium. Only when such effective social practices are absent is it possible to identify power as interactional instances of conflict between wills, structures, or expertise. Developing this distinction, I identify two types of power: power as indirect or intrinsic to social media and as direct or manifesting as traits of pressure and resistance, facilitation and constraint.

To elaborate the thesis that Dewey’s pragmatism implicitly formulates an analysis of power that centers on an indirect, intrinsic or transactional conception and entails distinguishing different types of power involves the following steps. First, the discussion shows how Dewey’s philosophical perspective provides a theory of praxis that is in essence a tacit theory of power. Second, the account shows how Dewey’s theory of praxis provides for distinguishing different modes or types of power. A third section considers how Dewey’s approach to power offers tools for determining the distribution of power. A final part highlights the implications of Dewey’s viewpoint for contemporary analyses of power.

**Pragmatism and Praxis**

A pragmatist framework of inquiry views human beings as participants and experimenters in a community of inquiry, breaking with the Cartesian tradition that sees humans as “spectators” discovering foundations and then deriving more complex knowledge from these foundations. “Man as agent comes into the foreground here because human agency is the key for understanding all aspects of human life, including human inquiry and knowledge” (Bernstein 1971: 177). Action and creativity become the central theme, with knowledge both depending on action and guiding action in difference making (Joas 1996).

The turn to praxis or human activity follows from Dewey’s empirical instrumentalism. His pragmatist starting point turns foundationalism upside down; it makes ontology result from inquiry and inquiry follows from concrete problems (Sleeper 2001: 119-121). Instead
of drawing implications from abstract premises, pragmatism starts with experience and thereafter moves on with the struggle to interpret and control it. Felt qualities are had as experiences from within and do not originate from predefined notions (Hildebrand 2003: 188-190). Rather doubts or problems that arise need to be denoted first and examined for possible solutions and decisions.

The pragmatic starting point rejects philosophical foundationalism, dualism, and reductionism. Tests of knowledge are to be found in the consequences of human activity rather than predetermined by prior conceptual strategy independent of the actual exercise of power. Knowledge cannot be defined or measured by conceptual fiat, determined by either objective or subjective foundations. This, in short, rejects traditional Cartesian epistemology in which the mind is a spectator, or “great mirror, containing various representations – some accurate, some not – and capable of being studied by pure, nonempirical methods” (Rorty 1979: 12).

Instead, Dewey’s empirical method holds that knowledge results from actively engaging an empirical dilemma, through an ongoing process “of working back and forth between the larger and the narrower fields, transforming every increment upon one side into a method of work upon the other, and thereby testing it” (MW 2: 316; cited in Ratner 1939: 56). To have an experience is to start with a problematic situation, a noncognitive and qualitative issue, and after that to define and redefine it until a solution is found. Starting from pure experience is impossible and starting with a theoretical tool restricts the scope of what is found. The empirical method consequently is a genetic method in which knowledge emerges from a “...working back and forth between the technical study of the intellectualized problems of philosophy and the common world of experience, the socio-cultural conditions and activities, including the scientific, which generate or are those problems (Ratner 1939: 56, Ratner’s italics). In contrast to the givens of the empiricist, pragmatism turns observable sense data into interpretations, “the products of reflective discrimination, while the situation from which they are discriminated is not” (Hildebrand 2003: 186). As Ira Cohen states (2000: 86), “... (Dewey’s) theory of praxis is not so much a theory of habit as a theory of cycles of habit, reflective, rational consciousness, and behavioral change”.

Dewey’s philosophic method for accumulating and correcting knowledge, moreover, allows for elucidating praxis in terms of three overlapping spheres of analysis. Originally articulated in Dewey’s Studies in Logical Theory (MW 2: 298-315) and highlighted by Joseph Ratner (1939: 49-50), these intertwined dimensions within Deweyan pragmatism are logic, modes of experience, and the social world giving rise to problems. The contemporary pragmatist sociologist Hans Joas conceptualizes action similarly, as involving three elements of analysis – intentionality, corporeality, and sociality (Joas 1996: 145-195; Jung 2010). Such elements hence provide the key dimensions for a pragmatist analysis of operations for the making of differences, the informed action or praxis of social agents effecting solutions to problematic situations.

The first sphere is logic or inquiry, referring to processes of thinking through options aiming to solve a specific problem and a concluding judgment or action that makes a difference by reconstructing a qualitative situation. This replaces the traditional dualism by proposing that knowledge results from solving problems through the application of the doubt-inquiry sequence in which agents make inferences and put their judgments to the test. All knowledge correspondingly is like other types of human activities, such as medicine or farming, in being practical adaptations to concrete problems. Viewing inquiry as organic functioning prevents fixing distinctions between superior and inferior causes and makes practical activities of examining inferences through experimentation the source of produc-
tive knowledge (Hildebrand 2008: 49). The knower is a participant in the public processes of inquiry, and human agency takes the leading role in creating knowledge and understanding human existence. Darnell Rucker (1977: xiv) summarizes Dewey’s position: “Knowing, whatever its level of abstraction or precision of statement, has its roots in human activity, and its being as knowledge depends upon the continual renewal of contact with that activity”.

The centrality of praxis recurs in Dewey’s discussion of experimental inquiry. The Quest for Certainty points to the historic turn to the practice of experimentation as a superior tool for warranting knowledge. Dewey sees the start of the scientific revolution in Galileo’s move away from grounding knowledge in contemplative enjoyment of fixed entities to the conscious and deliberate engagement and control of relations among existences (LW 4:76). According to Dewey, experimental methods are distinguished by three transitive activities.

The first is the obvious one that all experimentation involves overt doing, the making of definite changes in the environment or in our relation to it. The second is the agent’s use of ideas so that experiment is not a random activity, rather it is directed by ideas which have to meet the condition set by the need of the problem inducing the active inquiry. The third feature, in which the other two receive their full measure of meaning, is that the outcome of the directed activity is the construction of a new empirical situation in which objects are differently related to one another, and such that the consequences of directed operations form the objects that have the property of being known (LW 4: 70).

Dewey’s second key philosophical element for difference making is experience. In his “Need for the Recovery of Philosophy”, Dewey sets out his conception of experience by pointing to five contrasts with its traditional meaning. Instead of being a knowledge affair, experience denotes all modes of interaction between organism and environment; instead of being primarily subjective, the subject and object relations are functional distinctions arising from ongoing experience; instead of centering experience on the present or the past, it is forward looking; instead of consisting of discrete particulars, experience is constructed through transactions; and instead of being separated from reason, experience entails the future, the reconstitution of the present into a different situation (MW 10; Hildebrand 2003: 36). Experience denotes the praxis of agents’ doings and undergoings within unsettled situations and in accordance with socially learned responses or habits, impelling problem solving and creativity.

The central concepts of inquiry and experience link to the third area situating praxis, the social and natural world that gives rise to problems. The construction of order, as people move within and through various frames of discourses and action, resolves the uncertainty that cannot be appreciated by reducing it to sense data or to dyadic links between such data. Dewey clarifies that the “ultimate value of the logic of experience” is resolution of social problems:

The right relationship and adjustment of the various typical phases of experience to one another is a problem felt in every department of life. … It may be that general logic cannot become an instrument in the immediate direction of the activities of science or art or industry; but it is of value in criticizing and organizing tools for immediate research. It also has direct significance in the valuation for social or life-purposes of results achieved in particular branches (MW 2: 313).
As a result, the strategies or solutions that yield control are to be discovered in dealing with concrete problems, not revealed by analysis of given truths.

Efforts to improve the social medium, to enlarge the community’s ability to control future activity and results, depend on testing the effect of ideas. According to Dewey (1903: 243), “We must in any case start from acts which are performed, not from hypothetical causes for those acts, and consider their consequences. We must also introduce intelligence, or the observation of consequences as consequences, that is, in connection with the acts from which they proceed”. Dewey next points to “… the objective fact that human acts have consequences upon others, that some of these consequences are perceived, and that their perception leads to subsequent effort to control action so as to secure some consequences and avoid others”. From this, Dewey develops a distinction between private and public acts, between acts with consequences that directly affect those involved and that indirectly affect others who are unaware or uninterested at the time. Efforts to regulate these indirect effects of transactions give rise to the collective function of the state as the agency determining what is appropriate.

In the search for order, pragmatism’s transactional emphasis on human action, rejecting the notion of the isolated individual, gives primacy to socially encumbered actors responding to and regenerating their social medium. Individuals are not fixed essences but authors of culturally specific acts learned from and appropriate to the social context. Social connections among people provide the opportunities and means for carrying out societal purposes, whereas the self is in fact a social being formed within and through participation in various social media. In Human Nature and Conduct (1922), Dewey elaborates on the social character of human conduct, drawing on the three overlapping dimensions – a medium of learned practices or habits, the impulse or live energy, and intelligence from inquiry-based judgment – to conceptualize action or praxis.

In sum, Dewey’s philosophical starting point centers on praxis and the ways human action makes differences within and through a social medium, in effect furnishing a tacit theory of power. His approach to theorizing action through concepts of experience, inquiry, and the environment, with ideas mediating and regulating how and why transactions generating a cooperative instrumentality occur, moves away from standard interactive or dyadic approaches to power. In developing the Darwinian model of organism and environment into a theory of intelligent action, he presages a cybernetic vision, by transforming a biological metaphor into one of modes of communication and social control (Johnson 2010; Burke 1994; Gardner 1985). As Ira Cohen (2000: 84) clarifies, “… if action refers to what actors mean, or intend by what they do, praxis refers to how actors make what they do happen”, emphasizing the role of habits and inquiry in directing practices within and through the unfolding of the social medium. Controlling what happens is critical to pragmatism’s active search for meliorism. Philip Jackson (2006: 65) underscores how central to this is to Dewey’s philosophical achievement, citing Dewey’s reflection that his ambition was to have “… knowledge turned to account in the instruction and guidance it may convey in piloting life through the storms and the shoals that beset life-experience as well as into such havens of consummatory experience as enrich our human life from time to time” (LW 16: 389).

*Praxis and Types of Power*

Dewey’s analysis of praxis in terms of how agents make differences and how they do so in order to control future events provides the basis for arguing that his pragmatism contains a theory of power. Accepting this analysis entails a view of making differences or power
that centers on “power within” a social medium, while making provision for understanding other types of power. Showing that the theory of praxis establishes a transactional view of power will allow for differentiating it from inter-actional and self-actional conceptions.

The framework of analysis that Dewey and Bentley present in Knowing and the Known to formulate concepts that advance pragmatism and science also provides an analogy for assessing the contributions of the debates about power. They name self-action, interaction and transaction as three levels of the organization and presentation of inquiry that denote “… all human behaviors in and with respect to the world, and … are all presentations of the world itself as men report it” (LW 16: 100-101; Lavine 1989: xxxiii-xxxv). Self-action identifies self-possessed causal capacity, interaction captures the balancing between forces, and transaction indicates systems of multiple aspects and phases without any independent and final causal capacity. Assuming that the transactional view of power is central to pragmatism, there are in addition two other types: inter-action or the balancing and exercise of pressures via causal relations or structural mechanisms and self-action in which things or beings act in the own right due to their essence.

At the heart of the pragmatist view of power is the idea of a transactional organization in which aspects or phases of an organic whole can be distinguished but not be separated from an ongoing functioning of a continuous, self-moving social medium. This self-organizing phenomena consists of elements bound together through meaning, intent, signs, and other mentally constructed ways of giving significance to the way agents connect events (Bernstein 1973: 182-3). In this perspective, actors respond to situations and construct their lives in cooperation with others by making their way within transactional, shared, coactive frames of participation.

In contrast to notions of “power over” and “power to”, the pragmatist notion is that power arises within and operates through modes of joint participation of human activity. It is the unique role of reason, thought, or ideas in constructing patterns of human action and experience that conceptualizes power as modes through which agents use intelligent judgments to generate substantive consequences. According to Dewey, “The only power the organism possesses to control its own future depends upon the way its present responses modify changes which are taking place in its medium” (MW 10: 15). Dewey continues, “It is all a matter of the way in which its present reactions to things influence the future reactions of things upon it”. Further, he adds that this capacity to increase its control lies in “The extent of an agent’s capacity for inference, its power to use a given fact as a sign of something not yet given, measures the extent of its ability systematically to enlarge its control of the future”. The use of inference highlights the role of individuals in shaping the flow of the social dynamic, as mediating agents recognizing and formulating attempting to improve their situation. Active agents rely on inference, involving ideas which connect what happens to what may happen and constituting the effort to control events. This use of inference in the social or political realm is the same as science uses in the constituting knowledge through the discovery and determination of consequences (MW 10: 16). It is this idea of power as “collective intelligence” shaping associated activity and its consequences that provides the unique perspective of pragmatism.

Instead of the press of coercive resources, the constraints and possibilities afforded by structure, or the direction for behavior provided by narratives, power is intrinsic to human praxis because all behavior deals with the consequences of transactions in progress, in op-

1 There are parallels between the Dewey and Bentley categories of description and action and C.S. Peirce’s categories of Firstness (givenness), Secondness (balance of pressures or forces), and Thirdness (expressions of meaning and intention through triadic linkages between agent, sign, situation) (Bernstein 1971: 177-187).
eration, partially fulfilled, partially incomplete. For Dewey, praxis emanates from a social partnership and has moral or prospective significance. Dewey writes (MW 14: 16): “Conduct is always shared; this is the difference between it and a physiological process.” Combining personal disposition with environmental inducement, influencing future action requires regulating factors, individual or social, guiding future results; action or “habit”, such as malice or courage, is the way personal attributes operate in combination with environmental elements. In dealing with problems, praxis involves operations, linking processes to consequences and comparing them to desired ends. The assessment of these operations yields signs of what is happening and what may happen, which becomes “an indispensable factor in behavior dealing with changes, the outcome of which is not yet determined” (MW 10: 15).

Intrinsic participation within trajectories of transactional accomplishing distinguishes the primary mode of making differences. In connecting objective changes and subjective adaptations, habits constitute praxis and carry forward continuity in the adjustment and re-adjustment of conditions and operations. As Dewey states (LW 13: 18), “The basic characteristic of habit is that every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes, while this modification affects, whether we wish it or not, the quality of subsequent experiences. … For it is a somewhat different person who enters into them”. Habits project the organized and functional nature of internal dispositions; they serve as “a moving force” shaping sensibilities, motivations, and interests which engage the objective and external. Projection, in turn, produces changes in the world, which challenge agents in new ways. If action sequences make for a different person entering into transactions, the effects of past actions make for a slightly different world that is being entered. Dewey writes (LW 13: 22): “Every genuine experience has an active side which changes in some degree the objective conditions under which subsequent experiences take place. The difference between civilization and savagery ... is found in the degree in which previous experiences have changed the objective conditions under which subsequent experiences take place”2.

Practical knowledge functions to generate and order social activity. Transactional activity allows subject-matters to develop their own forms of control or regulative functions, testing actions against desired consequences. The application of intelligence through self-organizing criticism implies the possibility of control of future activity. Indirect control, that is, the intrinsic, subjective and intellectual participation of persons in the fabrication of the social medium, combines the way the situation engenders impulses and the way intelligent guides habits that sequence of enveloping socially co-ordinated actions (MW 10: 44). Participation within conjoint activities depends on individuals adjusting internal and external factors. Since ideas realize a capacity for inference by signifying connections between actions and effects and between present occurrences and future events, ideas enable individuals to adjust to and control situations in which they take part. Dewey summarizes:

The net outcome of the discussion is that the fundamental means of control is not personal but intellectual. It is not “moral” in the sense that a person is moved by direct personal appeal from others, important as this method at critical junctures. It consists in the habits of understanding, which are set up in using objects in correspondence with others, whether by way of cooperation and assistance or rivalry and competition. Mind as a concrete thing is precisely

2 Tom Burke (1994: 39) characterizes continuity as linking two “orthogonal” dimensions: 1) static and dynamic and 2) internal and the external.
The power to understand things in terms of the use made of them; a socialized mind is the power to understand them in terms of the use to which they are turned in joint or shared situations. And mind in this sense is the method of social control (MW 9: 38).

The practical character of thought and action, furthermore, function to bring about effective accomplishments in accord with the paradigm organizing a social medium. Dewey (LW 13: 22) writes: “The very existence of the social medium in which an individual lives, moves, and has his being is the standing effective agency of directing his activity”. The “effective agency” is able to control activity because individuals possess understandings about how to participate in social life, enabling them to gauge the standpoints and behavior of other participants involved in social cooperation. Of education Dewey writes (MW 9: 32), “This other method resides in the ways in which persons, with whom the immature being is associated, use things; the instrumentalities with which they accomplish their own ends”. He subsequently illustrates his point:

If a chair is drawn up to a table, it is a sign that he is to sit in it; if a person extends his right hand, he is to extend his; and so on in a never ending stream of detail. The prevailing habits of using the products of human art and the raw materials of nature constitute by all odds the deepest and most pervasive mode of social control (MW 9: 37).

Moreover, reflective monitoring develops into self-control as the standards by which individuals regulate their actions direct their participation in the social medium (Campbell 1995: 41). Dewey observes:

The individual is held accountable for what he has done in order that he may be responsive in what he is going to do. Gradually persons learn ... to hold themselves accountable, and liability becomes a voluntary deliberate acknowledgment that deeds are our own, that their consequences come from us (MW 14: 217).

The interactional and self-actional types of power receive more attention because they are more noticeable than power through social media. Force, authority, or organization dominate when the usual processes of associated action are ignored, breakdown or have never been established. And their descriptions depend on philosophical starting points that fix onto causal givens. Dewey’s philosophical method explains these inter-active types of power as the result of a breakdown in the functioning of meanings and intentions controlling social media. External factors are fixed as predominant in determining the balance of pressure and resistance, when a social system fails to coordinate conjoint accomplishments.

These distinctions are brought out in Dewey’s discussions of the First World War. In a 1916 article responding to concerns about American entry into World War I, Dewey defended the idea that, contrary to being the equivalent of violence, force was the source of all effects. He writes (MW 10: 248; Hickman 1992: 187) that “[N]o ends are accomplished without the use of force”. What is needed to stop war, however, is alternative and effective social arrangements for preventing conflicts from taking the form of overt hostilities”. To support this argument, he identifies three types of force distinguished by their efficiency: power or self-directed participation, coercive force such as the use of law, and violence or the wasteful application of force. Here identifying power with organized and self-directed activity, Dewey narrows the use of the term power to instances of operations within social media. He maintains (MW 10: 246; see also 211-15), “Power ... denotes effective means of
operation; ability or capacity to execute, to realize ends”. That is, power is the effective functioning of a social medium, the intrinsic self-control by agents participating in operating a social apparatus. Coercive force and violence are interactional and rely on external or objective types of control. Dewey observes (MW 9: 31), “When others are not doing what we would like them to or are threatening disobedience, we are most conscious of the need of controlling them and of the influences by which they are controlled”.

Interactive models, nonetheless, dominate the literature on power. For example, political science has long held the view that power is a question of who controls in whose interests. Harold Lasswell (1936) famously formulated this question as “Who gets what, when and how?”. This conventional view of power, however, presupposes epistemological and objective dualisms, between knowledge and action, facts and values, and elites and led. The result is to focus attention on interactional types of power, prefiguring conclusions confirming domination by the few. Dewey’s critical approach to philosophical foundations, further, contends that much conceptualizing of domination is the outcome of the conceptual fixing of the key causal elements determining outcomes. For example, empiricist foundations foreshadow an agency notion of power, realism a dispositional notion, and interpretism a disciplinary notion of power. Various philosophical perspectives specify primary forces that prefigure what power is and how it can be organized. They offer distinct and different insights by privileging diverse meta-theoretical foundations or givens. This means that different meta-theoretical starting points interpret phenomena through the lenses of various types of relational phenomena, phenomena seen to involve conflict between interacting elements and to have the prerogative of being the decisive fixed and final factor as the source of causation.

Finally, the self-acting modes of interpreting reality rely on a being’s or a thing’s own essence as the force propelling changes. This way of thinking can be found in Plato’s forms, Hegel’s Geist, theological doctrines in which God controls human action. Recently, this mode of thinking resurfaced in the “return of the state” movement in political science, a theoretical trend arguing that the institutional essence of the state should be seen to make it an agent in its own right (Skocpol 1985).

**Praxis and the Structure of Power**

The pragmatist analysis of the structure of praxis provides insight into the distribution of power. This focuses on which values control action and how these values shape ways of operating in order to control their effects. In the *Quest for Certainty*, Dewey writes:

When theories of values do not afford intellectual assistance in framing ideas and beliefs about values that are adequate to direct action, the gap must be filled by other means. If intelligent method is lacking, prejudice, the pressure of immediate circumstance, self-interest and class-interest, traditional customs, institutions of accidental historic origin, are not lacking, and they tend to take the place of intelligence. Thus we are led to our main proposition: **Judgments about values are judgments about the conditions and the results of experienced objects; judgments about that which should regulate the formation of our desires, affections and enjoyments.** For whatever decides their formation will determine the main course of our conduct, personal and social (LW 4: 211-212).
To analyze the “whatever” allocating control of consequences that Dewey alludes to in the passage above brings out the value-orientations implicated in the habits that actors use within ongoing situations and how these functional processes entail judgments about the desirable. The structure of power, thus, arises from and can be analyzed by examining the ways actors operate to control events. Examining what values control ways of functioning exposes what matters most and for what ends.

Though Dewey did not himself discuss the question of the way praxis distributes control, his conception of the practical character of thought and action offers tools for clarifying the way the elements of praxis operate to pattern coordinated operations and control effects. Here again the three overlapping circles of analysis – inquiry, experience, and social media – come into play.

The first element, the social elements of custom and habit, involves analyzing how social media establish interests and, in turn, how individual motive selects a specific environment and offers appropriate responses. The practical character of knowledge means that motives and practices of activity are neither given by external authority nor permanently fixed (see Dewey 1929). They depend on the inheritance of historical circumstances and dynamics within which an agent’s internal capacities adjust to external circumstances. Working from a pragmatist tradition, C. Wright Mills expresses this idea in his discussion of the cultural apparatus. He writes: “Every man interprets what he observes – as well as much that he has not observed: but his terms of interpretation are not his own; he has not personally formulated or even tested them” (Mills 1967: 406). Dewey’s effort to shift analysis away from first principles, foundational concepts, or fixed truths establishes the need to examine the use and adaptation of the medium. Rather than being subordinated to the purely subjective or an independent reality, experience is a matter of the transaction of a living being within its environment, the ways the objective world affects human action and is in turn modified by it.

Instead of relying on first principles and reified causal forces such as wealth or weapons, Deweyan analysis suggests that the basis of action be located through empirical and intellectual scrutiny of cultural tools conditioning experience. The use of these cultural tools or habits operates in the unfolding of trajectories within a medium. For Dewey, habits “… assimilate objective energies, and eventuate in command of environment” (MW 14: 15-16). Habits for Dewey reflect prior activity, provide an ordering of elements for action, are projective and dynamic, and are operative in making activity manifest (MW 14: 31). They also give form to stages in a sequence of ordering a situation through craftsmanship. They appear analogous to the operative character of the developmental patterns identified by Jean Piaget’s concept of schema, the self-organizing projections which a child uses to assimilate the world and which undergo reorganization or accommodation in response to that world (Piaget 1963). Tom Burke interestingly offers an innovative suggestion for a way of analyzing the operation of the cultural apparatus. He proposes that universal propositions, one of Dewey’s logical modes, can be used to analyze ideology or systems of ideas and how they function in social life (Burke 2004). Applying this insight suggests that Dewey’s concept of habit may be characterized in terms of his own conception of the types of logical propositions and the way they operate to fashion a cultural medium. Such a project may aid in clarifying links between operations and effects, even facilitating in formulating the way connections between conditions and consequences may yield desirable results. In short, a first step in unpacking structures of praxis and power must be to examine the logical operations or habits by which the subject-matter of an existing social medium prescribes and projects.
norms and ends and how these include or exclude, privilege or deprive, the particular interests comprising the conditions within which agents operate.

A second element follows from Dewey’s understanding of experience, analyzing the ways agents respond to and endure their media. This locates agency within cultural toolkits and appreciates its transactional dynamics, identifying initiative in deciding problems and possible responses. By implication, this view rejects the dualism of agency and structure central to current debates about power; instead, it offers the view that there is only human praxis and that action generates effects that are often reified and taken as structural forces in their own right. Dewey’s emphasis on the insurgent and creative character of human action means that experience involves projection via habits into circumstances not fully known; it is experimentation for the purpose of connecting with the future. As human actors undergo a circumstance, they simultaneously attempt to control it.

Pragmatism further emphasizes the rebellious, projective and educative nature of human experience, while rejecting simple and mechanical causal relations between independent units. For Dewey, individuals are “live creatures”, never totally passive (LW 10: 9-25). Their experience involves “simultaneous doings and sufferings”. As Dewey writes (1917: 8), “The most patient patient is more than a receptor. He is also an agent - a reactor, one trying experiments, one concerned with undergoing in a way which may influence what is still to happen”. Dewey continues (MW 10: 9), “Our undergoings are experiments in varying the course of events; our active tryings are trials and tests of ourselves”. As a living organism, individuals strive to turn their circumstances into sustenance aiding their life prospects. Analyzing the way agents use things to operate within the dynamic and independent relations of specific situations, then, reveals the loci of initiative within the media and the craftsmanship of agents in functioning to sustain complex systems of cultural operations.

A third element in analyzing the distribution of power, the criterion of decision, involves the role of inference and judgment in transforming problems into consequences. Dewey (MW 2: 296) proposes that reality is remade through the doubt-inquiry-judgment process, which functions through experience in accordance with the test of consequences and for the purpose of “readjusting and expanding the means and ends of life”. Thinking projects possible consequences or solutions through the interpretation of events (MW 10: 15-16). In so doing, thinking concludes with a conjecture which serves as the criterion determining conduct transforming a questionable situation. Judgment selects and applies a standard or rule of operation that terminates a problematic situation and creates an existential unity (Burke 1994: 109). Dewey writes in How We Think (LW 8: 215), “The judgment when formed is a decision [his emphasis]; it closes, or concludes, the question at issue”. Resolving problematic situations requires action transforming objective circumstances, the application of inquiry’s results in devising a more effective link between the difficulty and the desired effects.

Significantly, acts of judgment producing transforming differences are both instrumental and consummatory. They are instrumental because they facilitate the achievement of desired ends through coordination and control of collective accomplishment. And they are consummatory because power relations promote communication, a “sharing in the objects and acts precious to a community, a sharing whereby meanings are enhanced, deepened and solidified in the sense of communion” (LW 1: 159).

The connection between the instrumental, substantive, and consummatory values and qualitative situations affects the way judgments operate. When instrumental, “intelligence is partial and specialized, because communication and participation are limited, sectarian,
provincial, confined to class, party, professional group” (LW 1: 159). When bureaucratic organization, the imperatives of technical necessity, or the privileging of rational self-interest become uppermost, action is mechanical and self-indulgent. Absolutes or externally divined duty also denies participation.

In short, the analytical elements of Dewey’s theory of praxis identify how the distribution of social control varies, the way operations affect who decides what and how and so constitute a medium controlling participation and effects. While the theory of praxis and power frame a transactional description of activity, it also facilitates the analysis of patterns of control in interactional and self-actional modes of praxis. Whatever the type of social conjunction, examining how values shape its modes of operating illuminates the substantive consequences of what gets done.

**Consequences For Conceptualizing Power**

The transactional conception contrasts with interactional characterizations of power, namely, “power over” and “power to”, that dominate the current literature. Agency and structuralist formulations attribute the generation and exercise of power to the balance of resources, consent, traditions, or institutions. In the “faces of power” debate, power resides with agents who are equipped with various armaments giving them control of the agenda and/or decision-making. Structuralists locate the control of interests and decisions in objective institutional constraints and mechanisms. As Hay (2002: 185) states: “Power then is about context-shaping, about the capacity of actors to define the parameters of what is socially, politically and economically possible for others”. Foucault locates power in a cultural entity he calls disciplinary knowledge, itself an expression of power. It also contrasts with self-actional descriptions of difference making. Each of these identifies power as the result of external imposition.

Dewey’s transactional conception of praxis informs a view of power centering on the ways agents compose and operate within evolving social media. Power arises from intellectual control of participation in conjoint association and the distribution of control depends on the purposes animating the flow linking agent and environment into modes of activity. Dewey would agree with Hannah Arendt’s assertion in that “Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together” (Arendt 1969: 137), though he would emphasize that a group is itself a creation of the value-laden and knowledgeable praxes of its members. This means that control inheres in the values directing the flow of actions forming the social apparatus.

The transactional focus on recursive operations generating modes of social co-operation emphasizes the crucial role of the agency of human actors and their use of ideas and habits to control conduct as they construct and reconstruct activities moving them through life. In patterning interactions actors use ideas and habits as practical guides to particular consequences, as the tools for constituting social co-operation. Changing the social expectations agents use to hold themselves accountable for their behavior redefines the way things get done. As understandings directing activity, ideas are operative predispositions. The practical effect is to establish the accountability that controls conduct in particular contexts. Further, because transactions are dynamic and contingent applications of operations to social situations, power is created, variable, and tentative as agents conjointly engage in transactions arising from changing problems. Not fixed and given, variation in structure occurs as agents respond to their situations, for example, the fading of a honeymoon phase of a newly
elected US President. Thus, power is intrinsic to human conduct, since inquiry and judgment afford control of ways of acting on and with things and the differences made.

One consequence is that the praxis theory of power dismisses the concept of structure as a thing or essence with causal force, challenging the structure versus agency debate so prominent in the social science literature. The transactional view dispels the philosophical realist notion that agents are mere bearers of the interests of institutions and that power lies in controlling institutional incentives as well as the critical realist contention that structure is the medium and result of agency. The pragmatist views these notions of structure as examples of the interactional models’ reliance on reifying and fixing analytic categories.

A second implication is that the centrality of experience to praxis means that individuals have a degree of autonomy in affecting change. Action that is informed and deliberate is intelligent, projecting desirable effects and checking their results. This enables human beings to control the quality of their future experience (Thayer 1968: 200). As adaptive behavior, the intelligent use of ideas through the scrutiny of consequences makes possible more fruitful and desirable experience (LW 1: 17). Therefore, intelligence, inquiry, and ideas enable individuals to make a difference to themselves and to the contexts in which they operate. About his pragmatism, Dewey writes that it brings “... into prominence the importance of the individual … [for] … It is he who is the carrier of creative thought, the author of action, and of its application” (LW 1: 20). Human beings are participants and experimenters in organic processes, including a community of inquiry. According to Dewey (LW 1: 20), “The individual mind is important because only the individual mind is the organ of modifications in traditions and institutions, the vehicle of experimental creation”. Relatively autonomy, then, stems from human praxis and the self-reflection guiding participation in social processes responding to changing environments.

The autonomy afforded by praxis means further that questions of values and justice are crucial. By turning conditions into consequences, ideas operationalize values; they give expression to what is regarded as worthy. Action requires taking the responses of others into account and having one’s actions taken into account. Social transactions rely on and produce socially regulated behavior. To make a moral judgment is to decide “whether what is good in immediate experience has consequences for latter experience that warrant accepting the immediate good as a true good” (Rockefeller 1991: 407). Inquiry into the desirable or undesirable influences the character or habits of the inquirer and requires the application of a standard of judgment that actualizes priorities (Kennedy 1970: 87-90).

The pursuit of objectives through a social medium means that power, in addition, involves efficiency in operating. The organization of energy into social media increases working efficiency. Dewey observes, “Nevertheless force is efficient socially not when imposed upon a scene from without, but when it is an organization of the forces in the scene” (MW 10: 215). The more efficiently power operates the less external, violent force will be relied upon. Moreover, the more direct power is, the more it is open to public controversy. Since direct control operates in a more exposed arena, it incites further coercion in order to suppress emerging conflict. Contrary to an empiricist worldview in which agents engage in overt tests of strength and imposition, the efficient achievement of ends depends on organizing the way individuals coordinate their own actions within the larger project of collective accomplishment. And pragmatism’s interest in efficiency assumes that consequenc-

5 The view that power is productive and ubiquitous is also found in the work of Anthony Giddens 1984 and Michel Foucault 1979.
es regulate power rather than, as with Nietzsche and Foucault, power itself determining fact and truth (Weberman 1995).

Finally, the transactional conception of praxis and power exemplifies a method of critical analysis for deconstructing power structures. It makes evident that ideologies rely on political rhetoric or metaphor functioning to blind us to the ways their theoretical starting points entail power and effects. This critical function is important to creative democracy, based on challenges to and judgment about the use of power for common good and growth (Hildred 2009: 794-796, 799). More generally, pragmatism’s empirical method provides a tool for critically “seeing” the antecedently fixed assumptions empowered to produce the theoretical and empirical outcomes in modern research schools, providing a system for examining how their philosophical assumptions prefigure their models of power. In Experience and Nature, Dewey recounts this critical analytical method, namely, the philosophical fallacy, as a way of unmasking the effects of theoretical starting points (LW 1: 10-41). By taking antecedent givens as foundations, Dewey argues, theorists prefigure how and what they find. This meta-philosophical tool calls for the identification of assumptions that prefigure representations of nature and their effects and suggests that their illumination provides for their control. Dewey’s empirical method, in particular, asks how meta-theory frames the way actors justify their activity, gain initiative, and are held accountable to what they value, that is, how philosophical givens prescribe the ‘desired’ perception and interpretation. This idea, that what we see is attributable to our own ways of experiencing things, can be used to analyze models of power in political ideologies as well as theoretical approaches (Wolfe 2011: 138). Further, as articulated in Reconstruction in Philosophy, it challenges social theory’s preoccupation with debating and refining notions about its tools of inquiry instead of solving concrete problems (Ratner 1939: 63). Even more, this critical capacity to deconstruct power phenomena suggests a way of giving meaning to the concepts of subjective and real interests by the exposure of modes and structures of power (Amit 2008). The pragmatist critique thus enables us to get beyond a political theory’s claims to represent reality and instead to examine how its initial conceptual categories imply consequences for the way relations of control ought to be exercised.

**Conclusion**

In rejecting the philosophical starting points underlying the empiricist agency, realist dispositional or structuralist, and interpretivist facilitative models of power, Deweyan pragmatism provides a theory of praxis that is a tacit theory of power. This offers an indirect or transactional view of the ways human praxis makes differences within and through a social medium. A social medium, such as a class or game, carries power in its collective consequences in shaping conditions reacting on agents. It is also a framework of control since participants require understanding about how it operates and self-control in their application of knowledge in order to bring the social medium into being. This view holds that the social medium is the primary mode through which differences are made. Yet, if indirect control through the social medium breaks down, direct control through various types of relational enforcement occurs. In other words, Deweyan pragmatism recognizes that power also operates through inter-actional modes, such as, force, unequal resources, public consent, law, a generalized capacity, expertise, or a structural property of institutions. Further, different forms or patterns within social media represent different distributions of control. These depend on the ways different social paradigms motivate and inform praxis, how different experiences enable agents to use their range of options to take initiatives within these frame-
works, and what value-orientations control judgments. The resulting variations in the type and form of conduct, finally, provide a means for improving the quality of future events.

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Molly Cochran

Pragmatism and International Relations: A Story of Closure and Opening

Abstract. The discipline of International Relations [IR] is experiencing a pragmatist turn. Here I will argue that this is a critical moment to take stock and reflect on where it is heading. First, in order to understand what pragmatism might bring to IR as a social science today, it is important to examine the history of IR and explain why pragmatism appears not to have registered in its past. Why have the contributions of William James and, especially, John Dewey apparently disappeared from the early history of the field? Second, having examined what the problem was before, I go on to argue that the opportunity that exists today for pragmatism to influence the field is constructed upon its critique of empiricist epistemology, its scope for bridging plural methods, and the broadening of our understanding of what international relations is, opening the range of possible ontological claims which the discipline finds necessary at this time.

Introduction

Charles Peirce did not write on international relations, but both William James and John Dewey did. James was a member of the Anti-Imperialist League; he criticised US foreign policy in editorials and essays concerning America’s involvements in the Philippines, especially its war against Filipinos fighting for independence after the US acquired the Philippines in 1898. James also wrote on the theme of redirecting energies for war through alternative, peaceful channels. The idea is first broached in The Varieties of Religious Experience and then developed in his essay, “The Moral Equivalent of War”. Dewey was even more prolific on international relations: his writings include reflections on topics such as coercion and the use of force, war and democracy, the role of America in the world, American entry into the League of Nations, the outlawry of war, and the World Court (see Cochran 2010).

Yet, neither James nor Dewey features as a significant figure in accounts of the evolution of the academic discipline of International Relations (IR). This absence is especially remarkable in Dewey’s case, in view of the sheer extent of his writing on the subject; the fact that it appeared in widely-read journals such as The New Republic and Foreign Affairs; and his stature as a major public intellectual during the formative period when the academic study of IR was being institutionalised. The experience of World War I, and the hope of avoiding another war like it, generated an interest in the systematic study of war and peace

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1 I would like to acknowledge the assistance, editorial and custodial, of the Keenes: Eddie and my in-laws, Gillian and David. Thank you.

2 John McDermott writes in the introduction to William James’s Essays in Religion and Morality that “the ideas put forward in James’s essay were taken up in the United States on two occasions. First, during the depression of the 1930s the Civilian Conservation Corps was modeled after James’s plan. (In fact, under the leadership of a philosopher, Eugene Rosenstock-Huessy, one such camp in New Hampshire was called Camp William James.) A second affirmation of James’s viewpoint occurred with the founding of the Peace Corps during the presidential administration of John F. Kennedy. The Peace Corps was structured as an alternative to conscription, and the influence of James’s essay was cited on behalf of that bold political move” (James 1982: xxvi).
as a dedicated academic discipline: the first Chair in the subject, the Woodrow Wilson Chair of International Politics at the University of Wales at Aberystwyth, was established in 1919. The zenith of American Pragmatism thus overlapped with the development of IR as a social science. But a survey of histories of the discipline reveals no reference to the philosophy of Pragmatism, despite an early connection in the field with political theory and classical thought about international politics stretching back to Thucydides. Through all of these histories I have found just one mention of a Pragmatist, and that is a relatively brief nod to Dewey as an influence on others (Schmidt, 1998: 99).

I am careful to write that there is no mention of the philosophy of Pragmatism, because ‘pragmatism’ (with a small ‘p’) is a word that appears regularly in studies of international relations, most typically when being distinguished from the application of moral principle in world affairs. Indeed, it is widely argued that, in a world of diverse states, each with its own interests and often competing with one another to survive, it is fool-hardy to act in line with what moral principle demands rather than what prudence dictates. We are told that the statesman shapes policy in line with the national interest, knows the facts of existing conditions, and pays special attention to power and its alignments. This understanding, attributed to the school of ‘realism’ in IR, attaches moral value only to responsible action that pragmatically adapts policy to circumstances. I will argue later that the potential value of Pragmatism to normative theorizing in IR is something different from this position; but it should be acknowledged that, like realists, Pragmatists would be loathe to apply moral absolutes to matters of international relations; attention must be given to the particular context of a problematic situation.

So where are the Pragmatists in IR? The application of American Pragmatism to the social science of IR has suffered in two key respects, which stem from a central concept and surrounding discourse that runs through the history of the discipline: the anarchy problematique. The fact that international politics, unlike domestic politics, lacks an overarching central authority is a major organizing element of scholarship within the field. In one of its most stark formulations, anarchy is taken to imply that there is little scope for political philosophy or theory in the international realm, since, as Martin Wight famously wrote, those are forms of inquiry “appropriate to man’s control of his social life…the theory of the good life. International theory is a theory of survival” (1966: 33). The thinking goes that neither American pragmatism, nor any other set of philosophical ideas, can have purchase in this field of material forces. This is the first problem for pragmatism in IR, and it is an ontological one: if the fact of anarchy structures all that goes on in world affairs, then what scope is left for Dewey’s key concerns of theorizing change and improving societal and intersocietal conditions?

The second difficulty is related to the fact of anarchy as a habit of thinking in the discipline, but is epistemological rather than ontological. What do we know, and can we know, about international relations? The discipline experienced a behavioral revolution at a time

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1 David Davies, the founder of The Woodrow Wilson Chair, was motivated in this way and the Chair was intended in part as a memorial to students of the university who died in the Great War. See Porter (1989).

2 Histories of the discipline surveyed include: Asworth (1999); Banks (1984); Boucher (1998); Fox (1968); Hinsley (1963); Hinsley (1963); Kaplan (1961); Keene (2005); Knutsen (1992); Long and Wilson (1995); Olsen (1972); Olson and Groom (1991); Osiander (1998); Schmidt (1998); Williams (1991). I have excluded from this survey scholarship in the field of diplomatic history, which is of course related to, but has always been something apart from IR, given the social scientific aspirations of the latter. Worthy of note within this genre is Crabb (1989), American Diplomacy and the Pragmatic Tradition.

3 After making clear the use of pragmatism, small ‘p’, in IR as distinct from the American philosophy, I will now revert to writing of the philosophical tradition in the more typical way, without a capital “P”.
when the anarchy problematique was being felt acutely: particularly in America, the advent
of the atomic age and the context of the Cold War made the development of a science
of international politics an urgent requirement. Stanley Hoffmann has described IR as an
‗American‘ social science defined by its positivist proclivities and its will to make the study
of international politics a policy science, a ‗how-to‘ guide for wielding American power in
its post-World War II, global role. Thus, despite the existence of a rich, philosophically-
inspired historical tradition of international political thought (see Brown, Nardin and Reng-
ger 2002), IR has not maintained a strong connection with political theory or philosophy
since its turn to positivism, but has oriented itself towards a presentist vision of policy-
relevant science.

However, the bedrock of positivism that has dominated the discipline since the latter
half of the 1950s has experienced fissures of late. Confidence in the positivist schools that
came to dominate the field since the 1970s, ‗neorealism‘ and ‗neoliberalism‘, was funda-
mentally shaken by the failure of scholars to anticipate the events of 1989 that ended the
Cold War and led to the break-up of the Soviet Union. What, then, of prediction and con-
trol? An opening for interpretive approaches was created, and while many of these adopted
a form of ‗constructivism“ that aimed largely to fill explanatory gaps with ideational causes
- a kind of IR positivism 2.0 - deeper challenges to positivism emerged. In 1989, Yosef
Lapid declared the advent of a post-positivist era. New approaches challenged both the an-
archy problematique and the aims of prediction and control that had been at the center of
the discipline for so long. The 1990s brought developments in normative IR theory, a re-
vival of the classical approach of the English School, feminist IR theory, and historical ma-
terialism and IR. It is in this milieu of a new post-positivist phase of thinking in IR that
pragmatism has found a point of entry. When Steve Smith wrote the introduction to In-
ternational Theory: Positivism and Beyond in 1996, he posed the question, “if we wish to
open epistemological space for alternatives to an international relations based on empiri-
cism, what other epistemologies are available” (1996: 22-3). His answer was that the op-
tions were two: either a discredited rationalism or pragmatism. However, in his survey of
the emerging post-positivist approaches to IR at the time, there was little pragmatism in
sight.

Today is a different story. Jörg Friedrichs and Fredrick Kratochwil recently set out a
program to introduce an alternative methodological approach in IR based on American
pragmatism that could “reconcile scientific inquiry with the requirements of practical rea-
son” (2009: 703). Special issues on the topic of pragmatism and IR have been published in
Millennium: Journal of International Studies, the Journal of International Relations and
Here I will argue that this is a critical moment to take stock of these developments, and re-
fect on where they are heading. First, in order to understand what pragmatism might bring
to IR as a social science today, it is important to examine its history and explain why prag-
matism appears not to have registered in its past. Why, as I noted above, have the contrib-
utions of James and, especially, Dewey apparently disappeared from the early history of the
field? Secondly, having examined what the problem was before, I go on to argue that the
opportunity that exists today for pragmatism to influence the field is constructed upon its
critique of empiricist epistemology, its anti-positivist credentials so to speak; its scope for
bridging plural methods; and the broadening of our understanding of what international re-

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6 This point is made by Peter Katzenstein in the introduction to his volume, The Culture of National Security:
lations is, opening the range of possible ontological claims which the discipline finds necessary at this time.

**A Historical Puzzle: Where are the Pragmatists?**

Lucian Ashworth writes that the discipline of IR “is a twentieth century product of predominantly liberal Enlightenment concerns” (1999: 1). This raises a puzzle: why does John Dewey, an important figure writing on themes of liberal internationalism in his day, not really feature? Ashworth is clear that his account is a revisionist account, challenging the legacy of Thucydides, Machiavelli and Hobbes in the field. However, his point is that their writings are not examples of IR scholarship. Instead, these writers are primarily interested in the domestic polity and remark on the international as a side note to the extent that an external dimension intercedes upon thought about the domestic. Ashworth’s claim is that Enlightenment thinkers – Hegel being an important exception – linked an international project of perpetual peace to their plans for the domestic polity. Enlightenment themes of progress, political emancipation and the development of human freedom were transposed onto the international.

Some argue that IR grew into a discipline from thinking of this kind represented in action and popular journalism. W.T.R. Fox (1967: 2) attributed interest in the study of international relations to the nineteenth century peace movements, of which James was a member, and wrote that this generated an interest in arbitration and international law as a vehicle for eliminating war, an activism that Dewey took an important position in when he became a leading proponent of Salmon O. Levinson’s Outlawry of War movement after WWI. Dewey wrote on many themes important to liberal internationalists, such contributions making up almost half of two volumes of *Characters and Events: Popular Essays in Social and Political Philosophy* in which Joseph Ratner collected Dewey’s political journalism in 1929. What unifies these writings is an underlying concern that the moral inclusion of individuals be made effective in the relations between states, that a new diplomacy should arise out of the destruction of WWI that would give recognition to the humanity of each individual and assist in the development of human capacities, making manifest the idea of democracy in international affairs. Kant and Dewey got there in different ways, but each - like the early 20th century IR scholars Ashworth discusses – wanted to see moral value attributed to individuals in the sphere of international politics.

And yet, if one searches not only histories of the discipline, but the books and articles written by early contributors to IR, it is clear that Dewey was not regarded by them as ‘one of us’. He does receive mention as an important figure lending his name and stature to the cause of liberal internationalism, but he was not seen as a scholar of international relations as such. Why? It is striking that the language Ashworth uses when he writes about early IR scholars, such as Alfred Zimmern, H.N. Brailsford, Norman Angell and David Mitrany, is that they made international relations the primary focus of their work (1998: 4). At some level this must be right and relevant to our puzzle here. International relations was not the primary focus of Dewey’s work. Dewey was a philosopher whose intellectual interests drew him not only to politics and international relations, but psychology, education, religion, art and aesthetics. Given the breadth of his interests at a time of the narrowing and professionalization of academic pursuits, it would have been rather remarkable for him to have made a impact on the new discipline of IR in addition to the other disciplines he is known to have influenced: psychology and education studies especially.
However, the ‘who’ generating IR theory in the early 20th century was reasonably fluid in the sense that it was not being created by academics sitting in IR departments or by academics alone. As David Long writes, IR was “a fledgling social science in 1919; as such, there were few international theorists in the disciplinary sense”, and not even in the 1920s or 1930s do we see the field professionalized; “There was therefore a space for writers and publicists not located in an academic setting” (Long 1995: 303). So, if international relations theory was being created by academics who focused on IR, but did so from departments of history, law, and later politics and economics, and by non-academic writers – e.g. a journalist like Walter Lippmann – why not Dewey as an academic philosopher who wrote about the nature of the international, and not just on external aspects as they related to a theory of the state? What is so striking in relation to this question is that themes one finds in Dewey’s writings match up with those Long identifies in the non-academic IR he surveys. Among the academics writing non-academic IR he includes Laski - particularly interesting given what follows below - or those outside academe like J.A. Hobson, who were often writing on topics that preoccupied Dewey too: interdependence, the democratic control of international relations, non-state actors, and thinking about functionalism in the context of the international realm (Long 1995: 309; Cochran 2010). The volume and quality of his writing on these themes do not appear to have been sufficient to have made an indelible mark on the field. It remains a puzzle that will be raised, but not answered in this article. Nevertheless, Dewey had an indirect impact upon International Relations, and one that I will argue grows more important for the trajectory of IR as a discipline into its future.

Dewey and the Theory of State Literature in the Pre-history of IR

I mentioned above that the sole, brief, tantalizing, reference to Dewey appears in Brian Schmidt’s study, The Political Discourse of Anarchy, where he draws our attention to work in the early days of Political Science on the theory of the state, and claims that its discussion was important not only to the development of Political Science, but IR as well. Schmidt traces the pre-history of IR to the early 1880s, when the first school of political science opened at Columbia College. Early on, an influential paradigm emerged that anchored the discourse of political science in the theory of the state, mimicking the German Staatslehre (1998: 54). As the theory of the state developed in the late 19th century, it became the context in which both political science and the study of international relations took shape. According to Schmidt, “[t]he ontology of international relations, the character of international law, the possibility of a world state, the extent to which there was international organization and cooperation among states were all determined with respect to the theory of the state” (1998: 76). Its influence was substantial in founding the discipline and Dewey made a crucial intervention on the topic in 1874 in a commentary on the theory of the state as discussed by John Austin. According to Schmidt, Dewey’s views were picked up and ex- pounded upon by an important scholar for the new discipline, Harold Laski. In this pre-history, an early orthodoxy emerged in the form of the juridical theory of the state, the conception of which owed much to Hobbes, Bodin and Austin. Schmidt notes that W.W. Willoughby’s treatment of the juridical state was foundational to the discourse that developed in the 1900s, and the idea of international relations that he developed borrows from Austin (1998: 88-9). Austin’s belief that natural law can command no force with individuals in a state of nature was transposed by Willoughby onto international relations when
he argued that like a person, the state has a will of its own and is “legally supreme” with natural law having no more command over it than over individuals in a state of nature. This opened the discourse of anarchy that would, as Schmidt argues, feature throughout the development of IR as a discipline. In this formal, juridical notion of the state formulated by Willoughby and others in the early 20th century, the core principle of the state was sovereignty, and sovereignty was its “legitimating will.” It is Schmidt’s contention that juristic conceptions of the state came to be challenged in ways that were deeply influenced by the philosophy of pragmatism (1998: 99). In his essay, “Austin’s Theory of Sovereignty”, Dewey wrote that in Austin “there is a confusion of sovereignty with the organs of its exercise, and that this confusion has for its result a radical error concerning the mode in which sovereignty is exercised—an error which, so far as acted upon, is likely to result in harm” (EW4: 73). Why? Dewey argued that:

in every existing civilized state governmental power is in the hands of a certain body of persons, capable of more or less accurate assignment and thus Austin’s conception seems to agree fairly with facts. But that there are suchdeterminate governments, is a matter lying quite outside the range of Austin’s theory; they exist precisely because large social forces, working through extensive periods of time, have fixed upon these governments as organs of expression. It is these forces, gradually crystallizing, which have determined governments and given them all the specific (determinate) character which they now possess. Take away the forces which are behind governments—which have made them what they are, and the existence and character of these governments is an accident, likely to be changed at any moment. Admit these forces, and, since they determine the government, they are sovereign (EW4: 80).

According to Schmidt, Dewey’s argument resonated with Harold Laski and influenced Laski’s important pluralist critique of the juridical theory of the state that gained considerable momentum in the 1920s. Schmidt does not provide textual evidence for the claim, however, Laski certainly read Dewey, and referred to Dewey’s essay on Austin in his book, The Foundations of Sovereignty and Other Essays (1921). Laski was working at the New Republic when Dewey was one of its regular contributors.

The emerging pluralist position, as Ellen Deborah Ellis characterized it in 1920, was to deny “the essential unity and absoluteness of the state and sovereignty”. Dewey made his own contribution in 1920 when he asked whether the state

is not just an instrumentality for promoting and protecting other and more voluntary forms of association, rather than a supreme end in itself...As they [voluntary associations] develop in number and importance, the state tends to become more and more a regulator and and

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8 Schmidt writes the idea that the study of IR consists principally of “issues arising from the existence of sovereign states in the absence of a higher central authority” gives the discipline its “distinct discursive identity”. (1998: 41).
10 Dewey reflects again on the theory of the state, invoking Austin in his 1888 essay, “The Ethics of Democracy” (EW 1: 227-249). In making his argument for an organic conception of society in which “society exists for and by individuals”, Dewey writes, “[t]he English theory, as presented by Hobbes and worked out by Austin, virtually makes it [sovereignty] consist in irresponsible power (EW 1: 236). Interestingly, in this same essay, Dewey also remarks on J.C. Bluntschli ‘s organism, and Schmidt refers to Bluntschli as a contributor to the theoretical discourse of the state that influenced IR. Clearly, Dewey was a participant in this scholarly debate within political science in a way he did not seem to be as IR got underway post WWI.
adjuster among them; defining the limits of their actions, preventing and settling conflicts (MW 12:196).

Dewey likened the state to the conductor of an orchestra, saying the “state remains highly important—but its importance consists more and more in its power to foster and coordinate the activities of voluntary groupings.” Those groupings, which promote a diversity of goods, are the “real social units”, not states for Dewey. Thus, Dewey claims that “[p]luralism is well ordained in present political practice and demands a modification of hierarchical and monistic theory” (MW 12: 196). It is also important to note here that Dewey did not fail to comment on pluralism in relation to the international sphere, writing that: 1) the “abnormally supreme position” that states assume in war has led to the “increased demoralization” of the institution of war; and 2) that voluntary associations “do not coincide with political boundaries”, but are transnational. In general, there has been a “growth” of the international, of which these unbounded voluntary associations are a part. Thus, he concludes that “internationalism is not an aspiration but a fact, not a sentimental ideal but a force” which compromises the traditional dogma of exclusive national sovereignty. It is the vogue of this doctrine, or dogma, that presents the strongest barrier to the effective formation of an international mind” (MW 12: 197).

Laski similarly believed that the facts just didn’t match up with what was being claimed in the juridical theory of the state. His aim was to reconstruct political theory such that it reflected “institutions more fitted to the needs we confront”; that is, a pluralistic state that substitutes “coordination for a hierarchical structure” (Laski 1921: vii). Like Dewey, Laski argues that human association manifests itself in many ways and believes these voluntary associations to be important, possessing a kind of sovereignty in themselves which runs counter to the monist’s assertion that the sovereignty of the state is indivisible or omnipotent. However, as Schmidt points out, Laski’s empirical assertion is followed by a normative one, and we find the same in Dewey too: the claim that the sovereign state is not an end in itself, deserving of the moral rights conferred on it by a now compromised juridical theory of the state. As Laski writes, “advocates of pluralism are convinced that this is both administratively incomplete and ethically inadequate.” Finally, there are international implications of the pluralist critique for Laski as well. The juridical theory of the state was getting in the way of thinking about the international realm properly, and that it was “only by the abrogation of the idea of sovereignty in international affairs that is there any real prospect of the working of international ideas being placed upon a basis at once successful and sound” (Laski 1927: 290).

IR was starting to come into its own at this point, amounting to more than side commentary on the external features of sovereignty as it pertained to a political theory of the state. And Dewey played, at the very least, an indirect part in this transformation, shaping the pluralism that directed the study of IR towards ways of thinking about the facts of international interdependence, and about how to manage it better than the juridical sovereign state concept had made possible. Along with the pluralism that impacted and influenced interwar IR came a will to mitigate the effects of anarchy and reform international relations, placing the study of international organization at the center of what IR does. And it is important to

12The use of the term, ‘international mind’ by Dewey in this essay and others (e.g. “Emancipation of the International Spirit”, LW 3: 349) demonstrates his emersion in the scholarship of the liberal internationalists who were building IR, since the concept features in important works by two early notables in IR, Alfred Zimmern and Nicholas Murray Butler (also the President of Columbia University who hired Dewey and brought him to New York in February of 1905).

underscore now, because of the direction the study of IR took after WWII, and the tar of “utopianism” that E.H. Carr’s book *The Twenty Years’ Crisis: 1919-1939* brushed over the work of liberal internationalists, that it did so not out of wishful, idealistic thinking, but out of keen attention to reality: their world was strikingly global and a new interstate organization for managing the growth of international forces that were reaching beyond the control of sovereign states – The League of Nations – had emerged. These phenomena required careful, dedicated study. Dewey agreed. Rebuilding after WWI required an acknowledgement that the Westphalian model of state sovereignty was an anachronism; that a new diplomacy was needed to coordinate cooperation in directing the forces of interdependence so as to improve the life chances of all, rather than the interests of states narrowly interpreted; and that trans-boundary voluntary associations should unite as international publics to assist in shaping a more inclusive world politics, not leaving it to states alone (Cochran 2010).

The scholarly concerns of Dewey and the liberal internationalists were bracketed in the discipline for a good fifty or more years. The naiveté associated with liberal internationalism has been so great as to hide from view the connection of their pluralism with forms of pluralist critique that were to follow later in the discipline that shone light on cooperation and actors other than states in world affairs, e.g. transnationalism, functionalism, and complex interdependence (Schmidt 1998: 237). Additionally, their marginalization would not only narrow what was seen in the world as worthy of empirical investigation, but it would put a brake on normative inquiry almost altogether. Remember, the challenge of pluralism was an empirical as well as a normative challenge to the prevailing theory of the state. After WWII, the anarchy problematique submerged the interest that pluralists such as Dewey and Laski had demonstrated in questions of justice and the moral inclusion of individuals in world politics. It would not be until the rekindling of normative theory in IR in the late 1980s and early 1990s that a passage such as Laski’s would resonate again:

[p]olitically, in its judgment of what it is entitled to do, a state considers not the interest of humanity as a whole, not the obvious precepts of judgment and right, but the basest considerations of expediency, as it chooses to interpret them. A state becomes, in short, the judge of its own cause, and it is elementary that that is a denial of justice. (Laski 1927: 290).

As we shall now see, that would be an important opening for Dewey too, in which he would feature not only in the normative IR literature, but in 21st century calls for re-examining methodologies in IR.

Emerging from a Deep Winter: Pragmatism and Contemporary IR

The IR discipline may have grown out of liberal Enlightenment concerns, but such concerns experienced a deep winter. As I indicated in the introduction, this was not only due to the ontological implications of the anarchy problematique. The winter was made harsher by methodological preoccupations of molding IR into a proper science. IR scholarship during

14 Indeed, Carr is credited with framing the first great debate in IR between idealism and realism, the effects of which have been so lasting that articles and books are still being written today challenging its thesis that the idealists or utopians – as the liberal internationalists were labeled – were out of touch with the realities of world politics. Schmidt’s attention to pluralism and its significance for the pre-history of IR does the discipline the great favor of reminding it that the liberal internationalists built their contribution to the discipline challenging what was perceived to be reality then. In addition to Schmidt, see Wilson 1998 and Osiander 1998.
the interwar years was not without aims to science, but these aims were not as yet backed by the full-blown positivism that was to develop after IR experienced its behavioral revolution in the mid-1950s.

The influence of pragmatism in philosophy had long since waned as well, overtaken by analytical philosophy. However, before the aim of replacing “ideographic statements with empirical generalisations” (Wilson 1998: 10) won the day, realist scholars such as Reinhold Neibuhr and Hans Morgenthau who formulated their thought more traditionally in terms of organizing ideas and concepts, did engage with pragmatism, and Dewey’s philosophy in particular (Bauer and Brigi 2009: 165). This engagement does not register in the discipline either, even though realism’s own brand of traditionalism held sway for some time beyond the mid-1950s in the work of not just Morgenthau and Neibuhr, but Henry Kissinger, George Kennan, Raymond Aron, John Herz, and Martin Wight15. Science was not their plea, but rather the need to shift the focus of IR onto power and politics, over cooperation and international law and organization. Attention was thrown back onto sovereign states and their rational will as unitary actors to seek power and calculate interest in terms of power. The Hobbes-Austrian theory of the state that Dewey had criticised was back with a vengeance.

Positivism settled upon the discipline in waves that grew more forceful over time. Positivism in IR is unified by four basic propositions: 1) belief in the unity of science; 2) commitment to a strict fact/value separation; 3) belief in the existence of regularities in the social as well as the natural world that licenses deductive-nomological and inductive-statistical forms of covering law explanation; and 4) empirical validation, falsification, being viewed as proper inquiry (Smith 1996: 16). Positivism hit IR as behaviorism in the way it did across the social sciences in the mid-20th century. The behavioralists looked for eternal laws of international politics left uninvestigated within the classical foundations of realism. The avowed ‘scientists’ began to take a grip on the IR discipline beginning in the late 1950s. Morton Kaplan’s book, System and Process in International Politics (1957) is an exemplar and demonstrates “a firm commitment to the noncircular objectivity of science” (Kaplan 2000: 696). However, at the same time, a traditional realism of the kind found in the English School, registered a challenge: Hedley Bull’s critique of the American science of IR from the vantage point of his particular “classical approach” (Bull 1966). More theoretical challenges were to follow, what Michael Banks labels “post-behavioralism” in IR, exemplified by John Burton’s cobweb model of international relations as opposed to the classic billiard ball model of realism that was carried forward by the scientists16. These challenges of the late 60s were followed by the rise of theories of transnationalism and interdependence that were a reaction to the weakness of states in the face of challenges like the oil crisis of the early 1970s.

15 I have found one other reference to pragmatism from this period in a 1955 review article on methodology for political science which argues in a section on “The Problem of Knowledge”, that a grounding in the philosophic aspects of method (rationalism, empiricism, positivism, logical positivism) is important. It refers readers to Dewey and Bentley’s co-authored book, Knowing and the Known (largely because of Bentley’s early work on the processes of government being of interest to political scientist), but urges readers to dig deeper and look at almost anything within pragmatism to gain a background in what “has been so influential in the philosophy of science and social science” (Drscoll and Hynean, 1955: 14). In America at this time and still today, IR is a subfield taught within political science departments at most universities.

16 John Burton, an Australian diplomat who became a UK-based academic, developed a ‘world society’ approach that was inspired by behavioralism, but he employed it for purposes different than those found in the US. Where behavioralism served to provide a more scientific basis for realism in the US, ‘world society’ theorists used behavioralism to challenge the state-centric assumptions of realists, including those of the English school. They also employed it differently in the sense that they were less zealous in regard to quantification (Banks 1984).
The next significant positivist wave hit as détente gave way to a second Cold War, and realism resurged in the form of a structural explanation for the logic of power politics, provided by Kenneth Waltz in his book, *Theory of International Politics* (1979). Waltz’s structural realism, or neorealism as work of this genre also came to be known, represented the high tide of positivism that took hold of the discipline for approximately ten years. While the neoliberal critique continued to flourish, growing out of work on transnationalism, complex interdependence and later regime theory, it was only a mild ontological tweaking of the anarchy problematique; it held that states remained the most significant actors and that power and politics should continue to be the focus of attention in IR, but stressed that a realm of cooperation in the rules, norms, principles and institutions of international politics existed. But, while it echoed the earlier liberal belief in the possibility of international organization, “neoliberalism” did not share their normative concerns, and it cannot be construed as an epistemological challenge to neorealism. Indeed, neoliberal critics applauded structural realism for having put the discipline as a whole on a secure scientific footing, which is a powerful reason why this contemporary expression of pluralism was so out of touch with the interwar pluralists, and did not acknowledge its connection to ideas like those of Dewey.

This degree of epistemological dominance, such that even the challengers of the leading paradigm accepted its epistemological and methodological priorities with only a small qualification of what was to be the subject matter of IR, led to two reactions. First, some got busy generating the empirical data, either to substantiate the generalizable, structural theory of international competition set in motion by Waltz, or to round out that theory, examining how structural competition within anarchy impacted cooperation demonstrated in the system. Second, some desperately sought ways of thinking outside of the prevailing and powerful status quo, often by getting back to political theory and philosophy. Thus, pragmatism’s first significant point of entry into contemporary IR was through Rorty’s critique of the correspondence theory of truth, which was used in attempts to carve out a position beyond positivism in IR (Smith 1996, Cochran 1996, and Puchala 1995). Post-positivism has since gained a foothold, and new methodological avenues are being explored, as are the subjects fit for examination within the discipline. It is in this context that pragmatism is gaining significance for contemporary IR.

*Themes of Pragmatism in Contemporary IR*

“Readers of the contemporary literature in international relations [IR] increasingly find calls for a pragmatic reorientation in theorizing the field” (Kratochwil 2011: 200). Where a survey of the early period of IR yields little mention of American pragmatism, such a survey today produces rather different results. The majority of interventions on pragmatic themes, and the ones that resonate most in the discipline today, are those that aim to shed new light on the epistemological and methodological debates in which IR has been caught up since the 1970s. For example, Friedrich and Kratochwil write that they do not turn to pragmatism to be freed of such considerations; in the face of IR’s failure to secure foundations of knowledge, to say “anything goes” is not an option. Instead, they use pragmatism “as an instrument to go about research with an appropriate degree of epistemological and methodological awareness” (2009: 707). What they value in pragmatism is its recognition that knowledge generation is a social, discursive activity, and that the aim of pragmatist inquiry is to produce useful knowledge. In particular, they believe abduction is a “good bet” as a Pragmatist research methodology for IR, not the only possible one, but the one they
choose to develop. And they are not alone. Others invoke Peirce and abduction as a research methodology with benefits for IR (Rytovuori-Apunen: 2009; Finnemore 2003: 13, Ruggie 1998a: 94), however, Friedrichs, Kratochwil and Rytovuori-Apunen are the first to have provided a thorough engagement with what abduction represents methodologically; that is, the pragmatist philosophy that animates it.\(^{17}\)

Sil and Katzenstein are also of the view that the paradigmatic debates of IR could do with pragmatic interrogation. They advocate an opening out, a breaking of the constraints placed on social scientific inquiry in IR by “paradigm bound” scholarship, and propose that “analytic eclecticism”, inspired by pragmatism, could prove to be fruitful in this respect. They describe as ‘eclectic’:

any approach that seeks to extricate, translate, and selectively integrate analytic elements – concepts, logics, mechanisms, and interpretations - of theories or narrative that have been developed within separate paradigms but that address related aspects of substantive problems that have both scholarly and practical significance (Sil and Katzenstein 2010: 10).

Analytic eclecticism draws on pragmatism in three ways. First, it finds the success of a knowledge claim is in its practical consequences: whether, as Dewey writes, it helps scholars and citizens integrate ‘knowing’ and “doing’.

Secondly, it takes from Rorty the idea that “there are no constraints on inquiry save conversational ones”, and prioritizes inclusive dialogue with all who could be interlocutors. And thirdly, it draws on Mead’s symbolic interactionism for its pragmatist understanding of agency, structure and identity (Sil 2009: 561). Sil and Katzenstein acknowledge that their appropriations may seem crude to those who know the philosophy of pragmatism well, but that the dialogue needs to get started, and once it has, what remains awkward in its appropriations from pragmatism and their implications for IR can be worked out along the way (2010: 47)\(^{18}\).

A survey of pragmatist influences in the contemporary IR field yields much more besides. There are claims to pragmatism’s benefit, and in some cases neo-pragmatism’s (Rorty’s), for the discipline in the following: bridge-building, synthesis and dialogue creation across IR paradigms (Sil and Katzenstein 2010, Hellmann 2003, Checkel 2005, Cochran 2000); in theory cumulation or progress (Isacoff 2005, Chernoff 2004); as an alternative idea of what it means to be a social science (Jackson 2011 and 2010; Cochran 2002b); as a praxis-based philosophy (Friedrich and Kratochwil 2009; Owen 2002 Bohman 2002); as a multiperspectival theory (Bohman 2002); for its invocation of language, metaphor, rhetoric (Sil and Katzenstein 2010; Kornprobst 2009 Cochran 2001b); on ontology (Kurki 2008); on debates about state-personhood (Franke and Roos 2010); and for thinking about foundations for judgment, ethical or otherwise, in areas such as foreign policy making (Aalto 2011; Cochran 2001a), universal human rights (Wheeler and Dunne 1998; Brown 1997), intervention (Bellamy 2002; Wheeler 1997), migrants (Parker and Brassatt 2005); on boundaries (Festenstien 2002); public spheres, global and regional governance (Bray 2010;

\(^{17}\)Peirce is also invoked in another context by Fred Chernoff (2004), who draws upon Peirce’s account of scientific progress to demonstrate that the literature on the democratic peace theory has achieved ‘progress’ of a kind found in the natural sciences.

\(^{18}\)In Sil and Katzenstein (2010: 45-47), the authors offer four broad pragmatist ideas about social inquiry that have influenced their work. The first principle is by and large the same as above. The second, principle is the third in the 2010 version. Mead and symbolic interactionism remain, but another pragmatist principle is added: that knowledge must adapt to novel experiences and changing circumstances.
To what do we owe this rich state of affairs? Pragmatism experienced a revival beginning in the 1980s in the form of the neo-pragmatisms of Richard Bernstein, Richard Rorty, and Hilary Putnam. Rorty’s anti-representational epistemology and idea of cultural critique was an important source of IR’s re-engagement with pragmatism just at the time it was looking for sources of philosophical inspiration, and it stimulated curiosity in the work of the classical pragmatists, especially Dewey, the writer to whom Rorty gave the most credit for influencing his approach to philosophy. This is significant, but so too is the constructivist turn in IR that is often credited for the blossoming of pragmatism in the field (Kratochwil 2011; Widmaier 2004).

Constructivism broke through to become the “third party” in what looked to be only a two-party, positivist system of IR scholarship; a breakthrough confirmed by the inclusion of constructivist thinkers in the 50th anniversary issue of *International Organization* on the topic of “Exploration and Contestation in the Study of World Politics” (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). According to Alexander Wendt, a key constructivist innovator, there are two basic insights behind the constructivist challenge to the “neo-neo” orthodoxy: first, “that the structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces”; and secondly, “that the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature” (1999: 1). Thus, the causal powers attributed to the structure of the international system are not given, as assumed by neo-realists and neo-liberals, but instead, are shaped by the way anarchy is constructed in the social practices that exist between states; the way anarchy constrains is down to how anarchy is construed by state actors within the system. From this beginning, the reconnection with political theory, philosophy and social theory in American IR begins anew. As Wendt writes, the effects of anarchy could be something quite apart from what the anarchy problematique suggests; and manifest as Hobbesian, Lockean or even Kantian cultures (1999: 246-312). In view of our interest in the links between pragmatism and IR, it is significant that Wendt describes his own, highly influential, position – first presented in his often-cited 1992 article, “Anarchy is What States Make of It: the Social Construction of Power Politics”, but significantly elaborated in his book, *Social Theory of International Politics* – as a synthesis of structuration theory and symbolic interactionism, modeled in large part upon the work of George Herbert Mead (Wendt 1999: 143).

It is therefore no surprise that one finds calls for a new “constructive pragmatism”, or “pragmatic constructivism”, to take the discipline beyond its paradigm debates and on towards dialogue, synthesis and progress in our knowledge (Kratochwil 2011; Hellmann 2003; Haas and Haas 2002; Widmaier 2004). However, I would argue that these are unnecessarily conservative estimations of the benefit pragmatism can bring to the discipline. I agree with Rupra Sil, who writes

> [c]onstructivism may be marginally more receptive to aspects of pragmatist thought (for example, Gould and Onuf 2008; Haas and Haas 2008), but most Constructivists in the United States remain ‘conventional’ (Checkel 2007) in the sense that their rejection of the ontologies underlying realism and liberalism has not been accompanied by a fundamental challenge to epistemological and methodological perspectives derived from analytic philosophy (2009: 648).

This might find agreement from IR constructivists of a different stripe, such as those whom John Ruggie describes as aiming “to resist the influence of American social scien-
tific modes of analysis” (1998: 862). There is diversity apparent within constructivism. First, there are those who would be labelled along with Wendt and Ruggie as the mainstream within constructivism and who are interested in causation, albeit of a different, more ideational, kind from what positivists in IR had previously realised. Second, there are those who take interpretation further down and do the “resisting” that Ruggie suggests, who are not interested in a strict idea of social science, whether it be what constructivists like Ruggie, Finnemore, Katzenstein, or Klotz have endorsed as a neo-classical variant; or the naturalistic idea put forward by Wendt and Dessler.

Constructivism has played an important role in providing a point of entry for pragmatism by the simple fact that it stresses the role social interaction plays in making our world, and opens opportunities for seeing different “things” in that world as well as the possibility for changing what we see for the better. However, what it has not gone on to do is the analysis of social values attached to social interaction. For all the interest constructivists have shown in identifying and examining the international norms that impact the social behaviors of states, and more recently the behaviors of a range of other kinds of actors too - intergovernmental and non-governmental actors – the positivist bias of the discipline that has bifurcated empirical from normative lines of inquiry has not been broken, not even within constructivism. And this is another area in which constructivism, and IR more generally, needs pragmatism too.

Evaluating Social Facts in IR

Normative IR theory is largely a product of British IR, and this can in part be attributed to the fact that the ‘behavioural revolution’ that had lasting repercussions for American IR, did not take a solid hold of the British IR community. Where normative and empirical forms of political inquiry had come to be viewed in American IR as separate and markedly different enterprises, with the latter emerging as overwhelmingly dominant, there was no similar decoupling in British IR. The empirical work conducted by writers who established what is known as the ‘English School’, or the international society perspective, was comparative-historical and its interpretive methods were less at variance with normative analysis than American proclivities towards scientific hypothesis-testing. Those associated with the English school, recognizing the mark scientific theories were making upon the discipline, laboured to demonstrate the paucity of empirical work pursued independently of thought about standards for evaluating international political action. Theirs was a ‘classical approach’ as Hedley Bull called it and he distinguished it from the new orthodoxy of the scientific approach in American IR, which held:

assumptions, in particular about the moral simplicity of problems of foreign policy, the existence of ‘solutions’ to these problems, the receptivity of policy-makers to the fruits of research, and the degree of control and manipulation that can be exerted over the whole diplomatic field by any one country. (Bull 1966: 376)

By the late 1970s, British IR scholar James Mayall was writing that “we have seen the collapse of this ‘value-free’ social science and now accept that values have to be brought into IR theory, the question is how” (1978: 122).

One answer to this ‘how’ question was the development of normative IR theory in the UK, in part as a response to perceived deficiencies within English School itself. The English school did not eschew ethical judgement altogether, but it often allowed its historical
analysis of the actually-existing pattern of international order to dominate its views on the reasonableness of different ethical choices, particularly between the intersocietal values of order and justice and often prioritized order in the context of the Cold War. While they saw normative analysis as necessary to inquiry into the nature of international society, the English school’s capacity for normative theorizing was limited by their unwillingness to make judgments when values conflicted, either across moral traditions in Western thought or across plural cultural traditions in diverse political societies. Theirs was a propensity for ‘detachment’ and the less controversial task of laying out a rich panoply of patterns in which humans have reflected on the world and its organization (Wight 1991). The school did not have an answer to the ‘how’ question and avoided moral-philosophical reasoning, prompting the growth of normative IR in the UK. The critique that emerged of the School from normative IR was for its presumption of the good of the society of states because of the order it creates (Frost 1996: 115). Normative IR challenged the School to defend what normative value there is in international society and to think about an alternative organizing concept for the study of IR: what if we put justice rather than order at the centre of our inquiries into world affairs. The difficulty is that the English school lacked a method for doing this kind of inquiry, and constructivists have the same problem today.

Even though Ruggie had the English school in mind when he said that he would not include under his umbrella of “constructivism” those whose analysis failed to fall in line with the aims of American social science, many comparisons have been drawn between the English School and constructivism19. I am going to offer another, a suggestion that has yet to be made: neither of these approaches is self-consciously pragmatist in a methodological sense, but both encounter the same obstacle in their efforts to theorize change in international society, and the impact of change on the international norms which are the bread and butter of what each does. How is change to be directed? What is the moral or social value of norms, and what is lost, what is gained in the course of change? English school and constructivist scholars who are genuinely interested in such questions will have to study norms in the context of their normativity; that is, the processes of valuation that go on in the practices of international society. Both the English school and constructivists should be more interested in how valuation is done. Here is where pragmatism has more to offer than has hitherto been appreciated.

As noted above, one of the lessons that IR scholars have taken from pragmatism is to let methodological pluralism thrive; but this should extend too to the pragmatist research strategies from which we draw. Dewey offers a method of normative social inquiry that brings together empirical and normative lines of inquiry backed by a philosophy of valuation. Abduction is one method to be drawn from pragmatism, and I do not doubt that Friedrichs and Kratochwil are right that it is a “good bet”. Yet, if social scientific knowledge is purposeful, and the value of such knowledge is determined by “how it enables orientation in the social world, including the tractability of relevant social problems” (Friedrichs and Kratochwil 2009: 706), then consideration is essential of the role moral judgment plays not only in the act of seeking knowledge for purposes of orientation, but in thinking about the tractable in world politics and what action might be taken in relation to it. This suggests that valuation

19 Scholars in the UK who have written about the English School’s constructivist credentials include Dunne 1995, 1998; and Buzan 2001. American constructivists who acknowledge early constructivist insights in the work of the English School include: Klotz 1995; Finnemore 1996; Ruggie 1998; Keck and Sikkink 1998. For a view from an Australian who has spent time in both contexts and thought about the synergies of each approach, see Reus-Smit, C. 2002. This engagement has done much to revitalize the English school since the passing of its key members; in fact, a new English School section of the International Studies Association was created in 2003.
too could be an important pragmatist research tool in assisting orientation in the social world. We should not let the idea drop, perhaps out of residues of dichotomous fact/value, empirical/normative thinking, that other avenues of pragmatist research may be worthy of our interest and Dewey’s valuation is one such method. As Peter Manicas wrote in the first volume of the symposia:

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 (Manicas 2011: 16).

For their different reasons, when scholars of the English School, constructivism or any other, even pragmatist-inspired, approach to IR conclude that there is little point in inquiring into the nature of values in international relations, what is good or what is bad, they are missing a key point of Dewey’s philosophy. There is no problem of knowledge in relation to the truth of a value; there is instead, warranted assertability to be found in the clues provided in the particular social values of the communities sharing in a problem, clues which are rendered through a working method of inquiry. The aim of Dewey’s method is formulated simply too: to illuminate what our actually existing purposes are and the obstacles in their way as we work to adapt better to our changing world. As Dewey writes, our ends-in-view are but hypotheses to be tested in present conditions and can alter our ways of dealing with social issues for the better or not (LW 12: 491). The proof, or warranted assertability, is in the doing and in the outcomes of their application helpfully working for those concerned.

Thus, what distinguishes the philosophy of valuation and the method of Deweyan inquiry in IR is its scrutiny of: 1) social values and the reasoning associated with those values; 2) the interrelation of social values with the facts of problems found in international society; and 3) a critical method of intelligence with a view towards uncovering, or constructing where needed, an integrative value for improved problem-solving in the management of international society. Efforts at valuation in future research could add insight into what social values are at play in contemporary international affairs, and how an expansion of value horizons might facilitate the creation of a coherent conceptual framework for articulating common goals within the international practice of issue domains, like nuclear weapons or climate change, where there is clearly an acute problematic situation, but no agreement on what exactly the problem is among the parties who share in the problem.

Conclusion

Since the positivist grip on the discipline of IR has loosened, numerous approaches have found space within which to develop: constructivism, a revitalized English school, and normative approaches drawing upon a range of thinking from classical international political thought to Frankfurt School critical theory, French poststructuralism, feminism, and American pragmatism too. Each of these new approaches shares Dewey’s conviction that social learning can and does take place at the international level in response to changed international conditions. International institutions and international norms have grown more extensive and encompassing in the years since the classical pragmatists were writing. Do international social conditions today reflect what the liberal internationalists aimed to de-
scribe and understand, the possibility of making social institutions better with the ends of individuals in view? Is there scope for thinking about justice as well as anarchy in the study of international relations? On the long view, writers like Osiander (1998) believe the so-called ‘idealists’ performed better at seeing the future of IR than the realists of that first great debate in IR.

It has been the claim of this article, that in the early days of the discipline pragmatism did not really feature, but for Dewey’s indirect contribution to the theory of the state. However, this contribution was not insignificant. It holds many lessons for the pluralisms that were to follow in the ontological sense of what counts for study in the discipline. The shame is the disconnect created by the epistemological proclivities of IR when those new pluralisms were flourishing; there was no hook up to those lessons and so pragmatism’s relevance only really surged when the discipline began to break free from the dominance of positivism. The discipline first turned to pragmatism as a critique of the assumptions of positivism, and to shape its calls for methodological pluralism. A further shame would be to leave it there. There is more that pragmatism has to offer: Dewey’s philosophy of valuation and method of normative social inquiry was the one highlighted here. There may be others. But note that when we look back to the key formative moment of the IR discipline after WWI, and we cannot seem to find pragmatism there, even at a time when its philosophy was ascendant, a new, still plastic discipline was on the rise, and that philosophy was speaking to it, one can only call it a missed opportunity. Now, here comes another opportunity. IR is calling you, the philosophers of pragmatism. Sil and Katzenstein admit that their borrowings from pragmatism are crude and that they will need assistance in its application to analytic eclecticism along the way. The substantive concerns of James and Dewey at least stand as evidence that there is no reason why philosophers should turn away from international problems. Will philosophical pragmatists demonstrate an interest in international relations once again?

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20 For example, see Long 1995: 321-322.


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Abstract. In this article I present two theories of historical inquiry, which I characterize as conservative and pragmatic. I argue that these two views of history, John Dewey’s and Hans Georg Gadamer’s, provide an excluded middle between the extremes of positivism and relativism. They are pragmatic insofar as they accept the anti-foundationalist critique of positivism; they are conservative insofar as they refuse to reduce historical inquiry to mere discourse or narrative. Both focus on the situatedness of historical inquiry, paying special attention to the culturally emergent conceptual schemes and prejudices of the historian, but they constrain historical inquiry by providing an improved understanding of the relationship between the problems which give rise to our inquiries and the tools which help resolve them. Dewey, in the key of naturalism, and Gadamer, in the key of phenomenology, provide conservative and pragmatic philosophies of historical inquiry, which refuse to pose as science, but do not fall into narrative fiction. Additionally, their approaches to historical inquiry share a concern for the practical application of the study of history. In this concern for application, both Dewey and Gadamer provide a theory of historical inquiry consonant with a conservative and pragmatic judicial theory, which rejects both the formalism of legal positivism and the model of unconstrained judicial radicalism.

Introduction

Of particular interest to the relationship between pragmatism and the social science of history is the parallel relationship of the social sciences to the humanities. History departments do not have a singular vision of where their discipline lies upon the long spectrum of methods and self-images from the “soft” narrative and story-telling to the “hard” scientific study of history. Even within departments there are debates about whether history should count as a social science distribution requirement or a humanities distribution requirement. Therefore, we need to look at some conceptual options for how to think about historical inquiry. That is, presenting a genesis of the conceptual options will give us a lay of the land, enabling us to see the particular contributions of classical American pragmatism to the method of historical inquiry.

Between Martin Heidegger signaling the end of metaphysics (Heidegger 1927) and Jean-François Lyotard characterizing our postmodern condition, (Lyotard 1979) the social sciences faced a crisis. Historicists of a postmodern hue, including but not limited to Lyotard, responded to the Marxist Hegelian conception of history as a continuous series of well-defined social worlds and showed that universalized philosophies of history were in fact contingent products of socialization and cultural circumstance. This critical theme registered as a rejection of any foundational meta-narrative structure meant to maintain continuity throughout history. The American neo-pragmatist Richard Rorty registered an attack on any philosophy attempting to mirror nature or cut it “at the joints,” by positing an incog-

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nizable substructure—from “God” to “substance,” “matter,” “energy,” and “atoms”—to secure its continuity and observability (Rorty 1985: 3).

With philosophy qua metaphysics toppled, with all of its meta-narratives undermined, on what ground could the social scientist stand to investigate human relations, social worlds, and institutions? Worse still, how could historians understand the transformation of the same over time? Those engaged in the scientific study of history could either retreat to the safe and anticeptic, but increasingly questioned, model of positivism or face the postmodern abyss, eschew the gold standards of objectivity and truth, and reduce history to narrative and discourse alone.

With the crisis in view, we are able to see the first of the conceptual options for the study of history, historical positivism, which took a certain conceptual model of the natural sciences as its guide. The next, which reacted most radically to the latter, is historical relativism. If the former is too zealous in its quest for certainty, too reliant on a correspondence theory of truth, and too quick to efface the subjectivity of the historian in her quest for certainty, the latter gives up too much, reduces history to narrative and lacks the denotative reference needed to use historical knowledge to advance reforms and solve problems. In short, one poses as science and the other gives in to fiction.

The question for the pragmatist is always the same, what middle has been excluded when the crisis qua dilemma is posed? Hypothesizing the prospect for a conservative and pragmatic philosophy of history demands that we reject the dilemma as false. Our task then is to take the critical moments of one model seriously—we must read Richard Rorty’s seductive critique of foundationalism and the correspondence theory of truth charitably. But in order to conserve the value of the social science of history, we need to retreat to classical, not neo, pragmatism, paying special attention to John Dewey’s theory of inquiry and the place of historical judgment therein. In the same way that the negative and critical valence of Rorty’s work has antecedents and correlatives on the European Continent, Dewey’s reconstruction of history qua inquiry has as its ally on the continent Hans Georg Gadamer.

Both of these figures, Gadamer explicitly, and Dewey in a parallel context, respond to what Edmund Husserl referred to a “crisis of the sciences” (Husserl 1970 [1937]). Because the natural sciences, influenced by positivism, had so encroached on the social sciences, they were in need of a reconstruction of their method and self-image. Gadamer and Dewey provide us with such a reconstruction.

As we will see, those thinkers who might fall under the umbrella of pragmatism diverge from one another on the nature of historical inquiry as much as some of them diverge from those outside the umbrella. But the scholarly game of determining who is inside and who is outside of club pragmatism is not the best way to spend our energy. Thus, one premise in my present inquiry is that pragmatism is a loose constellation of those thinkers sharing a certain attunements and methods of inquiry. As we will see, the mood common among these figures includes those not ordinarily thought of as in the club. But a pragmatic approach to inquiry is guided by the norm of openness; therefore, I ask my audience to read pragmatically, to allow my denotative depiction of pragmatism to speak for itself, and not to be distracted if my umbrella is cast wide enough to include a tradition from the European Continent—phenomenology.

Gadamer gives us a philosophy of history which is pragmatic in that it refuses to efface the subjectivity of the historian in terms of her purposes, guiding interests, and conceptual schemes. Yet Gadamer’s philosophy of history is conservative because it refuses to let the subjectivity of the historian become the whole of history. It tills and harvests the soil of history in the admission that the field of potential data cannot be reduced to the engines of its
conceptual combine. Thus, there is always a limit to the narratives it tells and always denotive reference points which can restrict its excesses. Much as the blades of the combine’s thrasher jam when they encounter a stubborn rock in the soil, the historian’s ability to spin a tale may be resisted by the text she interprets, according to Gadamer.

An understanding of history, reconstructed from John Dewey’s *Logic: A Theory of Inquiry*, is one which views discourse as a function of inquiry, not the other way around (Dewey 1938). Dewey views inquiry as the response to the precarious and problematic character of our biological and cultural environments. Language is an inherited set of tools to help us navigate our inquiries. History *qua* inquiry views the study of history as a response to a problematic situation and an effort to resolve it. For Dewey, historical inquiries are contextually situated in their theoretical frameworks and limited by their perspectives, but historical propositions do not collapse into mere discourse. Dewey’s philosophy of history as inquiry avoids the Rortyan reduction and the postmodern abyss, while conserving the ability of inquiry in the social sciences to resolve problems.

Those following the approach of both Gadamer and Dewey accept an anti-foundational approach to social scientific inquiry, while constraining it with an improved understanding of the relationship between the problems which give rise to our inquiries and the tools which help resolve them. Additionally, their approaches to historical inquiry share a concern for the *practical application* of the study of history. Both see historical understanding registering as a norm of application. Further, both see that norm guiding the practice of judicial determinations in the court of law, and here we can further see their shared pragmatic sensibility. If we are to conserve the ability of inquiry in the social sciences to resolve problems, we might see how both Dewey and Gadamer give space for historical inquiry to help a judge resolve problems demanding historical understanding. In doing so, Dewey and Gadamer provide a theory of historical inquiry consonant with a conservative and pragmatic judicial theory.

If my umbrella of conservative and pragmatic approaches to historical inquiry seems as if it is cast too wide, including a phenomenologist and a naturalist under its shade, I ask my readers to read what follows as hopeful pragmatists, searching for the beneficial similarities between Gadamer and Dewey. They play the same theme, perhaps in different keys. But be sure, whether or not to sponsor Gadamer as a club member is not my concern.

*Foundations for Science*

Since the time of René Descartes, the aspiration of philosophy was to establish knowledge claims with such certainty as to ground the new science of Galileo and Newton on a firm foundation. René Descartes posited the *cogito*, a selfsame thinking substance, whose security in its reason provided a foundational perspective from which to observe the natural world and articulate its workings scientifically. Immanuel Kant figured that the only way we could make any sense of the world was if all of our judgments about it were accompanied by an “I” which does all the thinking, this the transcendental and synthetic unity of apperception, an ego which necessarily accompanied all of our thoughts. Thus, the cogito or the transcendental ego could be seen as continuous foundations for the possibility of securing scientific claims.

But the most mature extension of this pursuit and quest for scientific certainty came with the “Vienna Circle” logical positivists. Inspired by the realists Bertrand Russell and G.E. Moore, these philosophers, including Rudolph Carnap, preoccupied with theoretical physics and symbolic logic, concerned themselves primarily with analysis and clarification.
of meaning with the primary goal of unifying the sciences and providing an account of their operation (West 1989). The enterprise of logical positivism assumed a form of sentential atomism, which correlated isolated sentences with their empirical confirmation by science or with their logical necessity. The truth value of the former, synthetic propositions was judged by the court of empirical observation and the scientific method; the truth value of the latter, analytic statements was judged by the court of formal logic. Sentences regarding ethics, art, or religion, corresponded to what looked like the fictional trash-heap of emotion.

The logical positivists reduced experience, (shot through with affectivity and messiness), to sense data. This reduction translated sentences about physical objects into sentences about actual and possible sensations. The positivists attempt to unify the sciences resulted in a diremption of the linguistic, analytic, and theoretical from the empirical, synthetic, and observable (West 1989).

Despite the fact that the positivists’ description of the physical and natural sciences was inaccurate, the social sciences, in an attempt to differentiate themselves from philosophy and develop their own “scientific” self-image, transformed the logical positivists’ model of science into a reality by their practice of investigating social, cultural, and historical phenomena under the model of positivism (Packer 2011). Making positivism a reality by using its model in historical inquiry participated in what Husserl called the crisis of the sciences.

By treating the social spheres they investigated as mathematizable and quantifiable, the social scientist, qua positivist, lost contact with “original human consciousness,” and elevated one “attitude toward objects” as “primary and others are ignored and put into abeyance” (Kegley 1978: 187).

We might imagine what “historical positivism” would look like. The historical positivist would state that there is a definite historical fact of the matter that resists revision. The access we have to this fact is more or less an inductive method. The historian culls the documents, which have survived into the present and investigates them with an aim to abstract the general trends which emerge. The fact of the matter becomes what it is by virtue of the number of survivals which speak to it. Borrowing from the positive sciences, the historical positivist avoids lazy induction and seeks out potential documents which might serve as methodological controls on a given question. The positivist tends to use the language of sociology, of necessary and sufficient contributing factors, avoiding the monolithic application of causality in historical relationships except where their claims are most excessive. But the positivist does place a gold standard on quantifiable data and place less emphasis on cryptic survivals which demand fallible interpretation. The elevation of quantifiability to a gold standard runs parallel to the attempt to ignore the fact that such a standard is itself an inherited, contingent historical artifact, and can impose itself on historical data, not allowing other data to speak. History of this sort resists revision insofar as new, emergent attitudes, (the culturally informed subjectivity of the historian) are irrelevant to the way the data speak to the facts. History of this sort can be advanced, but only by the emergence of new data, amenable to judgment by the gold standard, which problematize previous conclusions. Historical positivism advances as science does, with better techniques of uncovering data and with more data to speak for itself. Its normative touchstone is the assurance of its objectivity. Its enemy is subjective excess and reinterpretation devoid of new data. But as we will see its quest for certainty effaces the historian’s subjectivity, including the culturally emergent conceptual schemes she uses, from the process of historical inquiry.

But the quest for certainty and objectivity in the social science of history need not abide by all of the tenets of the aforementioned hypothetical model. The attempt to secure natural science upon a firm foundation, as with Kant and the logical positivists, runs parallel to ac-
tual attempts to conduct historical inquiry upon foundational premises. Consider the project of Wilhelm Dilthey, who sought out “a philosophical grounding for historical knowledge” (Gadamer 2004: 215). If Kant had tried to discover how nature could be understood through mathematical constructs, Dilthey, in an attempt to treat experience as an historical science, drew a parallel between the coherence and significance found in the subjective experience of an individual and the coherence of meaning found in the object of historical inquiry. Despite the fact that Dilthey himself knew that the subject of historical inquiry was herself conditioned and contingent, he still sought to establish “knowledge of what was historically conditioned as an achievement of objective science” (Gadamer 2004: 225). Dilthey’s attempt to harmonize the human sciences’ mode of knowledge with the natural sciences’ result-oriented criteria led him to demand the same type of objectivity and method as in the natural sciences, but this was only possible if he “neglected the essential historicity of the human sciences” (Gadamer 2004: 225, Serequeberhan, 1987: 50). What I will show below is that the type of objectivity Dilthey had hoped for is not suitable to the social science of history.

Reading Rorty: The Negative Valence of Pragmatism

The undermining of the project of logical positivism is apiece with the undermining of historical inquiry guided by its foundational premises. A student of Carnap’s, W.V.O. Quine, undermined this project of logical positivism from within. In “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” Quine showed that the web of verification about the meaning of observable phenomena was not so thin as to correspond to the truth-value of single sentences (Quine 1951). Instead the web needed to be cast wider to include entire theories and communities of language users. Nor could each synthetic statement improve its likelihood of truth by the occurrence of a specific set of sensory events. In these ways, Quine showed that the verification theory of meaning and the reductionism on which it is founded, atomized human experience to such a degree that it ignored the corporate and communal character of knowledge, and the communal origins of its use (Quine 1951). Further, Quine’s critique showed just how theory-laden all observation is because the observer brings with her the language of her community and the conceptual schemes and inherent prejudices built therein.

But the most revolutionary critique of this shortcoming in academic philosophy in the twentieth century was Richard Rorty’s Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature. In it, Rorty employs, among other tools, Quine’s holism and Dewey’s naturalism to topple the presumption that Nature speaks the language of science, calling for an end of philosophy’s task of mirroring nature in mental representation and language. Rorty, by reference to Quine, showed that observation was so theory-laden that truth claims about the world by appeal to a world were bound to be circular. As Cornel West described Quine’s position, “We cannot isolate ‘the world’ from theories of the world, then compare these theories of the world with a theory-free world. We cannot compare theories with anything that is not a product of another theory” (West 1989: 197). Rorty, a thoroughgoing anti-realist, thinks there is a world out there, but that it does not speak the language which we create in trying to navigate it. Rorty described his rejection of the correspondence theory of truth, (the mirroring of reality in the mind or in language), when he wrote:

The pragmatists conclude that the intuition that truth is correspondence should be extirpated rather than explicated. On this view, the notion of reality as having a “nature” to
which it is our duty to correspond is simply one more variant of the notion that the gods can be placated by chanting the right words. The notion that some one among the languages mankind has used to deal with the universe is the one the universe prefers—the one which cuts things at the joints—was a pretty conceit. But by now it has become too shop-worn to serve any purpose (Rorty 1985: 3).

Rorty views language, including narrative and social scientific vocabularies—not as representing and corresponding to an external reality—but as thoroughly instrumental. These vocabularies are tools we use to solve problems and make the world as we hope it will be, but they are historically emergent and thus contingent. In *Irony, Contingency and Solidarity*, Rorty tells us how the “historicist turn,” (his phrase for the contributions of Hegel, Marx, and Darwin), helped the intellectual community get beyond a confrontation between those, like Plato, who thought that private psychology and public justice were internally related, and those like Nietzsche, who thought that conceptions of public justice were only artifices of private wills to power (Rorty 1989). Rorty paints Nietzsche as an anti-Enlightenment thinker, but one who exhibits all of the tendencies of the Enlightenment, such as universalizing some particular human tendency, (for Nietzsche the will to power), as most fundamental, and therefore one who fails to get beyond metaphysics as he had hoped. According to Rorty, historicists showed that any of these formerly universalized tendencies were contingent products of socialization and cultural circumstance (Rorty 1989: viii).

Rorty’s work, building on the conclusions he draws in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, argues against the project of unifying public and private strivings in theory and for a program sufficiently ironist, historicist, and nominalist (Rorty 1989: xv). The liberal ironist “faces up to the contingency of his or her most central beliefs—someone sufficiently historicist and nominalist to have abandoned the idea that those central beliefs and desires refer back to something beyond the reach of time and chance” (Rorty 1989: xv). The Rortyan ironist understands that her own driving beliefs are historically contingent and that they are merely nominal, not referring or participating in any conceptual reality; however, the ironist strives to achieve those beliefs, whether private, aesthetic self-creations, or calls to public solidarity and mutual recognition, in spite of their nominalism and lack of metaphysical or theological foundation (Rorty: xv).

The lynchpin holding together Rorty’s program is the contingency of language. Rorty rejects the “old” idea that any of our chosen “vocabularies,” whether poetic or scientific, can tap into or correspond to any metaphysical or noumenal in-itself. We cannot mirror nature and should give up such a quest (Rorty 1989: 4). For Rorty, nature does not speak, only we do, and all metaphysics, even that which invests history into it, as Hegel’s did, is really only a description of various radical redescriptions (which Hegel had interpreted as the movement of Spirit through history) (Rorty 1989: 7). According to Rorty, the positivists view their language, and therefore their historical propositions, “as gradually shaping [themselves] around the contours of the physical world,” where “Romantic history of culture sees language as gradually bringing Spirit to self-consciousness” (Rorty 1989: 19). Rorty thinks that philosophy of language, and therefore philosophy of history, blindly evolve according to the needs to the linguistic community.

**Historical Relativism**

But Rorty’s critique of foundationalism and correspondence theory of truth, in its underlining of attempts to ground the sciences and achieve objectivity in the human sciences,
ends up presenting only a polar opposite approach to the philosophy of history—relativism. The proponent of this postmodern view of history sees the inevitable reduction of historical narratives to sheer interests in the present. For Rorty we can write history as adaptation to present circumstances and needs by spinning stories whose vocabulary does not shape itself around the contours of any objective reality, but which adapts blindly to the needs of the historian. For Rorty, history as narrative discourse is just descriptive novelty at our service.

Rorty’s philosophy of language is pragmatic, in that it builds on Dewey’s philosophy of language to a certain extent, viewing language as instrumental and evolutionary. However, the question which must be posed is, how does it stand with respect to the relationship between the purpose of historical inquiry and the tool of propositions which function historically? Language is a tool, and a language of scientific mechanism, not metaphorical flight, suits our purposes better when we want to engineer a machine or do biochemistry. However, historical propositions solve problems too. How do the problems stand in relation to the tools which help resolve them? If all linguistic propositions, situated within a given vocabulary, are redescriptions, then from what perspective do we judge which redescriptions better resolve the problem which led to our historical inquiry? That perspective need not be metaphysically foundational; it would be more impoverished to think itself so—which is why we need to read Rorty’s anti-foundationalism charitably. But historical inquiry should be clear about the genesis of its own scheme of appropriation and the method of its employment. The more these are opaque to the analysis, the worse off history is, not ontologically, but functionally. Historical knowledge is not simply a feature of reflection, and the process of selecting data for historical inquiry cannot be completed in total each time it is exerted. Instead, each historian provides restraint and resistance to all others, as do the texts they interpret. The field of potential data for historical investigation can be resistant to the concepts used to select and interpret it, and the community of inquiry converges on a more functionally correct history by their redescriptions. Their inquiries are contextually situated in their theoretical frameworks and limited by their perspectives, but they cannot reduce their field of research to that framework without collapsing their own historical propositions into mere discourse. Rorty sees inquiry as a linguistic expression of discourse, but the classical pragmatists see this the other way around—discourse is only a part of inquiry, not its entirety (Hickman 2007: 51).

If we examine the sheer interest driving the relativist’s use of history, we find those interests embedded in some customary practice, governed by a practical norm concerning the practical outcome of the interest and the articulation of that interest as conceptually understood. Being intellectually honest about the use of history in a thorough, inclusive, coherent way does not only abide by the intellectual norm of formal self-consistency, it abides by the pragmatic norm of bringing theory and practice closer together. Getting history more correct does too. The postmodernist philosopher of history can only offer these discursive descriptions and revisions, and these lack the potential to provide platforms of restraint and denotative reference (Hickman 2007: 51). Pragmatism provides these stable platforms while accepting anti-foundationalism.

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1 Postmodernist and relativist history, in its most excessive incarnations, results only in “expressions of an infinitely self-reflexive nexus of literary descriptions and redescriptions which are tantamount to interminable discursive flights that do not offer the possibility of firm, behavioral, referential perches,” as Larry Hickman put it (Hickman, 2007: 51). Rorty raises the relativism of infinite interpretability and redemption to an absolute of its own, the same way Nietzsche raised anti-reason to one.
The answer to the relativist, including Rorty, is that some norm will drive historical inquiry, and the consequence of separating the intellectual norm of inquiry from the embedded norms of praxis is unpragmatic, leading to a greater separation between theory and practice. That is, the intellectual norms of dealing with history pragmatically, including honesty, inclusion, thoroughness, skeptical reserve, and a melioristic faith, are kinds of embedded norms of praxis. Thinking is an activity, and doing this well is governed by norms which are continuous with ethical norms guiding other types of activities. Thomas Grey provides a reminder of this insight: “Thought always comes embodied in practices—culturally, embedded habits and patterns of expectation, behavior and response” (Grey 1991: 9, 12). The norms governing our habits and patterns of thought do not allow historical inquiry to be reduced to narrative, as Rorty would have it.

I propose that we take the negative and critical valence of Rorty’s postmodern view of history seriously without reducing historical inquiry to the subjectivity of the historian or her contingent cultural schemes of appropriation, (and that includes the schemes of the positivists). We can reject the need for a metaphysical foundational perspective and view language as thoroughly instrumental and evolutionary, while not reducing historical inquiry to discursive flight. As we will see, classical pragmatism retains the negative and critical moments of postmodernism, resisting hasty universalism, foundationalism, and naive correspondence theories of truth. But the classical pragmatists want their historical inquiries to do more than just redescribe. Classical pragmatists find that while some concepts, such as “the individual,” whose ontological security had been deconstructed by a variety of postmodern critiques, are useful outcomes of situated historical inquiries and can be used as platforms in future inquiries, as long as their use is sensitive to the context of the involved situation of the future inquiry.

Dewey’s Theory of Historical Inquiry in the Key of Naturalism

Dewey embedded his discussion of the nature of historical judgments within his broader examination of the pattern of inquiry. Dewey was working against several mistakes in the philosophy of logic, which treat logic as either merely dependent upon subjective and mentalistic states and processes, as mere copies of antecedent empirical materials, or as originating outside experience from an a priori or transcendental source (Dewey 1938). Dewey identifies logic with methodology, the theory of inquiry, of which the guiding principles and criteria emerge empirically but have rational standing as affairs of relations of means to consequences. This logic is progressive: logical forms read off from sciences no longer respected by the community of inquiry do not provide coherent accounts of existing scientific methods, and as such, demand revision. The subject-matter of logic is determined operationally. It inquires into both the materials of experimental observation and the symbols which direct reflection on those materials. Furthermore, the latter element in the operation of the logic is delineated by reference to the existential conditions and consequences of the former. But logic is naturalistic: Dewey postulates that the biological and cultural existential matrices of inquiry are continuous with the matrix in which inquiry is formal, rational, and takes its own symbols and language as its subject matter. Dewey does not dichotomize realms of inquiries; instead they lie on a spectrum from the problematic situations of the live creature, to common sense, to controlled scientific investigation, to inquiry directed at its own methodology. Although logic is naturalistic, it is a social discipline, conditioned by the natural, communal, and linguistic interactions in of those in community with each other. The logical forms are postulates of inquiry made of and for inquiry as formulations of con-

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ditions to be tested by further inquiries until they yield warranted assertibility, (Dewey’s fallible replacement for truth). They are not the ultimate a priori grounds or transcendental conditions for possible inquiry yielded by intuition or pure reason. Yet logic is autonomous. It is a circular process because, as inquiry into inquiry, it only depends on that which is connected to inquiry and thereby rules out the importation of metaphysical or epistemological presuppositions, (such as the self-same cogito) “shoved under inquiry as its foundation” (LW 12: 28).

Inquiry follows a pattern, and as we will see below, historical inquiry is no exception. The antecedent condition of inquiry is an indeterminate situation, which is permeated and defined by its particular doubts, questions, uncertainties, and discomforts. Once this precarious situation is subjected to inquiry, it is constituted as a problematic situation. This is a step in inquiry as there has been movement from complete indeterminacy to the identification of the constituents and terms of a given situation, pointing to possible solutions. Reasoning ensues as to direct existential operations by an idea in order to terminate in a resolution by rearranging the conditions of indeterminacy toward settlement and unification.

Dewey frequently uses the example of a trial-at-law to depict both the nature of the pattern of inquiry and to explain denotatively the nature of a judgment. The trial is analogous to a problematic situation, which requires resolution. The disagreement and conflict regarding the significance of what happened led to the uncertainty and dispute in the case. Dewey writes, “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: 124). The judgment is the outcome of inquiry patterned above. The rules of the judicial system fix the significance, relevance, and materiality of the facts produced as evidence. But the quality of the situation, civil or criminal for instance, determines those rules to a certain extent. The rules of the system, therefore, are analogous to the conceptual structures of inquiry brought to bear on a problematic situation. The past bears on the process of inquiry by providing the standards and rules applicable to various kinds of cases. Dewey summarizes by stating: “The theoretical ideal sought to guide judicial deliberation is a network of relations and procedures which express the closest possible correspondence between facts and legal meanings that give them their significance” (LW 12: 124). The consequences of the decision are the effects of the disposition of the originally indeterminate case, and the problematic situation is resolved by being directed as future activities. Dewey’s view of historical inquiry is more conservative than Rorty’s, in that it maintains a continuity between the purpose of the need for inquiry and the resolution to the indeterminacy which gave rise to the inquiry, Dewey answers the more relevant question of what type of historical analysis can contribute to the resolution of a more specific, novel, and indeterminate case. The pragmatic turn in philosophy generally evades the attempt to achieve exact correspondence with truths antecedent to inquiry—the dream of positivism’s quest for certainty—in favor of the project of describing and reflecting on experience in order to generate concepts evaluated by their social consequences. Rorty’s view of history is pragmatic in just this sense.

But Dewey, although representative of this turn in philosophy, investigates the grounds upon which some historical judgments are made more credible than others. But this was not an attempt to recreate a map of past events on a one-to-one scale, as the positivist would suggest as an aim. Rather, Dewey sought to understand the nature of historical judgments with regard to “the relation of propositions about an extensive past durational sequence to propositions about the present and future” (LW 12: 231). Thus, the relation among these propositions concerns their credibility, relevance, criterion for selection, and multivalent
temporal structure. Historical analysis, like inquiries into contemporary physical situations, demand a search for relevant data, criteria for selection formed as conceptual principles for determining the relevance of the data, and systematic conceptions working to arrange the selected data. When historical analysis observes and sorts the data and confirms it as authentic data, the result is propositions about facts which exist in the present, serving as the material for historical inference and reconstruction. These propositions are relevant only in relation to the problem which demanded their search and evaluation, and as such, they are responses to a problematic situation. The historical analysis evaluates and selects these propositions, and not others, based on the conceptual subject-matter with which it operates. But this conceptual subject-matter is too often opaque to the analysis and works as a tacit presupposition. Perhaps in the quest to avoid mere subjectivity, the historian does not reflect upon the problem which demanded the analysis or the conceptual subject-matter which aids the evaluation and interpretation of the relevant propositions—this, the problem of objectivity in the social sciences Gadamer addresses. Thus, the pursuit of objectivity in historical analysis renders it culturally subjective, and the historical sense is susceptible to Rorty’s critique of positivism and foundationalism.

Dewey reminds us that the conceptual material employed in writing history is that of the period in which it is written. The more transparent this is made during the analysis the more likely the historian is to abstract the conceptual schemes which a given culture under historical analysis brings to the selection of relevant data left available to the present historian as artifacts. In this sense, history is of the present and of that which is judged significant by the present cultural milieu. The more pressing concerns of the day, whether economic or political, color and direct the investigations into the past, just as the record of rainfall in an ancient civilization brings to light its importance to their then-present situation. Furthermore, the naïve assumption that history is of the past, and had by direct access to history books, is a logical impossibility since “the past is a past-of-the-present, and the present is the past-of-a-future-living present” (LW 12: 237). Past events register as relevant because they evince changes, and those changes can only be made evident from the perspective of a given purpose of an inquiry. History must always be rewritten given these temporal and logical observations. Additionally, cries against revisionist history (as disruptions of the settled facts) are as naïve as the view of history as directly accessible via history books. The clarification of these subtleties, including the observation that the current writing of history becomes relevant data for selection by future historians, renders historical analysis more humble, fallible, and self-transparent. And these traits, as we will see, could serve the judge doing legal history in an effort to resolve the problematic case at hand.

Dewey’s philosophical reflections on historical methodology, which embed historical analysis into a discussion of logic and inquiry, split the difference between the naiveté of positivism and the excesses of postmodernism and Rortyan relativism at the other extreme. His philosophy of history avoids nominalism and the pitfalls both historical positivism and historical relativism. Concerning the latter, historical knowledge is not simply a feature of reflection, which, with its dialectical and self-undermining structure and genesis, can undermine praxis. Nor can the act of selecting data for historical investigation exhaust the data investigated. The field of potential data for historical investigation is independent of the concepts used to select any given data. While all inquiry is contextually situated in a theoretical framework, conceptual scheme, and perspective, reducing the field of data to the scheme chosen turns the results of inquiry into mere discourse and dialectic. But as Larry Hickman points out, for Dewey, discourse is a phase of inquiry, not the other way around. Dewey resists the “infinitely self-reflexive nexus of literary descriptions” of postmodernist
history as “divisive relativism” in favor of “the denotative method,” which always returns his deliberations to the “pushes and pulls of existential affairs” (Hickman 2007: 21). Dewey writes:

Intelligent understanding of past history is to some extent a lever for moving the present into a certain kind of future. No historic present is mere redistribution, by means of permutations and combinations, of the elements of the past. Men are engaged neither in mechanical transposition of the conditions they have inherited, nor yet in simply preparing for something to come after. They have their own problems to solve; their own adaptations to make. They face the future, but for the sake of the present, not of the future. In using what has come to them as an inheritance from the past they are compelled to modify it to meet their own needs, and this process creates a new present in which the process will continue. History cannot escape its own process. It will, therefore, always be rewritten. As the new present arises, the past is the past of a different present. Judgment in which emphasis falls upon the historic or temporal phase of redetermination of unsettled situations is thus a culminating evidence that judgment is not a bare enunciation of what already exists but is itself an existential requalification (LW 12: 238).

In summary, the writing of history is an inquiry responding to a problematic situation, whose resolution is a judgment based upon the facts which present themselves to us in the present. History is of the present and is inferential. In history qua inquiry, we see that all history proceeds from a certain set of present interests, which directs the study. For Dewey, clarifying these interests and their accompanying biases genetically and methodologically makes for good history. Genetically, we need to understand how our social customs and individual habits give rise to the values which direct our inquiry. Methodologically, we need to show how those values give us our conceptual schemes of inquiry and render some facts relevant and amenable to those conceptual schemes (Dewey 1925; Auxier 1990).

**Gadamer’s Theory of Historical Inquiry in the Key of Phenomenology**

John Dewey is not the only representative figure of this philosophy of history. His philosophy of historical judgment is not merely a product of turning the inquiry crank according to the pattern he laid out and applying the crank to historical data. Rather, other philosophers from disparate traditions have arrived at similar, pragmatic conclusions regarding the nature of historical inquiry. What we will see in Gadamer’s view of history, building on the tradition of phenomenology, is an explication of the role of prejudice in making historical judgment. Gadamer eludes Rorty’s relativism, while admitting the role of subjectivity in historical analysis, but in a mediated, constrained way.

The search for a philosophy of historical inquiry which rejects, alongside Rorty, a foundational perspective from which to conduct historical inquiry in a quest for a certainty, brings us to Gadamer, who represents another conservative and pragmatic view of historical inquiry. Gadamer’s method emerges from the phenomenological tradition initiated by Edmund Husserl, and continued in phenomenological ontology by Martin Heidegger. The two great movements which grew out of Heidegger’s *Being and Time* were deconstruction and hermeneutics. The former, motivated by Heidegger’s call for the destruction of Western metaphysics, gave rise to many figures, such as Foucault and Derrida, but also Rorty. Gadamer, as a branch of this latter tradition of hermeneutics, represents a method constrained by conservative and pragmatic norms of inquiry, which resist the infinite interpretation of
the postmodern philosophers either doing deconstruction in literary criticism or, alongside Rorty, merely undermining meta-narratives meant to provide history with continuity.

Gadamer’s inheritance of Husserl and Heidegger is complex. Husserl gave his philosophical progeny several persisting insights. First, Husserl refocused the inquiry away from the what of givenness to the how of givenness. Too many hypothetical constructions and naturalistic assumptions corrupted the purity of the former mode of investigation, according to Husserl. Husserl’s quest to rid logic of its psychologistic tendencies eventually led him to his phenomenological reduction and epoché (Husserl 1913). Here, he could give a description of experience uninhibited by either the natural attitude or any naturalistic concepts. The importance of this for our purposes is that such rigorous attention to the mode of givenness demanded that explanatory devices emerge from a radically empirical description of the modes of givenness, and this resisted the importation of concepts outside of or antecedent to such contextual and modal descriptions. Here we see the skeptical warning against a failure to abide by this procedure. For Husserl the constant danger, of allowing our aesthetic and moral experience to be reduced to the modes of quantification and efficient causation evoked as naturalistic gold standard, signaled a crisis of the sciences. As a positive contribution to this constant threat, Husserl gave phenomenological description of both the constitution of natural, psychic, and spiritual regions of experience (in Ideals II) (Husserl 1952) and the constitution of the laws of logic and reason in the phenomenological transcendental aesthetic (in Analysis of Active and Passive Synthesis) (Husserl 2001 [1929]). The former asked that concepts constituted in different modes of experience be applied to their appropriate region, preventing the crisis, while the latter gave an experiential origin to the original sense-giving sources grounding and accomplishing scientific knowledge. This latter description was in an effort to illuminate, animate, and integrate the sciences into “the spiritual nexus of humanity” (Husserl 2001: 5).

Pragmatism worked to advance the same effort. Dewey warned against the philosopher’s fallacy, of taking the conceptual and abstract products of inquiry and treating them as inhering in the indeterminate experience which gave rise to need for inquiry or as easily exportable to disparate contexts of inquiry. These efforts in phenomenology and pragmatism are normative throughout and they warn against the tendencies which Husserl referred to as the crisis.

Husserl characterized our experience of time as a synthesis of retentions and protensions. In retention we carry with us our just-past without actively presenting it to ourselves as in memory. In protention we tacitly anticipate our near-futures by expecting that our ex-

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2 That Husserl wrote with naturalism in the background as a tacit or explicit opponent should not prevent the building of any bridges between phenomenology and pragmatism. Dewey was a naturalist, but he worked with a method of non-reductive empiricism, which refused to reduce experience to sensation, as some British empiricists and the positivists did. See John Dewey, “The Concept of the Reflex Arc in Psychology,” (Dewey 1896). Further, Dewey offered the postulate that “things—anything and everything— […] are what they are experienced as” (Dewey 1905). His naturalism was radically empirical, inspired in part by William James, of whom Husserl was another inspired reader. His turn to view things as they are experienced can be described according to the phenomenological catch phrase, “to the things themselves.” Dewey, too, was looking at the how of givenness, although never articulating any explicit epoché, as Peirce, a fellow pragmatist, did, in his description of presentness when he wrote: “The first and foremost is that rare faculty, the faculty of seeing what stares one in the face, just as it presents itself, unplaced by any interpretation, unsophisticated by any allowance for this or for that supposed modifying circumstance. This is the faculty of the artist who sees for example the apparent colors of nature as they appear” (Peirce 1958-1966, 5: 1-42). Here, Peirce, the founder of American pragmatism, “bracket interpretation” and “modifying circumstances.” Such was Dewey’s task in his postulate of immediate empiricism (Dewey 1905). For even more insight into the historical connections between pragmatism and phenomenology, see Bell, J. M., (2011). Husserl advised a dissertation on Royce by Winthrop Bell, and Husserl was therefore well aware of Royce’s pragmatic idealism.
experience conforms to that which we have habituated in passive synthesis. Our anticipations of concordance, based on certain retentions, unfold against an indeterminate horizon of possibility. But we appropriate them for our pre-understanding of future experience. Our pre-understanding is the experiential substratum for the understanding which predicates our active characterizations of experience. We can confirm experience as concordant, discordant, fulfilled, or unfulfilled, and these judgments are based on a more primordial pre-understanding of experience. Husserl’s expression for the pregivenness of objects of the understanding was vorgegebenheit (Husserl 2001).

Heidegger’s extension of the phenomenological method and his demand to combine this with ontology is well-known and documented, but I must give Heidegger some treatment if we are to understand Gadamer’s hermeneutics more fully. In Heidegger’s early thought, the vor-structure of the understanding comes to fruition, and Gadamer continues it with respect to analysis and interpretation. Heidegger takes Husserl’s analysis of time consciousness, drags it through history and experience, and the result is a description of the essential structures of Dasein. For Heidegger, Dasein, or human situatedness—the being for whom Being is a question—engages in the world of entities in a way constantly affected by its past, and this pastness of Dasein registers as attunement to the world, or mood. But Dasein, in order to recover itself from inauthentic modes of engagement, must also investigate the experience of its ownmost possibilities, and possibility registers as an orientation to the future. Thus, Dasein, as understanding, is projective of its Being upon possibilities. To develop itself, Dasein must develop the understanding as interpretation. Interpretation is the “working-out of possibilities projected in understanding” (Heidegger 1962: 149). That which as been encountered as ready-to-hand is understood, then comes to be interpreted. The condition of this possibility is that the object which is to be understood as something must already be accessible to the understanding, so that this as-structure may be made to stand out for us. This access presupposes a pre-understanding at work. The interpretation we seek as Dasein, which is of ourselves, has already been determined in a way of envisagement by an advanced grasping, a fore-conception of the understanding (Heidegger 1962). Heidegger’s expression for this is related to the verb vorgreifen (“to anticipate”) and to the noun Begriff (“concept”) (Heidegger 1962: 150). Here we can see these terms as connoting a preconceptualizing or an anticipation of a conceptualization at work in the interpretive process of the understanding. The operative term at work in Gadamer’s hermeneutics, which expresses phenomenological inheritance in terms of the vor-structure of the understanding, is Vorteilung (“prejudice”) (Gadamer 2004: 241).

Gadamer’s impetus to clarify a conception of interpretation was not far afield from the articulations of the crisis above. He felt that the human sciences, (conceived as the “moral sciences,” Geisteswissenschaften, or the humanities) were borrowing the inductive logic from the natural sciences as their sole method. But, much in line with Husserl and Heidegger, this copying of the natural and positive sciences ends in an effacement of subjectivity as it attempts the impossible—investigating the object of inquiry from a nowhere perspective. That is, the natural sciences invoked a methodology that cannot incorporate the subject with its conceptual schemes and prejudices into its self-aware task.

Gadamer assumes a self-consciously phenomenological approach in his task of reinvesting the human sciences with an understanding of the human condition as interpretive through and through. This registers as a movement away from the whatness of the study (with its objective emphasis) to an examination of the how of the givenness of the object (with its emphasis on modes of givenness). The question for Gadamer is how meaning is constructed and what constitutes and limits the process of construction. The answer to the
latter question for Gadamer is history. History constitutes our interpretative capacity by giving us our cultural practices, habits, customs, and concepts as inheritances. By these we are prejudiced in our interpretive projects. Furthermore, Gadamer inherits Husserl’s concept of an horizon, as the ever-shifting temporal and spatial limit of our perspective, and translates it into a cultural and conceptual limit, but one which may be fused with others’ horizons in the experience of understanding the Other.

Therefore, Gadamer gives, in Truth and Method, both an account of historical interpretation and an example of it. This insures that his contribution does not pose as standing outside of the insights he presents, and avoids assuming a self-undermining posture, an attack to which the postmodernists are susceptible. Gadamer takes phenomenology to be the key to overcoming this problem of objectivity in history (Gadamer 2004). By conceiving of our fundamental and ontological orientation to the world as hermeneutic, Heidegger offered a full-blown structure to the way the understanding works in its capacity as projective towards an indeterminate horizon. By giving interpretation a fundamental role, not a supplemental one, in our conception of understanding, Gadamer reinvests the understanding with subjectivity. And such subjectivity is always already historically, and therefore culturally and conceptually, situated. The historicity of the hermeneutical experience speaks to the limitations of hermeneutical consciousness and the finitude of human experience. As Tsenay Serequberhan put it: “The hermeneutical consciousness does not start from certainties but from a recognition of its own limitations and an experienced appreciation of its heritage” (Serequberhan 1987: 53). In overcoming the problem of objectivity in history, Gadamer is overcoming the prejudice against prejudice which emerged during the Enlightenment (Gadamer 2004). The prejudice against prejudice suggested that some self-same foundation, such as reason, could achieve the quest for certainty in science, including historical inquiry.

In order to reveal the dialogical and interactive structure of interpretation, Gadamer emphasizes the need for application of interpretation, and this I offer as evidence of his pragmatic sensibility. Two of his analogues to this process are that we interpret scripture in our application of it in the activity of preaching, and we interpret laws in our application of them to specific cases. The process of interpretation is interactive with the process of applying interpretation. The two mutually inform each other (Gadamer 2004). This is similar to the pragmatic conception of the relation between theory and practice. The former should not be developed antecedent to the latter, much as Gadamer warns against the formulation of any method over and above that which he is instantiating in his history of hermeneutics.

By his admission of the inevitability of prejudice, Gadamer discloses that which historical positivists want to efface. By his admission of tension with a common object, Gadamer resists the equation of prejudice and object and refuses to inflate interpretability beyond its necessary and conservative constraints, which means that interpretation cannot be poured into any historical text as if such a text were an inert receptacle. Furthermore, practice and application mutually inform conceptualization and theory. Any practical application of theory and interpretation is constrained by the historical reception of concepts which circumscribe, either positively or negatively, the manner in which we project our understanding onto the common objects of interpretation (Gadamer 2004). Historical inquiry, qua Gadianerian hermeneutics, confronts the crisis of the sciences by way of phenomenology, and helps overcome the problem of objectivity; that is, it refuses to pose as positive science and does not attempt to ground historical science upon any “foundation.” However, it does not reduce itself to narrative fiction. Guided by pragmatic and conservative norms, it resists historical relativism.

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A Conservative and Pragmatic Judicial Theory

Both Dewey and Gadamer share a common resistance to historical relativism and its view of history as mere redescrptive novelty. Such a point of commonality evinces their conservatism. But both Dewey and Gadamer also share an anti-foundational stance, and both respond to the crisis of the sciences. These similarities evince their pragmatism. Additionally, their approaches to historical inquiry share a concern for the practical application of the study of history. Both see historical understanding registering as a norm of application. Further, both see that norm guiding the practice of judicial determinations in the court of law, and here we can further see their shared pragmatic sensibility. If we are to conserve the ability of inquiry in the social sciences to resolve problems, we might see how both Dewey and Gadamer give space for historical inquiry to help a judge resolve problems demanding historical understanding. In doing so, Dewey and Gadamer provide a theory of historical inquiry consonant with a conservative and pragmatic judicial theory.

As we saw above, Dewey exemplifies the way in which adjudicating a problematic and indeterminate situation or case is a synthesis of several temporal phases of inquiry. As an inferential judgment about present propositions which are operationally historical, the judge existentially re-qualifies the present, which serves as potentially relevant data for future propositions operating on the to-be-historical present. What this means is that cries against judicial activism are philosophically analogous to cries against historical revisionism. Judges or historians proper use the conceptual subject-matter of the present cultural environment in order to make historical judgments using present propositions operating historically to resolve novel problematic situations in a trial-at-court (Dewey 1938).

Similar to Dewey, Gadamer refers to the law in order to exemplify the nature of historical inquiry qua hermeneutics. With respect to legal theory Gadamer writes, “The meaning of a law that emerges in its normative application is fundamentally no different from the meaning reached in understanding a text” (Gadamer 2004: 310). Gadamer claims that “a law does not exist to be understood historically,” but to be made concrete “in its legal validity by being interpreted” (Gadamer 2004: 307). In judicial determinations, the judge must embrace the tension between the law as a common historical object and the changing circumstances and cases in which it must be understood, and then applied (Gadamer 2004). Similar to Heidegger, but also similar to Dewey, Gadamer emphasizes the situatedness of interpretation—that understanding always occurs within an event of tradition, a “process of handing down” (Gadamer 2004: 308). Further the judge must subordinate herself to the text and interpret its will in light of the temporal distance separating her from it and trying to overcome the “alienation of meaning” which the legal text has undergone (Gadamer 2004: 308). This balance between the inheritance of the past and the need for an attunement to the context of the involved situation demanding judgment speaks to the conservatism and the pragmatism of these thinkers. And as I show below, their understanding of historical inquiry is a condition for the possibility of a conservative and pragmatic judicial theory.

Before completing a brief picture of what a pragmatic and conservative judicial theory would look like, I need to distance it from any colloquial associations these terms might harbor. These pragmatic and conservative norms are methodological. They are not political. Pragmatic does not mean left-wing or favoring judicial activism, and conservative does not mean right-wing or reactionary. When legal theorists label judges as conservative, they of-
These colloquial associations die hard. Ronald Dworkin referred to this tendency when he claimed that popular imagination sorts Supreme Court justices into two camps, "liberal" and "conservative." Dworkin thinks that one criterion for distinguishing these two camps lines up more or less along the lines of right and left wing politics. See Dworkin, R., (1986: 358). Richard Posner recently made a similar assertion. Justices are considered conservative and liberal according to their politics. See Posner, R. (2008: 9).

Legal pragmatists, such as Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., reacted to the formalism and the positivism of the utilitarian approaches to law, offered by John Austin, a student of Jeremy Bentham. Holmes has been offered by several intellectual historians as a founder of American pragmatism. His preparatory essays for the *The Common Law* (1881) were written around the time he was in conversation with other classical American pragmatists, C.S. Peirce and William James.

Dewey maintained this in his essay "My Philosophy of Law" (1940). The principles guiding adjudication need to emerge from customary practice because that is where they must return, and importing them from outside communal practice or the relevant situation decreases the probability that they would ameliorate the legal situation to which they apply.
and the judicial theory it makes possible refuses to pose as science, but in doing so, it does not turn into narrative fiction.

References


Section III. Contemporary appropriations
Frithjof Nungesser

Three Dimensions of the Sociality of Action. Some Reflections based on the Cultural Psychology of Michael Tomasello and Sociological Pragmatism

Abstract. The relationship between action and sociality is one of the fundamental problems in social theory and philosophy. In this paper I strive to contribute to an action theoretical approach that conceives of individual action and sociality as intrinsically related. I will do so by drawing on two distinct strands of cultural and social theory: the sociological pragmatism of Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead, and the cognitive cultural psychology of Michael Tomasello. Since the work of Tomasello is – at least in detail – relatively unknown to philosophers or social scientists, the primary focus will be on his seminal studies in comparative and developmental cognitive psychology. By means of a detailed analysis I will delineate a cognitive, motivational and cultural dimension of the sociality of action in Tomasello. The results of this discussion will then be compared with the central tenets of sociological pragmatism. In the end, it will become clear why cognitive scientists like Tomasello can help us to reformulate pragmatist social theory against the background of recent findings in the human sciences. By doing this, we can remain true to the transdisciplinary approach of pragmatist thought that has long been neglected in social theory. Conversely, such a comparison may reveal some of the limits of Tomasello’s account with regard to social theory.

I. Introduction: The sociality of action – extrinsic or intrinsic?

How exactly are our individual actions related to sociality? This is one of the crucial questions in social theory and diverse answers have been proposed in social philosophy and the social sciences. In this paper, I will argue for an action theoretical perspective that conceives of agency and sociality as intrinsically related. I will do so by drawing on two distinct strands of cultural and social theory: the sociological pragmatism of Charles Horton Cooley and especially George Herbert Mead, and the cognitive cultural psychology of Michael Tomasello.

By embracing an intrinsic approach, I will reject the competing extrinsic conception that cuts human action into halves by distinguishing between two separate types of action: individual action on the one hand, and social action on the other hand. For example, for most of contemporary psychological social psychologists², social actions are directed towards social objects while other types of action are not. Such an understanding of ‘social action’ would deprive all actions dealing with nonsocial objects of their social dimension. Alternatively,

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² For a comprehensive critique of the Disappearance of the Social in American Social Psychology see Greenwood 2004. Critical accounts can also be found in Collier et al. (1991) and Farr (1996). To speak of ‘psychological social psychology’ is not tautological. For the difference between ‘sociological’ and ‘psychological’ social psychology and its emergence see Collier et al. (1991: 8-10).
one could claim – following Weber – that “we shall speak of ‘action’ insofar as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to his behavior – be it overt or covert, omission or acquiescence. Action is ‘social’ insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course” (Weber 2007 [1922]: 4; see also 22ff.). In this view, actions related to nonsocial objects may also be regarded as social actions because their ‘subjective meaning’ takes into account the behavior of others. Yet, while Weber’s classical definition may allow for a more adequate perspective on social action, it still fails to acknowledge crucial aspects of the sociality of action. Perhaps most dramatically, in his writings on methodology or action theory Weber never raises the question to what extent action must be seen as social per se or whether sociality is constitutive for agency. Consequently, Weber thinks of social action as just one specific type of action.5

Perhaps surprisingly, a similar problem can be found in the work of another founding figure of sociology. In Durkheim’s methodological and anthropological remarks, individual action is not social by nature. Rather, the individual actor is depicted as intrinsically instinct-driven, insatiable and egocentric. “It is not human nature which can assign the variable limits necessary to our needs. They are thus unlimited so far as they depend on the individual alone. Irrespective of any external regulatory force, our capacity for feeling is in itself an insatiable and bottomless abyss” (Durkheim 1979 [1897]: 247). By “external force” Durkheim means, of course, society that shapes the individual and sets the limits. Yet, at least in the early Durkheim, even the socially well adapted individual is split into two: social and egoistic on its individual side, social and altruistic on its collective side (e.g. Durkheim 2004 [1893]: 253f.).

Given this admittedly crude sketch, it seems that most social scientists – not only ‘methodological individualists’ such as Weber or (psychological) social psychologists, but also ‘methodological holists’ such as Durkheim – conceptualize the connection between action and sociality as extrinsic.6 Social processes are thought to be something external and separable from the individual and its actions. In contrast, ‘intrinsicalists’ highlight “the irreducible sociality behind all individual acts” (Joas 1996: 189). In this perspective, sociality is a constitutive condition for and essential dimension of human action. Consequently, the goal is not foremost to distinguish between different forms of individual and social action. Rather, the question is how the individual’s ability to act self-reflexively and autonomously can be explained on the basis of its irreducible embeddedness in intersubjective processes.

In this paper I want to contribute to this theoretical tradition by outlining three dimensions of the sociality of action based on the work of Michael Tomasello as well as sociological pragmatism. By distinguishing between a cognitive, motivational and cultural dimension of the sociality of action I will show why the relation between human action and sociality can only be understood if we conceptualize it as intrinsic. Since the work of Mead or

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5 Another problem in Weber’s methodological writings is that he defines social action as meaningful action (as opposed to mere behavior). Since he defines sociology as “the science concerning itself with the interpretative understanding of social action” (Weber 2007 [1922]: 4) a broad range of social phenomena like, for example, habits and habits would not be part of sociological research. Yet, Weber himself is aware of the “indefinite borderline of social action” (Weber 2007: 24) and repeatedly refers to this problem.

6 Of course, this does not imply that these approaches are identical – far from it. In fact, they conceptualize this extrinsic relation in diametrically opposed ways. In an individualist perspective, sociality is the result of coordinated and rational individual actions; in a holist perspective, in contrast, sociality is possible only because of the coercive power of society that forms the primordially asocial subjects.
Cooley will be more or less familiar to most readers within philosophy or social theory, the focus will mainly be on Tomasello. Only later he will be seconded by the pragmatists.

I will start with an introductory characterization of Tomasello’s approach to cognitive psychology (II). Based on this approach, I will heuristically identify three dimensions of the sociality of action in Tomasello’s work (III). Chapter IV then compares these results with the central tenets of sociological pragmatism. As a result, it will hopefully become clear that, generally speaking, social theory can substantially benefit from cross-disciplinary exchange, especially with certain strands within cognitive and cultural psychology. More specifically, cognitive scientists like Tomasello can help us to reformulate pragmatist social theory against the background of recent findings in the human sciences. By doing this, we can adhere to the original transdisciplinary claim of pragmatist thought that has long been neglected in sociological theory. Yet, in the end, it is this transdisciplinary perspective that constitutes the fundamental importance of pragmatism for the social sciences.

II. A short characterization of Tomasello’s approach to cognitive psychology

Tomasello’s basic question is why human life is impregnated by culture in such an extraordinary way:

Human beings and only human beings cognize the world in ways leading to the creation and use of natural languages, complex tools and technologies, mathematical symbols, graphic symbols from maps to art, and complicated social institutions such as governments and religions. The puzzle is that other primates have created none of these things even though some – the great apes – are as closely related to humans as horses to zebras, lions to tigers, rats are to mice (Tomasello and Rakoczy 2003: 121).

In order to solve this “puzzle” Tomasello has been conducting comparative experiments with human children and nonhuman primates. To understand why he is such a convinced “advocate of the comparative method” (Tomasello 2006: 507), one has to look back over a few decades.

Since the 1930s the debate on whether nonhuman primates have the capacity to acquire natural languages or other alleged human-specific faculties has been heated. In the 1930s the chimpanzee Gua was raised by Winthrop N. and Luella A. Kellog, disciples of Robert Yerkes, as though she were a human child in order to teach her to speak a language. Since then much ink has been spilled on the (supposed) language skills of Gua or other chimpan-
zees like Viki, Washoe, or Nim Chimpsky (cf. e.g. Terrace et al. 1979; Gardner, Gardner 1989; Yule 2010: 16ff.). The debate is still ongoing. Yet, in Tomasello’s view, two inferences can be drawn for certain. On the one hand, comparative analyses of the language skills of enculturated (i.e. human-raised) and mother-reared chimpanzees demonstrate the enormous impact of cultural processes during ontogeny (Tomasello 1999: 34-36). Enculturated chimpanzees show marked differences to their mother-reared conspecifics with regard to attentional, learning and language skills. For example, they are able to request desired items by using sign language and are capable of imitation learning (cf. Tomasello 2008: 246-256; Tomasello et al. 1993). On the other hand, it is obvious that enculturated apes, even after undergoing intensive training, “do not thereby turn into human beings” (Tomasello 1999: 35). Human-raised apes still show severe ‘limitations’. Compared with human children they do not engage in the same way in “extended joint intentional interactions” and they lack decisive linguistic (esp. syntactic) competences (Tomasello 2008: 249-256).

Tomasello’s work derives two important conclusions from this extensive discussion. First, systematic research on the socio-cultural impact on human and nonhuman primate ontogeny is needed. Second, the human-specific cognitive and motivational infrastructure must be identified, which explains the substantial differences between humans and both enculturated and mother-reared nonhuman primates. By means of well-controlled comparative studies of the cognitive development of human children and (mother-reared as well as enculturated) great apes, both objectives can be pursued. This is why ‘Developmental and Comparative Psychology’ constitutes Tomasello’s methodological ‘silver bullet’.

In my own research group, we have chosen to approach these problems [= to explain human cooperation and culture; FN] via comparative studies of human children and their nearest primate relatives, especially chimpanzees. The hope is that in these somewhat simpler cases we may see things more clearly than is possible in the myriad complexities of adult human behavior and societies (Tomasello 2009b: xvii).7

One thing that can be seen “more clearly” in these comparative experiments is the intrinsically social and qualitatively new character of human cognition and action which, according to Tomasello, can be demonstrated most clearly by means of the simple act of pointing.

Tomasello states that “the majority of studies of nonhuman primate communication focus on their vocal displays”. Thus, most of these studies do not look into gestures. Yet, while vocalizations in apes are “mostly unlearned, genetically fixed, emotionally urgent, involuntary, inflexible responses to evolutionarily important events”, gestures are “individually learned and flexibly produced communicative acts” (Tomasello 2008: 54). Hence, in order to study the influence of the socio-cultural environment during ontogeny, gestures are far more instructive research objects. This is why Tomasello considers the traditional focus on vocal displays to be “a huge mistake” (Tomasello 2008: 53).

7 This methodological program became possible because Tomasello has been part of pertinent research institutions. In 1998 he became Director of the “Department of Developmental and Comparative Psychology” at the Max-Planck-Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig. At the same time, he is Co-Director of the Wolfgang Köhler Primate Research Center (“Pongoland”), which is part of the Leipzig Zoo. Before that (starting in 1980), he was Professor at Emory University and Affiliate Scientist for Psychobiology at Yerkes Primate Center (which is part of Emory). A great deal of his research done in Yerkes can be found in his comprehensive work on Primate Cognition (co-authored by Josep Call; cf. Tomasello, Call 1997).
Indeed, in comparative analyses, enculturated and mother-reared apes show marked differences with respect to their gestural behavior while no new vocalization skills emerge in this process. In the wild, great apes do not point – neither to show something to their conspecifics (declarative pointing) nor to share an experience with them (expressive pointing). Moreover, they do not even point in order to request something (imperative pointing). In contrast, enculturated primates point quite often. However, they do so only imperatively – and only when humans are present. They never point when interacting with conspecifics (Tomasello 2006; Tomasello 2008: 34ff.). In the following section I will illustrate why exactly these observations are of such crucial importance for social theory and action theory by distinguishing three dimensions of the sociality of action and cognition in Tomasello’s work.

III. Three dimensions of the sociality of action in Tomasello

a) The cognitive dimension

For Tomasello, it is the seemingly trivial act of pointing – and not the often invoked faculties of language or reason – that contains in itself the seeds of human culture. Pointing, so the argument goes, requires a species-specific form of social cognition, namely, the cognitive infrastructure of shared intentionality. This infrastructure, in turn, relies on several capacities. Individuals that share their intentions must be able to cognize triadic interactions. In order to understand a pointing gesture, I have to realize that someone is trying to direct my attention to a certain object. Imagine, for example, two friends on a hike in the Black Forest. Now, friend A is pointing en passant to a chestnut tree in order to please friend B. A knows that chestnuts are B’s favorite trees. B understands A’s pointing only because she knows that he knows that chestnuts are her favorite trees. In this example, B has to be able to cognize the relation between A’s communicative intention (to draw her attention to the tree), his referential attention (the chestnut tree) and his social intention (his message: “Look! A chestnut tree – isn’t that nice?”).

The example shows that shared intentionality does not only presuppose ‘triadic cognition’ but also ‘recursive mindreading’ (A knows that B knows that A knows…). Without the recursiveness of human social cognition the constitution of a ‘common ground’ necessary for communication would not be possible (Tomasello 2008: 4ff.; 73-82). To speak of a common ground, however, implies two (or more) individuals acting in the same context. A common ground is not just all the things that are part of a given situation. Rather, it “is what is ‘relevant’ to the social interaction, that is, what each participant sees as relevant and knows that the other sees as relevant as well” (Tomasello 2008: 74). This is why Tomasello (and others) think of common ground as something that is shared. In our example, B knows that chestnuts are her favorite trees just as A knows that chestnuts are B’s favorite trees. However, when it comes to communication the crucial point is that A and B know

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8 As opposed to pointing, chimpanzees “gesture to one another regularly. Although some of their gestures are relatively inflexible displays invariably elicited by particular environmental events, an important subset are learned by individuals and used flexibly – such things as ‘arm raise’ to elicit play or ‘touch side’ to request nursing” (Tomasello 2006: 506).

9 In contrast, “there is no evidence that great apes can do even one step of recursive mind reading … , which is the cognitive underpinning of all forms of common conceptual ground” (Tomasello 2009b: 72).

10 The concept of ‘common ground’ Tomasello borrows from the work of Herbert H. Clark (cf. Clark 1996: 92ff.). His cooperation model of communication in general is strongly influenced by diverse authors such as Wittgenstein, Grice, Quine, Searle, Gilbert, Bratman, Tuomela and others (cf. especially Tomasello 2008: 72-108).
together] that chestnuts are B’s favorite trees. This means that A has to know that B knows that he knows that chestnuts are B’s trees of choice and that B knows that A knows that she knows that he knows that chestnuts are her favorite trees\textsuperscript{11}. Without this shared common ground built on recursive mindreading, B would not understand A’s pointing.

Compared with iconic signs such as facial expressions or pantomime, the understanding of indexical signs is more dependent on common ground. This is because in icons “more information is potentially in the gesture itself”. Thus, “iconic gestures should be more effective than pointing, in many contexts, with strangers” (Tomasello 2008: 203). In a way, there is even greater dependence on shared ground when it comes to communicative conventions. More often than in indexical and (non-symbolic)\textsuperscript{12} iconic gesturing, the objects referred to in symbolic communication are absent and/or imperceptible by the senses. Also, in conventionalized communication, the (more or less) arbitrary signs are themselves part of the common ground. This also explains why, for Tomasello, language itself depends on these social cognitive skills (Tomasello 2008: 218). Moreover, gestures and language are interlocked phylogenetically as well as ontogenetically. Tomasello claims that in the development of spoken language there occurred/occurs a double-transition from pointing to demonstratives such as ‘this’ and ‘that’ and from iconic gestures to content words, e.g. nouns and verbs (Tomasello 2008: 324)\textsuperscript{13}.

Yet, language not only draws on human-specific socio-cognitive skills. It also has an enormous impact on the development of human cognition. This cultural aspect of human cognition and action will be discussed in more detail later (III. c). For the moment, the decisive insight is that, according to Tomasello, the simple act of pointing demonstrates that human beings – as opposed to nonhuman primates (e.g. Tomasello 2006: 509) – always act in a shared cognitive space, which “takes people beyond their own egocentric perspective on things” (Tomasello 2008: 76). Consequently, the concept of shared intentionality does not primarily focus on ‘parallel’ attentions, knowledge, and intentions. Rather, the crucial point is that people who share their intentionality attend together, know together, and intend together. This is to say that they know that each of them knows of, attends to, and intends something. But they also always know that the other knows that they know of, attend to, and intend something, and vice versa. Thus, we always act within a space of shared representations, attentions, and intentions. Within this space, “in direct competition, shared common ground trumps individual personal relevance every time” (Tomasello 2008: 77).

Yet, the anthropological account of the intrinsic sociability of cognition and action that can be

\textsuperscript{11} When the terms ‘knowing’, ‘guessing’, ‘understanding’ and the like are used in this paper they do not, of course, imply that the individuals have to be aware of their ‘knowledge’, their ‘guesses’, their ‘understanding’ etc.

\textsuperscript{12} Tomasello’s terminology differs from Peirce’s classical semiotic classification (cf. Peirce 1998 [1903]). For instance, according to Tomasello, there can be both symbolic and non-symbolic icons. For Tomasello, “symbols” seem to be defined by “conventionalized representation” – mostly of something that is not present. In contrast, the term “iconic” almost always refers to “iconic gestures” which, in turn, is synonymous with “pantomiming” (see, e.g., the subject index of Tomasello 2008: 386). Thus, in Peirce’s perspective, Tomasello’s concept of the “icon” seems to oscillate between two of his trichotomies – it touches on the nature of the sign itself (qualisign, sinsign, legisign) and at the same time on the relation of the sign and the object (icon, index, symbol). Even though Tomasello refers to Peirce repeatedly, he never (to my knowledge) discusses these semiotic differences.

\textsuperscript{13} This is why arbitrariness, for Tomasello, is not an absolute characteristic of symbols. Rather, there is a “drift to the arbitrary” (Tomasello 2008: 219-225), i.e., a continuum between iconicity and symbolicity. Here, Tomasello again touches on one of the crucial insights of Peirce’s theory of signs which – in contrasts to other semiotic approaches – emphasizes the structural interconnection of the different classes of signs. For Peirce, every symbol must at some point be embodied in iconic or indexical signs in order to connect to ‘reality’ (Peirce 1998 [1903]: 291f.; cf. also Jung 2009: 155, 187, 293).
formulated on the basis of Tomasello’s work takes into account not only the cognitive infrastructure but also the motivational basis of action.

b) The motivational dimension

As shown above, nonhuman primates in their natural habitats do not point for each other, while their human-raised companions do so imperatively (but not declaratively or expressively)\(^{14}\). In this context, it is important to note that both mother-reared and enculturated apes are unable to understand pointing. Several experiments conducted by Tomasello and other primatologists over the last several years strongly support this claim. For example, Tomasello, Call, and Gluckman introduced apes to the so-called ‘object choice task’\(^{15}\). In this game one human hid some food in one of three opaque containers. Later, another person tried to help the apes by pointing at the baited bucket. Although the primates knew from past experience about the helpfulness of this human and although they were “attentive and motivated”, they chose at random. This holds true even when trained conspecifics, rather than humans, pointed at the box containing the food. However, the apes’ failure to understand pointing is not based on their inability to follow the direction of the pointing gesture. In several experiments it became clear that nonhuman primates are quite talented in following pointing and gaze directions (Moll, Tomasello 2007: 640). Accordingly, in the ‘object choice task’ the tested primates followed the deictic gesture of the experimenter to the baited container. This did not, however, influence their decision. Moreover, in another research design, which focused more on competition than on cooperation, these apes demonstrated their ability to understand intentional action. In order to obtain the food stored in a bucket, the experimenter had to reach through a hole in a plexiglass barrier (note that reaching looks quite similar to pointing). However, he did not get it because the bucket was out of reach. Later, his simian competitor had the opportunity to choose between the different buckets on the other side of the barrier. Importantly, in this design, she did so very successfully – in most cases she selected the container the experimenter had tried to reach before (Tomasello 2006: 508).

The increased use of competitive paradigms in the study of primate cognition over the last few years has demonstrated that apes are endowed with considerable abilities to represent the intuitions and perceptions of others (cf. Tomasello et al. 2003; Tomasello 2006; Call, Tomasello 2008; Kaminski et al. 2008). For Tomasello these findings have constituted a serious challenge because until around the year 2003 one of his fundamental claims had been that “the overwhelming weight of empirical evidence suggests that only human beings understand conspecifics as intentional agents like the self” (Tomasello 1999: 6). Moreover, according to Tomasello’s ‘first theory’, other uniquely human forms of social cognition do follow automatically from this single basic cognitive difference\(^{16}\). For example, in this

\(^{14}\) However, note that one cannot be absolutely certain about the exact nature of primate imperative pointing because it is not known whether they understand the cognitive structure of pointing or whether they point to humans because they make desired outcomes happen (cf. Tomasello 2006: 509f.). It seems, however, as though they are just using humans “as a ‘social tool’” (Moll, Tomasello 2007: 643).

\(^{15}\) For this and comparable experiments see Tomasello 2006: 507ff. and Tomasello 2008: 38ff.

\(^{16}\) For Tomasello’s ‘first theory’ see e.g. Tomasello, Rakoczy 2003 and especially Tomasello 1999. In their 1997 Primate Cognition Tomasello and Call discuss the question of whether nonhuman primates understand intensions at length but do not yet answer it conclusively (Tomasello, Call 1997: 318ff.). – Of course, by speaking of Tomasello’s ‘first’ and ‘second’ theory, I do not argue that there are two separate approaches. Tomasello would still claim his earlier work to be valid for the most part. Nevertheless, these theoretical modifications need to be highlighted and their implications need to be discussed – especially with regard to Tomasello’s earlier work on The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition (1999).
view, the understanding of others as not only intentional but mental agents is merely “a kind of ‘icing on the cake’” – the “cake” of course being the capacity to understand the intentions of others (Tomasello and Rakoczy 2003: 122)17.

Given these recent findings, we must conclude that “understanding goals or intentions is not the same thing as understanding communicative intentions” (Tomasello 2006: 508)18. Thus, by observing their conspecifics and by guessing their intentions, chimpanzees and other nonhuman primates gather important environmental information. Yet, they do not understand that other beings may have the intention to draw their attention to some object. In other words, apes do not realize that the communicative behavior of other individuals may be conducted ‘for them’. In contrast, human children start to point not only imperatively but also declaratively and expressively at around one year of age (Tomasello 2008: 135ff.). They do so without any instruction. Hence, for Tomasello, there seems to be an intrinsic drive in human children to express themselves, to share their experiences with others and to help other individuals (Tomasello 2008: 82–88)19. Around the same age, children also learn to understand all types of pointing. Consequently, at only 12 to 14 months of age, toddlers pursue and recognize what Tomasello, following Grice, calls “communicative intentions”, that is, the kind of intention in which “you intend for [me to share attention to (X)]” (Tomasello 1999: 102).

However, human children are not only motivated by the desire to help and share when they point. They also have quite specific expectations regarding the appropriate reaction of others to their pointing. For example, Liszkowski et al. proved that 12-month-old infants were dissatisfied with the reaction to their declarative pointing when the adults only looked briefly at the object, showed no reaction or emoted positively without reference to the object. Only when the adults looked back and forth between the object and the child and expressed a positive reaction were the toddlers pleased (cf. Tomasello 2006: 511)20.

According to Tomasello, from all of this evidence it follows that the simple act of pointing is representative of the intrinsic cooperative nature of human communication. Humans communicate out of the motives of sharing and helping (i.e. helping or being helped). And

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17 To cognize others as ‘mental agents’ means to understand that they do not only have certain goals and perceptions but also beliefs about the world which may be either right or wrong and which may differ from one’s own beliefs. Taking their start from Premack’s and Woodruff’s claim that chimpanzees have a ‘theory of mind’, the two psychologists Wimmer and Perner in a classical paper developed a ‘false-belief-task’ in order to study the development of the ‘theory of mind’ in human children. The result was that children develop the ability to understand others as mental agents who may have false beliefs between four and six years of age (cf. Wimmer and Perner 1983: 126). Yet, because Wimmer’s and Perner’s “Maxi-test” (just as later modifications of it) presupposes sophisticated linguistic skills, it is not applicable to nonlinguistic beings. This is why Call and Tomasello developed a nonverbal false-belief-task which can be used both with children and apes (cf. Call and Tomasello 1999).

18 The experiments based on this nonverbal design demonstrate “that apes do not have a ‘theory of mind’ in the sense of understanding the false beliefs of others. This does not mean, however, that apes do not have sophisticated cognitive and social cognitive abilities” (Call and Tomasello 1999: 393). According to Tomasello’s ‘first theory’, this lack of understanding necessarily results from their inability to cognize the intentions of others. In his ‘second theory’, I suppose that this inability needs to be interpreted as a result of the missing capacity for shared intentional.

19 In contrast, see Tomasello (1999: 103) for his earlier position on this point.

20 Not even imperative pointing seems to be purely purposeful. In another experiment, Schwe and Markman demonstrated that two-year-olds were unsatisfied not only when their request was refused but also when it was granted unintentionally. Even in these cases (“You want this (wrong object)? You can’t have it but you can have this one (correct object) instead.”) the child frequently repeated his/her appeal (cf. Tomasello 2006: 511).
they verify whether their communicative act is understood. If necessary, humans repeat and – more importantly – reformulate their communicative acts. This seems to be another human-specific kind of behavior. It not only constitutes a showcase for the essentially cooperative nature of human communication but also draws attention to the necessary connection of cooperativeness with common ground. The ability to match one’s message to others presupposes the faculty of recursive mindreading. Without this social cognitive skill, and thus, without a common ground, successful communication would be impossible or at least highly improbable.

Consequently, the intrinsic sociality of action does not only have a cognitive foundation (namely, shared intentionality) but also a motivational basis – the intrinsic social character of the human motivational structure. The close connectedness of these two aspects can also be studied with regard to their respective developmental chronologies (cf. Tomasello 2008: 135-167). On the one hand, the cognitive infrastructure of shared intentionality develops between the 9th and 12th month. Thus, it follows the understanding of individual intentions, which is the first key result of the ‘nine-month revolution’. On the other hand, parts of the motivational structure seem to be in place quite early in ontogeny. Three-month-olds demand action (e.g. by ritualized crying), share emotions “in face-to-face dyadic exchanges” and engage in “a process of affective attunement in which infants and adults tune into the emotions of one another” (Tomasello 2008: 137). While infants are capable of imperative and expressive behavior even before the nine-month revolution, informative communication develops only after the goals and the knowledge of others can be understood. Accordingly, the demanding of action and the sharing of experiences by means of pointing begins only after the infrastructure of shared intentionality – and hence common ground – has developed. Conventionalized communicative gestures usually emerge around the 14th and 18th month. In almost every case a period of intensive pointing precedes symbolic communication.

Now, given the close connectedness of these two processes, the question needs to be asked whether there are substantial differences between humans and their nearest relatives in both dimensions. In other words: Would chimpanzees be able to engage in shared intentionality if they were motivated to help others and to share their experiences? Or would they be supportive and expressive if they could create common ground? Tomasello does not answer this question conclusively. On the one hand he argues that apes do not point because “(1) they do not have the motives to share experience with others or to help them by informing; and (2) they do not really know what is informationally new for others, and so what is worthy of their communicative efforts” (Tomasello 2006: 513). Yet, on the other hand, he writes that “[t]he main difference is motivational (with perhaps a cognitive dimension to this in the sense that infants may be motivated to do things that apes cannot even conceive)” (Tomasello 2006: 510; see also 517). While the first passage suggests that there are important dissimilarities between humans and other primates in both dimensions, the second quote grants a certain priority to the motivational aspect. In order to answer this question a far more fine-grained picture of anthropogenesis is needed. At the moment, a conclusive answer seems to be out of reach. Yet, at least conceptually, one can specify the motivational and cognitive features that allow for the intrinsic sociality of human cognition and action. What is more, this motivational and cognitive infrastructure is indispensable for explaining the cultural aspect of human cognition and action.
c) The cultural dimension

According to Tomasello, human cognition becomes more complex through cumulative cultural evolution. This cumulative cultural process, also known as the ‘ratchet effect’, presupposes ‘sociogenesis’ as well as reliable methods of cultural transmission. The term ‘sociogenesis’ is used by Tomasello to characterize those processes “in which something new is created through social interaction of two or more individuals in cooperative interaction, and indeed in many cases the new product could not have been invented by any of the individuals acting alone” (Tomasello 1999: 41). By “species-unique modes of cultural transmission” (Tomasello 1999: 4) Tomasello means processes of imitative learning and teaching. Taken together, these two processes allow for cumulative cultural evolution. In contrast, animals – including apes – fail to generate cumulative traditions. However, they do so not primarily because they lack the creative skills. Instead, it is the inability to preserve their innovative problem-solutions that prevents the emergence of a cumulative cultural history (Tomasello 1999: 5).

It will not come as a surprise that, in Tomasello’s (current) theory, both sociogenesis and cumulative cultural learning are based on the described human-specific capacity of shared intentionality. On the one hand, sociogenesis is a form of cooperation. In order to cooperate with someone I have to understand that we have a common goal. Moreover, I have to recognize that the other person has a different perspective on the same problem and thus has a different role to play in order to reach the common goal. Finally, all individuals have to be motivated to collaborate in order to make sociogenesis happen. Thus, it quickly becomes clear that sociogenesis rests on the basis of shared intentionality. On the other hand, the means of cultural transmission, that is, imitative learning and teaching, also make use of human-specific social cognition. In contrast to the ‘emulation learning’ of (mother-reared) apes, which focuses on the changes in the environment caused by the action of the other, imitative learning is a much more social form of learning. Here, learning is accomplished by taking the role of the acting person. By doing this it becomes possible to distinguish between the means and the ends of the observed action. Thus, compared to emulation learning, imitation requires a much ‘deeper’ identification with the other. We not only learn from but through the other (Tomasello 1999: 6, 26ff.). In his recent writings Tomasello also emphasizes the motivational aspects of cultural learning. He claims that besides certain socio-cognitive skills, “humans’ ultra-cooperative tendencies also play a role in the cultural ratchet” (Tomasello 2009b: xiv). This holds true for the altruistic act of teaching as well as for norms of conformity (Tomasello 2009b: xiv).

Without shared intentionality cumulative cultural traditions would not be possible. Yet, most importantly, shared intentionality does not only constitute the psychological basis of culture. Also, it is only with this cognitive and/or motivational basis in mind that it becomes possible to understand The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition. For Tomasello,

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21 The following draws mainly on Tomasello’s book The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition which contains the most comprehensive discussion with respect to cultural theory. However, as noted above, this argumentation is based on his ‘first theory’ of human social cognition. In the following I will reformulate his argument according to his ‘second’ theory whenever necessary.

22 There are at least two different forms of sociogenesis. First, a “virtual” form of collaboration that “takes place across historical time” thereby combining different individual innovations. Second, an “actual” form of collaboration that is defined by the simultaneous cooperation of two or more individuals (Tomasello 1999: 41).

23 As noted above, human-raised primates are able to learn by means of imitation (cf. Tomasello et al. 1993).

24 Interestingly, the German title of the book differs slightly from the original one. While the American title speaks of the “Cultural Origins of Human Cognition” the German title ‘only’ refers to the “Cultural Development of Human Cognition” (Die kulturelle Entwicklung des menschlichen Denkens; cf. Tomasello 2009 [1999]). Ironi-
the relation between cognition and culture is not a one-way street. Language may be the best example for this relation. According to Tomasello, language is not so much a product of biological but of cultural evolution. It does, of course, rely on biologically evolved human-specific skills. As demonstrated above, neither the use of symbols nor the cooperative structure of human communication would be possible without the capacity for shared intentionality. However, in Tomasello’s social-pragmatic view, there is no such thing as innate universal grammar. On the contrary, the grammaticalization of language is a product of human cultural evolution — formed by sociogenesis and passed on by cultural learning (Tomasello 1999: 41-48). In turn, however, the culturally evolved capacity for language allows for the very efficient transmission of knowledge over generations. Furthermore, language defines how this knowledge is organized. The cultural structure of knowledge is passed on by means of language (Tomasello 1999: 165ff.). In other words, one of the results of cultural evolution — language — fundamentally modifies the working of the very mechanism that allowed for its emergence. Consequently, it would be a mistake to say that cognition “is affected by” or “interacts with” cognition. Instead, “language is a form of cognition” (Tomasello 1999: 150).

Acquiring language thus leads children to conceptualize, categorize, and schematize events in much more complex ways than they would if they were not engaged in learning a conventionalized language, and these kinds of event representations and schematizations add great complexity and flexibility to human cognition (Tomasello 1999: 159).

With respect to the problem at hand, it is of crucial importance to see that the cultural development of cognition also pervades the social character of cognition and action. That is because language not only provides a kind of ‘cognitive grid’ but also allows for the symbolic embodiment of perspectives. Children begin to understand perspectives as they engage in activities based on shared intentionality (Moll and Tomasello 2007: 645). To understand perspective means to recognize that another person may have a differing view on the same thing. This recognition, in turn, presupposes that the individuals share their perceptions, attentions, and intentions. In these situations, one- to two-year-old children “begin to make active choices about how to construct things linguistically — this is a dog, an animal, a pet, a pest, or even ‘it’ — for purposes of interpersonal communication” (Tomasello and Rakoczy 2003: 127). The toddlers thus actively choose between different simultaneously available symbolic perspectives. The appropriate use of symbols is acquired by role reversal, which is a special form of imitation learning. Thereby, the child learns that symbols are shared entities that can be used by you and me in both directions. Also, these children understand the normative dimension of symbols, that is, how they are used ‘right’ and

cally, however, the translated German title seems to be more appropriate given Tomasello’s main argument: “[S]ocial and cultural processes during ontogeny do not create basic cognitive skills. What they do is turn basic cognitive skills into extremely complex and sophisticated cognitive skills” (Tomasello 1999: 189).

For Tomasello’s social-pragmatic or “usage-based” theory of language, as well as his criticism of Chomskian linguistics, see Tomasello 1995 and especially Tomasello 2005.

Language thus is an extremely powerful form of what Andy Clark (with reference to Vygotsky) calls “external scaffolding”: “We may call an action scaffolded to the extent that it relies on some kind of external support. Such support could come from the use of tools, or the knowledge and skills of others; that is to say, scaffolding (as I shall use the term) denotes a broad class of physical, cognitive and social augmentations — augmentations which allow us to achieve some goal which would otherwise be beyond us” (Clark 1998: 163).

For the following see Tomasello (1999: 118ff., 170ff.) and especially Tomasello, Rakoczy 2003. The problem here, again, is that these studies are based in the ‘first’ theory.

Actions learnt by imitation are usually directed to a third object. In contrast, in dialogue, the symbolic acts of others are directed to me. Thus, in order to use them I have to learn to reverse the roles of sender and receiver.
‘wrong’ as can be seen in wordplay. Symbols thus embody intersubjectively shared perspectives including a specific normative dimension (Tomasello and Rakoczy 2003: 128).29

However, something important is missing in the symbolic and perspectival skills of these young children. For them what another person says does not represent something beyond this concrete symbolic act; there is no general belief behind the words or acts of the other. So, they understand intention, perspective and symbols but they have not yet acquired a full-fledged ‘belief-desire’-psychology. Accordingly, for two-year-olds the norm related to a certain symbol or artifact applies only to that specifically and only with respect to the specific individual who formulated the norm.

For Tomasello, it is through continuous dialogical interaction in the third and fourth year of age that children begin to develop a much more mature understanding of the social world. In his view, two dialogical mechanisms are of particular importance for this transformation of social cognition. First, there is ‘perspective-shifting discourse’. At some point after their second birthdays “children begin to command linguistic skills advanced enough to enable them to engage in more sophisticated discourse interactions with a real give-and-take of perspectives” (Tomasello and Rakoczy 2003: 135). Now, the perspectives expressed are no longer the perspectives implicit in the linguistic symbols but the perspectives of the interlocutors themselves. In order to understand, children now have to take the role of the other. They shift their perspective and then relate it to their own perspective. With respect to the children’s socio-cognitive development, disagreements and misunderstandings between peers and didactic meta-communications between the child and some authority seem to be the most important forms of perspective-shifting discourse. As Piaget observed, in peer discourse children need to clarify and reformulate their perspectives and often have to reconcile diverging perspectives. Hence, they are forced to explicate their view on a given situation and to distinguish between their perspective and that of the other. In contrast to peer discourse, in didactic interactions the child is likely to defer to the authority’s view. Importantly, in this case there is still a dialogical interaction. However, it is internalized in the form of “reflective discourse” (Tomasello and Rakoczy 2003: 136). Following Vygotsky, Tomasello claims that this leads to an enduring dialogical self-regulation of subsequent actions. Second, “propositional attitude constructions” (Tomasello and Rakoczy 2003: 138ff.) seem to be of some importance.

These constructions prototypically have some kind of psychological verb expressing a propositional attitude as the main verb (e.g., say, know, think, believe) and then a full proposition indicating what someone says, knows, thinks, or believes (Tomasello and Rakoczy 2003: 137).

The use of the propositional attitude constructions develops gradually and becomes more complex over time – especially between two-and-a-half and three-and-a-half years of age. Thus, it seems that children at this stage become able to differentiate between the truth value of the sentence “I think tomorrow will be Tuesday” (belief) and the sentence “Tomorrow will be Tuesday” (reality). Furthermore, this shows that children at that age begin to understand that syntactical constructions – like propositional attitude constructions – imply a certain perspective on things.30

29 The development of children’s understanding of the intentional and normative dimension of artifacts is quite similar to their understanding of linguistic symbols (cf. Tomasello and Rakoczy 2003: 129ff.).
30 According to Tomasello, the bulk of the grammatical complexity of natural languages follows from this need to articulate a specific perspective on a certain situation (Tomasello 1999: 156).
Through the participation in a several year period of dialogical linguistic interaction children come to understand that others have beliefs that are more or less stable, that may differ from their own, and that may be wrong. That is to say, they are able to represent both the other and themselves as persons with beliefs and desires. Further, they understand collective practices and beliefs “which have the world-making power to create cultural-institutional realities” (Tomasello and Rakoczy 2003: 139). Finally, they distinguish between beliefs and objective ‘reality’. Thus language – one of the products of cumulative cultural evolution – shapes cognition not only by way of the transmission of knowledge and its structuring role for cognition but also because it deepens and generalizes the sociality of cognition and action.31

Interestingly, Tomasello summarizes his argument with respect to Mead:

We may thus say that 2-year-olds participate in shared intentionality with specific other persons, whereas 5-year-olds participate in collective intentionality with individuals representing a broader set of cultural perspectives and norms. In the terms of Mead, the child is going from guiding its actions via an internalized ‘significant other’ to guiding its actions via an internalized ‘generalized other’ (Tomasello and Rakoczy 2003: 139).

Although Mead probably never used the concept of the ‘significant other’, such a reference ‘points to’ the close relationship between Tomasello and sociological pragmatism. Hence, a comparative analysis seems to be worthwhile.

IV. Tomasello’s cognitive cultural psychology and sociological pragmatism. Some comparative and critical remarks

Tomasello’s work provides important theoretical insights as well as much-needed empirical backing for the understanding of the intrinsically social character of action. Therefore, I claim, it needs to be synthesized, to the furthest extent possible, with the arguably most radical and elaborated ‘intrinsicalist’ account of the sociality of action in the founding generation of the social sciences, namely, sociological pragmatism. To this end, the following sections of this chapter will briefly and critically compare Mead’s, Cooley’s, and Tomasello’s contributions to each of the dimensions of the sociality of action.33 Thereby, we might not only be able to assess in how far pragmatist social theory can be confirmed and updated by recent findings in the human sciences. Also, it might become clear what needs to be added to a cultural psychology such as Tomasello’s to successfully incorporate it into social theory.

31 Therefore, the use of linguistic symbols allows “children to do things they would not otherwise be able to do in some particular situations, since these symbolic artifacts were created for the purpose of enabling or facilitating certain kinds of cognitive and social interactions” (Tomasello 1999: 95).

32 Tomasello only refers to Mead’s most famous work, Mind, Self & Society. Yet, it must be remembered that this book resulted from the compilation of several notes written by students. Since there is still no critical edition, “the editorial situation of Mead’s writings continues to be a disaster” (Joas 1997: xi). In order to avoid editorially questionable references I will whenever possible refer to articles published by Mead himself, especially to the series of articles published between 1909 and 1913 in which he progressed from functional psychology (esp. Mead 1903) to his anthropological social psychology of human interaction and intersubjectivity (Mead 1909, 1910a, 1910b, 1912, 1913).

33 For some interesting comparative remarks on Tomasello and Mead see Jung (2009: 15, 230, 242, 248-252, 376).
Before I start with my theoretical reflections, however, I will present a short comparative description of the “disciplinary constellations”\textsuperscript{34} that gave rise to sociological pragmatism and Tomasello’s cultural psychology in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of their striking similarities.

\textit{a) Disciplinary constellations}

By studying both the cognitive basis of culture and the sociocultural impact on cognition, Tomasello is one of the few cognitive scientists who gives center stage to social and cultural processes. On the one hand he adheres to the methods of experimental psychology and applies them to specific problems in developmental psychology, primatology, cognitive science, and linguistics in order to isolate those species-specific faculties that make possible human sociality and culture. On the other hand, his research designs are inspired by the extensive adoption of concepts and theories from philosophy, cultural theory, and sociology. While he repeatedly refers to arguments in the tradition of the later Wittgenstein, the decisive influence in the emergence of his cultural theory has probably been the cultural psychology of Lev Vygotsky, which he became acquainted with through his “second mentor” Jerome Bruner\textsuperscript{35}. Over the years, by combining these two levels of inquiry, Tomasello developed a cognitive cultural psychology based on elaborate experimental designs, which is characterized by profound interdisciplinarity and the effort to avoid dualistic and reductionist arguments.

Pragmatist social theory came to the fore in a disciplinary context quite different from the (again quite diverse) academic constellations that gave rise to the European ‘classics’. Its protagonists did not try to constitute a new disciplinary field as, for example, Durkheim did\textsuperscript{36}. Rather, they tried to develop a new kind of social thought within the boundaries of their respective disciplines – be it philosophy and psychology (Mead) or economics and sociology (Cooley). This does not mean that they completely abstained from ‘boundary work’. They not only strongly rejected the theological philosophy that dominated most American colleges, as well as all ‘dualistic’ philosophies, but also criticized many developments in economic thought\textsuperscript{37}. However, most importantly, since their boundary work did not aim at the institutionalization of a new discipline, they neither tried to marginalize other fields such as psychology, nor did they posit irreconcilable differences between academic areas such as the natural and the social sciences. For instance, while they rejected certain kinds of psychology (Herbartian association psychology, the ‘structuralist’ psychology of Titchener, etc.) they did not reject psychology altogether but rather emphasized the importance or even contributed to the emerging fields of physiological, developmental and comparative psychology\textsuperscript{38}; while they criticized reductionist and biologistic positions they

\textsuperscript{34} The concept of the “disciplinary constellation” – which I borrow from Lepenies (1981: xviif.) – basically implies that the relations a certain discipline maintains with its neighboring/rival/role model disciplines also affect the development of this very discipline. Of course such a ‘constellation’ does not determine this development in the strict sense of the term. Yet it defines a certain ‘horizon of possibilities’.

\textsuperscript{35} Personal conversation. For a short contextualization of Vygotsky’s work see Cole; Scribner 1978; for the rediscovery of Vygotsky’s work first in the Soviet Union and then in the US from the mid-1950s onward see Bruner 1995. For the relevance of Vygotsky for Tomasello cf. e.g. Tomasello (1999: 20f.; Moll; Tomasello (2007: 639).

\textsuperscript{36} For the institutional strategies and the ‘boundary work’ of the Durkheim Schools cf. e.g. Karady 1981; Besnard 1981.

\textsuperscript{37} See e.g. Mead 1909; Cooley (2009 [1902/22]: 35-50).

\textsuperscript{38} For example, Mead demands more exchange between sociology and psychology in order to arrive at a convincing social psychology. Moreover, he regards social psychology and physiological psychology not as opposing but as complementary disciplines (cf. Mead 1909: 402; 407f.).
were also deeply influenced by new developments within physics and – as most American social scientists of their generation – by the Darwinian revolution. However, by reading Darwin against an idealist or Hegelian background, authors such as Dewey, Cooley and Mead used evolutionary theory in a quite specific way.

Hence, we can conclude that both pragmatist social theory and the work of Tomasello emerged within ‘disciplinary constellations’ allowing for intensive scientific exchange between certain strands of philosophy, evolutionary theory, physiology, sociology and social, developmental and comparative psychology. Most importantly, however, neither of these authors fell prey to one-sided explanations of human action. Instead, each of them formulated a naturalist but non-reductionist account of human activity that stresses the evolutionary value of concepts such as consciousness, reflexivity, creativity, self or culture, often eschewed by psychologists and cognitive scientists as ‘epiphenomena’ or ‘metaphysical entities’. Yet, these concepts are not rendered as metaphysical givens but rather as processes that emerge within the dynamics of human interaction with their social as well as non-social environments. Subsequently, however, these processes become of fundamental functional importance for these very interactions, thereby creating a qualitatively new form of sociality. While the impact of the “Hegelian bacillus” (Dewey) may explain the pragmatists’ anti-reductionist take on Darwinism and psychology, Vygotsky’s anti-behaviorist social and cultural psychology (which was strongly influenced by Marxism; cf. Cole and Scribner (1978: 6ff.,)) may do the same in the case of Tomasello. Finally, given the striking similarities between Mead’s and Vygotsky’s thought (Edwards 2007; Holland and Lachicotte 2007), the affinity between pragmatism and Tomasello may not come as a surprise, after all.

b) Evolutionary continuity, the “holism of difference”, and cultural evolution (The cultural dimension)

How can human beings be so alike yet so fundamentally different from their primate relatives or other ‘higher’ mammals? This is a question of crucial importance not only for Tomasello but also for sociological pragmatism. Each of the approaches wants to discover and explain ‘the difference that makes the difference’, that is, the human-specific faculty that makes possible a social and cultural quantum leap. Yet, at the same time, each of them strives to understand this difference in terms of its evolutionary continuity.

In Mead, this twofold aim can clearly be seen in his comparative analyses of the gestures used in animal and human communication. By “embedding gestural language in the continuity of human with animal sociality” (Joas 1997 [1980]: 101) Mead tries to define the

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40 The basic assumption “that all mental operations can be embedded in the functions of the organism in a non-reductionist manner” (Joas 1997 [1980]: 34) was the starting point of ‘functional psychology,’ which coevolved with pragmatism. Dewey’s seminal article on “The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology” (EW 5) can be seen as the founding document of this psychological tradition.

41 For Dewey’s and Mead’s Hegelian interpretation of Darwin see Thayer (1981: 460 ff.) and Joas (1997 [1980]: 54ff.). Also, Bernstein (2010: 92) argues that “Darwin replaced Hegel as a source of inspiration for the organic, dynamic, changing character of life”. Because Cooley’s early intellectual development revolved around the transcendentalist critique of utilitarianism he was influenced by idealism only indirectly. Yet, Cooley was directly affected by Dewey’s interpretation of Darwin since he attended his lectures at the University of Michigan in which Dewey “discussed the Darwinian paradigm, and … presented the beginnings of a pragmatic theory of ‘social sensorium,’ action, and communication” (Schubert 1998: 9).
exact transition points where subhuman communication turns into human-specific communication. By this means, he hopes to discover the behavioral and socio-psychological underpinnings of human intersubjectivity and language:

Language, then, has to be studied from the point of view of the gestural type of conduct within which it existed without being as such a definite language. And we have to see how the communicative function could have arisen out of that prior sort of conduct (Mead 1967 [1934]: 17).

The use of results from animal and comparative psychology is far from surprising, in this context. As Degler (1991: 32) points out, “[i]n none of the social sciences was this assumption of the relevance of animal behavior to the study of human beings more apparent than in the new science of psychology that was emerging in the last decades of the nineteenth century”.

Yet, in contrast to Tomasello, Mead does not refer to his own experimental research. Instead he repeatedly uses the example of an imaginary dogfight as a foil. In that context, Mead agrees and disagrees with Darwin at the same. While he highlights the necessity to understand human communication in terms of its evolutionary continuity he disagrees with Darwin’s theory of emotional expression. Against Darwin and with Wundt, he stresses the social and expressive value of emotional expression and gestures in animals (e.g. Mead 1904: 382; 1909: 406f.). In Wundt’s “vocal gesture” – which is not only perceived by the ‘receiver’ but also by the ‘sender’ – he discovers a “transitional” concept necessary for the understanding of self-reflexivity as well as of the unique mechanism of human interaction (Mead’s reasoning will become more clear in the following sections).

A comparable argument can be found in Cooley, who also emphasizes the importance of comparative studies:

If we go far enough back we find that man and other animals have a common history, that both sprang remotely from a common ancestry in lower forms of life, and that we cannot have clear ideas of our own life except as we study it on the animal side and see how and in what respects we have risen above the conditions of our cousins the horses, dogs, and apes (Cooley 2009 [1902/22]: 4).

Also for him, such a comparative perspective reveals the unique features of man, namely his flexibility and openness to cultural processes during ontogeny: “The difference is in teachability or plasticity. … This difference is fundamental to any understanding of the relation of man to the evolutionary process, or of the relation of human nature and human life to animal nature and animal life” (Cooley 2009: 19). In contrast to instinct-driven and hence inflexible animals who function like a “hand-organ”, humans resemble a “piano”: “in contrast to the “hand-organ”–it is not made to play particular tunes; you can do nothing at all on it without training; but a trained player can draw from it an infinite variety of music” (Cooley 2009: 19). This conceptualization of ‘humans’ and ‘animals’ as ‘ideal types’

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42 Cf. e.g. Mead (1910b: 177ff.; 1912: 402; 1967 [1934]: 14ff., 42ff., 63, 68ff., 162).
43 Thus, to put it simply, Mead agrees with the Darwin in terms of his Origin of Species and The Descent of Man – where Darwin does not only claim the evolution of man out of some simian ancestor but also emphasizes the dramatic consequences of these findings for psychology (1981 [1872]: 48f.) – but disagrees in important ways with Darwin in The Expression of Emotions in Man and the Animal – where he claims that facial and bodily expressions of emotions are just discharges of emotional energy which do not have a function for communicative interaction.
44 That they are, indeed, ‘ideal types’ in Weber’s sense can be seen in the following quote: ‘Of course there is no sharp line, in this matter of teachability, between man and the other animals. The activities of the latter are not
however, has its drawbacks because it does not allow for a convincing phylogenetic explanation of human-specific faculties in terms of their evolutionary continuity. This can also be seen from the fact that Cooley, in contrast to both Mead and Tomasello, does not posit the primacy of gestural communication in order to reconstruct the transition from nonhuman to human communication.

For Tomasello, in turn, the question of evolutionary continuity is crucial since it is an “ineluctable conclusion … that individual human beings possess a biological inherited capacity for living culturally” (Tomasello 1999: 53). Culture cannot be completely explained by culture. Thus, in order to avoid a circular argument, a well-founded account of the evolutionary continuity between nonhuman and human primate cognition and behavior is indispensable. For Tomasello, to call this a reductionist position would, however, utterly miss the point (Tomasello 1999: 11). In contrast to other cognitive scientists he does not want “to skip from the first page of the story, genetics, to the last page of the story, current human cognition, without going through any of the intervening pages”, namely, social interaction, cultural history and ontology (Tomasello 1999: 204). He stresses that the human-specific socio-cognitive capacity of shared intentionality must have been the result of a minor change in the socio-cognitive and/or motivational endowment. Indeed, given the short history of Homo sapiens (in evolutionary terms), anything more than a minor modification is highly improbable. This is why Tomasello repeatedly criticizes ‘modular’ or ‘nativist’ theories according to which the mind is made up by several “sub-programs” (Tooby, Cosmides 2005: 17), each adapted for a highly specialized task and each with its own evolutionary history.

Hence, Tomasello, as well as Mead and Cooley, uses results and theories from comparative psychology in order to identify the human-specific faculties that make possible human communication, society, and culture. While the coherence and details of their evolutionary accounts differ significantly, all of them agree that these faculties must be understood not only as products of gradual evolution but also as qualitatively new processes in the course of natural history. Consequently, both the pragmatist and Tomasello’s accounts attempt to recognize what Matthias Jung calls “the double-structure of the holism of difference and evolutionary continuity”.

That is to say, they do not only emphasize the enormous biolog-

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45 In his 1930 obituary for Cooley, Mead strongly criticizes Cooley for his poor phylogenetic account (cf. esp. Mead 2009 [1930]: xxxiiff.).

46 In order to explain the uniquely human form of life we have to presuppose an evolutionary thrust in social cognition towards cooperativeness and sharedness after the human lineage diverged from that of its primate relatives. Consequently, we have a time frame of 5 to 7 million years at the very most. However, “for all but the last 2 million years the human lineage showed no signs of anything other than typical great ape cognitive skills”. Furthermore, “the first dramatic signs of species-unique cognitive skills emerged only in the last one-quarter of a million years with modern Homo sapiens” (Tomasello 1999: 2f.). Thus, our problem is “one of time. The fact is, there simple has not been enough time to normal processes of biological evolution involving genetic variation and natural selection to have created, one by one, each of the cognitive skills necessary for humans to invent and maintain complex tool-use industries and technologies, complex forms of symbolic communication and representation, and complex social organizations and institutions” (Tomasello 1999: 2).

47 Examples of modular approaches are Chomsky’s theory of an innate “language organ” popularized today by Steven Pinker (2000), theories in evolutionary psychology that conceptualize the human mind as a bundle of highly specialized modular tools, that is, as a kind of “Swiss Army knife” (e.g. Tooby, Cosmides 2005; Buss 1995), or Baron-Cohen’s account of the ‘theory of mind’ and of autism (1995).

48 See Jung (2009: 370): “die Doppelstruktur von Differenzholismus und evolutionärer Kontinuität” (for the concept of the “holism of difference” in general see Jung (2009: 2, 6ff., 54ff., 197ff.).
ical and cognitive similarities between humans and their nonhuman relatives but also stress the qualitatively new form of life that results from the minor evolutionary differences. For example, Tomasello acknowledges our primate nature but does not search as his well-known colleague Frans de Waal does for “Our Inner Ape” (de Waal 2006). Speaking of the “holism of difference” means to oppose “multi-story anthropologies” (“Stockwerkanthropologien”) (Jung 2009: 198). Homo sapiens is not an ape with an additional layer of language, reason, or culture build on top, not a “genius-chimpanzee” or “chimpanzee-with-grammar” (Clark cited in Jung 2009: 57). In contrast, the concept of the “holism of difference” implies two major claims (Jung 2009: 55f.). On the one hand, it implies that the biologically evolved species-specific faculty impregnates the existence of this species as a whole, that is, even those ‘aspects’ that it ‘shares’ with other species. On the other hand, speaking of the holism of difference means that the human form of life cannot be understood ‘bottom-up’, i.e., by cumulative understanding of its faculties. Rather, it must be understood as an integrative whole. Thus in Mead’s theory of interaction, intersubjectivity and self-reflexivity; in Cooley’s account of sociability, sympathy and the looking-glass self; just as in Tomasello’s conceptualization of shared intentionality and ultra-cooperativeness, certain crucial specific capacities of humans also impregnate their perception, memory, attention, categorization, bodily movements, etc. – all aspects we share with other primates. In addition, according to Tomasello, the recognition of the evolutionary continuity of human nature calls for an alternative mechanism of cognitive transformation. In contrast to the above mentioned modular views, for him, human cognition and action can only be explained by granting a decisive role to cumulative cultural evolution which – compared to biological processes – works “on a completely different time scale” (Tomasello 1999: 207). Thus, while Tomasello wants to identify the socio-cognitive foundations of culture, he does not try to reduce culture to some overriding biological processes. Instead, he strives for an understanding of the psychological mechanisms that allowed for the cultural process to branch off of biological evolution, thereby constituting a relatively autonomous process which must be understood in its own terms. In other words, according to Tomasello, human society and culture can only be explained by means of dual inheritance theory, that is, by considering not only natural as well as cultural evolution but also their complex interdependencies.

Again, a similar, if less detailed, argument can be found in the work of the pragmatists. In Cooley’s Human Nature and the Social Order, for example, we can find a powerful metaphor for the interplay of “heredity” and “social transmission”. Here, he draws on the image of “a stream and a road running along the bank” (Cooley 2009: 4) in order to characterize the relationship between the “two channels of life,” i.e., between cultural and natural evolution. While the road is more recent than the river, in the course of human evolution it becomes “more and more distinct and travelled, and finally develops into an elaborate highway, supporting many kinds of vehicles and a traffic fully equal to that of the stream itself” (Cooley 2009: 5). In the life of the individual, these two processes become “a total organic process not separable into parts” (Cooley 2009: 15). Hence, according to Cooley, natural and cultural evolution should not be seen as antagonistic but as complementary.

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50 Take, for example, the following quote: “Of course human cognition is in large measure constituted by the kinds of things that appear as chapter headings in traditional Cognitive Psychology textbooks: perception, memory, attention, categorization, and so on. But these are all cognitive processes that human beings share with other primates. My account here simply presupposes them” (Tomasello 1999: 10).

51 For the idea of “dual inheritance theory” see esp. Richerson and Boyd 2006.
Thus, just like Tomasello, Cooley does not want to skip from the first to the last page in order to explain human activity and cognition, either. These phenomena can neither be understood as genetically fixed and hence ‘hard-wired’ nor as passively imprinted by culture. For Cooley, human agency is the result of active interpersonal interchange within the primary group that serves as a kind of cultural transmitter. Most importantly, however, human agency is not only triggered by the socio-cultural environment but takes a certain cultural form depending on its context. This is to say, plasticity is linked to the sociality and culturality as well as to historicity of human nature.

Human history, in distinction from animal history … is a process possible only to a species endowed with teachable instinctive dispositions, organized, partly by reason, into a plastic and growing social whole. This whole, responsive to the outer world in a thousand ways, and containing also diverse and potent energies within itself, is ever putting forth new forms of life, which we describe as progress or decadence according as we think them better or worse than the old. These changes do not require any alteration in our hereditary powers (Cooley 2009: 31).

Also, for Tomasello, humans are the “paradigmatic cultural species” since their culture is not only “quantitatively” but also “qualitatively unique” (Tomasello 2009b: ix, x). Because of their ontogenetic receptivity humans develop genuine cultural cognition. With respect to social cognition this leads to a new form of deepened and generalized shared intentionality. Consequently, the ‘qualitative’ disparity51 between the activities and cognitions of humans and animals builds up not only on their socio-cognitive and/or motivational differences but also on the effects of the cultural dimension of sociality, which itself became possible in the first place on the basis of this psychological infrastructure. The use of symbols and language illustrates these cognitive changes through culture. As Vygotsky already noted:

Although practical intelligence and sign use can operate independently of each other in young children, the dialectical unity of these systems in the human adult is the very essence of complex human behavior. Our analysis accords symbolic activity a specific organizing function that penetrates the process of tool use and produces fundamentally new forms of behavior (Vygotsky 1978 [1930-35]: 24; see also 45ff.).

In other words: the effects of the cultural ratchet change the ratchet’s mode of operation. This is why Tomasello approves of Mead’s claim that “there is nothing odd about the product of a given process contributing to, or even becoming an essential factor in, the further development of that process” (Tomasello 1999: 13; cf. Mead 1967 [1934]: 226).

So far, the comparative discussion of Tomasello and sociological pragmatism focused on the relation of natural and cultural evolution as well as on the impact of the socio-cultural environment on cognition. Now, however, the question arises why humans are able to partake in the sociocultural process (c) and why they are motivated to do so (d). In other words, Tomasello’s account of the cognitive and motivational dimension of the sociality of action needs to be compared to corresponding arguments in the works of the pragmatists.

51The term ‘qualitatively’ as I use it does not have any normative or ethical connotations. The differences discussed here are – in my view – irrelevant with respect to discussions about speciesism or animal rights.
c) Tomasello’s elaboration of the cognitive roots of human sociality (The cognitive dimension)

Arguably, the most important and radical contribution of sociological pragmatism to social theory is the claim that the problems of human agency and of human sociality are not two distinct problems but two aspects of the same problem. This is why we need to look into social interaction and social cognition in order to understand the self-reflexive and conscious activity of the individual. Yet, in order to understand the co-evolution of these two aspects we cannot begin with human specific communication. Instead, as can be seen in the work of Mead and Tomasello, an anthropological theory of action must begin with the most basic and hence ‘sub-human’ forms of interaction to identify the ‘transition points’ where non-human interaction turns into human-specific interaction. This explains why Mead and Tomasello assert the methodological primacy of gestural communication over speech (cf. e.g. Mead 1904: 79ff.; Mead 1910a: 397ff.; Tomasello 2008: 53ff.)52.

Most importantly, primate gestural communication is conceptualized not as an imitative but as a cooperative interaction. Each of the three authors discussed in this paper rejects those kinds of imitation-theory that regard imitation as the basic intersubjective process which makes interaction, enculturation, learning, understanding etc. possible53. Mead, Cooley, and Tomasello argue convincingly that imitation cannot be seen as ‘transitional’ concept since it already presupposes self-reflexivity and human-specific interaction:

When another self is present in consciousness doing something, then such a self may be imitated by the self that is conscious of him in his conduct, but by what possible mechanism, short of a miracle, the conduct of one form should act as a stimulus to another to do, not what the situation calls for, but something like that which the first form is doing, is beyond ordinary comprehension. Imitation becomes comprehensible when there is a consciousness of other selves, and not before. However, an organization of social instincts gives rise to many situations which have the outward appearance of imitation, but these situations – those in which, under the influence of social stimulation, one form does what others are doing – are no more responsible for the appearance in consciousness of other selves that answer to our own than are the situations which call out different and even opposed reactions. Social consciousness is the presupposition of imitation (Mead 1909: 405f.).

Indeed, as Mead notes at the end of the first sentence of the quote, it would not even be functional if imitation were the basic mechanism of human interaction. Instead, in most situations, efficient interaction only occurs if the members of a group carry out different actions that complement each other. Yet, because human individuals are deprived of instinctive behavioral patterns an evolutionary new mode of coordination is needed which makes possible institutionalized behavioral patterns. Despite their contingent character, these patterns would allow for a relative predictability of the behavior of others.

52 Because of his focus on imaginations, this does not apply to Cooley. Although he touches on the importance of bodily, especially facial, expressions for the development of young children (cf. e.g. Cooley 2009 [1902/22]: 81ff., 97ff.) he does not integrate these observations into a systematic anthropological theory of human communication and intersubjectivity.

53 For criticisms of imitation-theory and the complex motivational and cognitive preconditions of imitation see, for example, Mead (1909: 405ff.; Mead 1922: 160ff.; Cooley (2009 [1902/22]: 51ff.; Tomasello (1999: 26ff.). This does not mean that imitation is not important – far from it. In Tomasello, for example, it is the most important form of cultural learning. At this point, however, all that matters is that imitation is a very demanding process (e.g. Tomasello 1999: 26ff.) and not a relatively simple one which constitutes the anthropological basis of human interaction.
Such a new form of coordination, however, presents a serious challenge to social cognition. As long as we deal with non-social objects the coordination of action is relatively simple. But as soon as other social objects, that is, other individuals, become part of the situation everything changes\textsuperscript{54}.

A man’s reaction toward weather conditions has no influence upon the weather itself. It is of importance for the success of his conduct that he should be conscious not of his own attitudes, of his own habits of response, but of the signs of rain or fair weather. Successful social conduct brings one into a field within which a consciousness of one’s own attitudes helps toward the control of the conduct of others (Mead 1910a: 403).

Hence, in situations where humans interact with each other self-reflexivity becomes functional and necessary for the first time in natural history.

Yet, why does self-reflexivity present a challenge to social cognition? The answer to this question is ‘role-taking’. Cooley, Mead, and Tomasello agree that humans are able to act in a self-reflexive way only because they can take the role of the other, that is, only because they can look at themselves from the ‘outside’. Only if the individual experiences itself as a social object self-reflexivity or identity emerges. This is why we need to analyze social cognition in order to explain self-reflexivity.

While the three authors agree on this account of the relationship between role-taking and self-reflexivity, their works vary greatly in their degree of detail and their accuracy. In Cooley, we find a detailed discussion of the interplay of sympathy, role-taking, imagination, and identity. However, he does not connect this argumentation to the problem of gestural communication, interaction, and coordination in any systematic way. In contrast, the relation between gestural communication and social coordination on the one hand and role-taking and self-reflexivity on the other is central to Mead. Something similar holds true for Tomasello, whose work, however, discusses the different cognitive processes involved in social interaction in greater detail and presents experimental proof for many of its claims. Moreover, in contrast to Mead, Tomasello provides a detailed chronological developmental psychology not only the “developmental logic” of cognitive maturation (Joas 1997 [1980]: 119f.).

Most importantly, however, I think that Tomasello’s theory might be able to fill a crucial gap in Mead’s account. As already mentioned, Mead draws on Wundt’s concept of the “vocal gesture” in order to explain how an individual becomes self-reflexive. In contrast to facial and bodily expressions, so the argument goes, the vocal gesture can not only perceived by other individuals but also by the individual who performs the gesture. Because the ‘sender’ is affected by his own vocal gesture he can then associate this self-affect with the ‘attitude’ of the other which has been observed before:

In so far then as the individual takes the attitude of another toward himself, and in some sense arouses in himself the tendency to the action, which his conduct calls out in the other individual, he will have indicated to himself the meaning of the gesture (Mead 1922: 161).

\textsuperscript{54} For Mead, the difference between social and non-social objects is a decisive step in his argument (e.g. 1909: 403f.; 1910a: 403). In contrast, Cooley only touches on this problem: “By the time a child is a year old the social feeling that at first is indistinguishable from sensuous pleasure has become much specialized upon persons, and from that time onward to call it forth by reciprocation is a chief aim of his life” (2009 [1902/22]: 85).
Yet, if we look at singing birds or barking dogs; or if we think of manual gestures – which can also be observed by the ‘sender’ (as Mead himself notes (cf. 1922: 160)) –, the question arises: what is special about human vocal gestures? In some of Mead’s texts it seems as if his argument completely relies on this concept (cf. Mead 1913: 376f.). At least in one text, however, Mead himself acknowledges that it is not sufficient to refer to the vocal gesture alone.

Of course the mere capacity to talk to oneself is not the whole of self-consciousness, otherwise the talking birds would have souls or at least selves. What is lacking to the parrot are the social objects which can exist for the human baby (Mead 1912: 405).

While he acknowledges the problem, Mead does not, in my opinion, adequately address the further requirements of self-reflexivity. With reference to *Mind, Self & Society* Hans Joas and Harald Wenzel argue that Mead posits the “reduction of instincts” and the “constitutional uncertainty of reaction” in humans which, in turn, result from physiological changes of the central nervous system and the cerebral cortex, as further preconditions for self-reflexivity (Joas 1997 [1980]: 115; cf. Wenzel 1990: 71f.). Yet, even if this is correct, the question still is: what are the cognitive preconditions that allow for intersubjectivity and agency in the face of human ‘instinct reduction’ and ‘uncertainty of reaction’? Mead, I think, does not answer the question. Hence, it might be worthwhile to attempt to fill this gap with Tomasello’s detailed account of human social cognition. This, however, cannot be discussed here in detail.

Overall, not only with respect to the cognitive underpinnings of intersubjectivity Tomasello’s argument shows marked similarities to that of Mead. As becomes clear in his writings on cooperation, the reference to Mead is also important when it comes to the question of motivation: “Initially children base such “we-ness” on identification with significant other individuals such as parents and family and schoolmates (G.H. Mead’s significant other), and only later generalize them into truly impersonal cultural norms based on identification with some type of cultural group (G.H. Mead’s generalized other)” (Tomasello 2009b: 41f.). Thus, we should look into the similarities and difference with regard to the motivational dimension of the sociality of action. Why, so the basic question, do we strive for social contact and cooperation, in the first place?

d) An overly harmonious view of human action? (The motivational dimension)

To refer to ‘instincts’ in contemporary social theory to identify the motivation for a certain human activity is not really en vogue, to say the least. Around 1900, however, a great number of instinct theories were discussed in the social sciences, especially in the United States. Some of them listed dozens or even hundreds of different instincts. Apart from the sporadic early criticisms of Carl Kelsey, Franz Boas or Luther L. Bernard, the “assault on instinct theory” only started in the early 1920s (cf. Collier et al. 1991: 32-34; Degler 1991: 157ff.). Like many other social scientists the pragmatist authors for a long time maintained an ambivalent attitude towards instinct theory. It was not until 1921 that Ellsworth Faris, a disciple of Mead, rejected instinct-theory completely by stating that “genetic explanation is a sort of mythological effort and has resulted in rather ludicrous stories which pass as explanations” (Faris 1921: 84).

Today, the concept of ‘instinct’ is associated with biologicist and reductionist theories that completely deprive the individual organism of self-reflexivity, empathy or prosocial motivations. Mead, however, aimed at a non-reductionist anthropological theory of inter-
subjectivity and self-reflexivity. Why, then, was he attracted by instinct-theory? In his review of McDougall’s *Introduction to Social Psychology* (1960 [1908]) — one of the first textbooks of social psychology and a seminal contribution to instinct-theory — Mead writes:

> The most important feature of this analysis of Mr. McDougall, in the mind of the reviewer, is that it makes the ultimate unit an act rather than a state of consciousness. All consciously formed habits are regarded as in a sense derivatives of these instincts and servants of them. All the motive power of conduct is found in them. All the complexities of thought and action are explained through the complications of the instincts and their stimuli and motor responses (Mead 1908: 386).

This quote suggests that Mead embraces ‘instinct-theory’ because he regards it as a possible way out of the contradictions of the traditional philosophy of consciousness (cf. Joas 1997 [1980]: 93). Because instinct-theory takes its start from the analysis of the instinctive behavior of an individual organism in its environment, higher psychological processes need to be explained not only in terms of their functional value for the organism but also on the basis of these basic activities. Hence, in Mead’s view, instinct theory does not assume what needs to be proved, namely, self-reflexivity and consciousness. Moreover, the integration of the concept of ‘social instincts’ into instinct theory — that can already be found in Darwin (1981 [1872]: 79ff.) and that takes central stage in McDougall — not only suggests the above mentioned distinction between social and non-social objects but also implies the impulse to interact with others in various ways. Here, we can not only locate the starting point of a possible theory of motivation in Mead but also the need to combine it with his account of intersubjectivity. Yet, in spite of these important insights, there is no systematic discussion of the motivational dimension of the sociality of action in the work of Mead. Two theoretical problems need to be considered in order to account for this shortcoming. First, Mead drew on instinct-theory only in his earlier studies. Like many other social scientists “Mead, too, later dissociated himself from the psychology of instincts and became an adherent of the weaker version of this theory which held that the impulses are the remnants of instincts in human beings” (Joas 1997 [1980]: 93f.). For example, in his 1929 study “National mindedness and international mindedness”, Mead only presupposes two natural and rather diffuse impulses, namely, solidarity and aggression (Joas 1997: 119). These “natural impulses”, then, become part of his concept of the “I” as the spontaneous, creative, and impulsive part of the self (Joas 1997: 117). Second, Mead not only changed the conceptual framing of his motivational ‘theory’ but also failed to connect it to his theory of identity (Joas 1997: 117).

In contrast to Mead, Cooley was skeptical of instinct-theory from the start. Humans, according to Cooley, are motivated not by fixed instincts but by “instinctive emotions” which “are rapidly developed, transformed, and interwoven by social experience, giving rise to a multitude of complex passions and sentiments … . Indeed, as these change very considerably with changes in the social life that moulds them, it is impossible that they should be defined and finally described” (Cooley 2009 [1902/22]: 27). While this seems to be a possible

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55However, despite its promising beginnings McDougall’s approach fails to provide a convincing account of self-reflexivity and the self (Mead 1908: 389).

56For example, in 1909 Mead argues: “If self-conscious conduct arises out of controlled and organized impulse, and impulses arise out of social instincts, and the responses to these social stimulations become stimuli to corresponding social acts on the part of others, it is evident that human conduct was from the beginning of its development in a social medium” (Mead 1909: 403f.).
starting point for a cultural sociology of motivation and emotion (cf. Nungesser 2012) it does not explain in any conclusive way why human beings have such a strong impulse to partake in social interaction.

In Cooley, such an explanation can most likely be found in his account of human “sociability” (Cooley 2009 [1902/22]: 81-135). For Cooley, sociability initially manifests itself in children’s “susceptibility to touches, tones of voice, gesture, and facial expression” (Cooley 2009: 5, see also 103). At the beginning they strive for contact with others mainly in search of “stimulating suggestions” (Cooley 2009: 84), later – when they are around one year of age – their “social feeling” enables them to distinguish social objects from other kinds of stimulation. Towards these objects “the child has by heredity a generous capacity” (Cooley 2009: 86). Children want to share their experiences with others. They allow them to express themselves which is of crucial importance for their further development (Cooley 2009: 85). Yet, sociability involves not only an expressive but also a receptive dimension since it also implies the willingness to imagine the thoughts and sentiments of others. This is why the emergence of an “imaginary playmate” is a decisive step in the development of sociability (Cooley 2009: 88ff.). For Cooley, the conversations with this playmate have to be regarded as “the naïve expression of a socialization of the mind that is to be permanent and to underlie all later thinking” (Cooley 2009: 89). In other words, in these interactions the intersubjective, dialogical and imaginative character of cognition and action becomes apparent (Cooley 2009: 89ff., 360ff.). From then on the “mind lives in perpetual conversation” (Cooley 2009: 90) and through this imaginative effort, that is, through the constant imagination of other people’s thoughts and sentiments “our personality is built up” (Cooley 2009: 97)57.

Yet, just as Mead, if for quite different reasons, Cooley does not arrive at a full-fledged theory of motivation. While he pays more attention to impulses and emotions than Mead does, he fails to connect his theory of sociability (motivational dimension) with his theory of sympathy or understanding (cognitive dimension)58.

In spite of its shortcomings, Cooley’s concept of “sociability” shows marked similarities to Tomasello’s account of the motivational dimension of sociality. Just like Tomasello, Cooley emphasizes the spontaneous character of the children’s expressivity and generosity. Also, for Tomasello, to help and to express themselves is a “naturally emerging behavior” in children (Tomasello 2009b: 7). In his view humans are “born (and bread) to help” (Tomasello 2009b: 1). So, if he had to choose between Hobbes and Rousseau, Tomasello would side with the latter (Tomasello 2009b: 3). Hence, the question arises: why isn’t there love and peace everywhere in the world? Isn’t this “Rousseau first, Hobbes second” hopelessly naïve? Don’t we have to “Bring the Beasts Back in”, as van den Berghe put it (1974)? Of course, Tomasello is aware of this possible misunderstanding.

For all parents who think their child must have skipped the naturally cooperative stage, let me quickly note that we are talking here about a behavior measured in relation to other primates. All viable organisms must have a selfish streak; they must be concerned about their own survival and well-being or they will not be leaving many offspring. Human cooperativeness and helpfulness are, as it were, laid on top of this self-interested foundation” (Tomasello 2009b: 5).

57. This is, of course, the toe-hold to Cooley’s theory of the social self that finds its expression in the well-known concept of the “looking-glass self” (Cooley 2009 [1902/22]: 184f.).

58. This shortcoming can be recognized by the mere fact that the concept of “sociability” is hardly mentioned after Ch. III of Human Nature and the Social Order. Conversely, the term “sympathy” (in the sense of “understanding”) gains crucial importance only from Ch. IV on.
I consider this intuitively plausible claim to be profoundly problematic. *Homo sapiens* is conceptualized here as a kind of ‘chimpanzee-plus-helpfulness’. That is to say, Tomasello slides into a kind of ‘multi-story anthropology’ that splits the human individual into a savage and egocentric ape and an altruistic and empathic human. The result would be a two-part theory of action: one part dealing with the explanation of self-interested action on the basis of nonhuman primate behavior; another part dealing with disinterested action on the basis of human-specific social cognition and motivations. However, in order to avoid such an anthropological conception that contradicts the aforementioned holism of difference all kinds of actions must be understood against the background of the qualitatively distinct human form of life.

This does not lead to an overly harmonious view of human action. Humans can, of course, be ‘both competitive and cooperative’ (Moll and Tomasello 2007: 640). However, the crucial insight is that human self-interested actions are qualitatively different from that of apes. Just as cooperative actions they draw heavily on species-specific skills. In his phylogenetic account of the *Origins of Human Communication*, Tomasello expresses this view quite clearly:

Our proposal is that human cooperative communication was adaptive initially because it arose in the context of mutualistic collaborative activities in which individuals helping others were simultaneously helping themselves. This is not quite as obvious as it first sounds, as cooperative communication today may be used for all kinds of selfish, deceptive, competitive, and otherwise individualistic ends” (Tomasello 2008: 170).

Hence, compared with nonhuman primates, completely new modes of egoistic actions become possible. For example, lying and deception is only possible on the complex basis of recursive mindreading and an understanding of common ground. What is more, even the most vicious acts like sadism or torture draw heavily on these social cognitive skills. Consequently, based on an account of the intrinsic sociality of cognition and action a better understanding of cooperative as well as competitive and even amoral or vicious action becomes possible. Humans can, of course, act egoistically, sadistically, or antisocially but they rarely act egocentrically in the true sense of the word.

**V. Final Remarks**

The comparison and potential synthesis of sociological pragmatism and recent developments in the cognitive sciences would, of course, require a more detailed discussion. Yet, it should already have become clear that an intense dialogue between authors such as Tomasello and the pragmatists holds a lot of promise. By entering into this dialogue, one remains faithful to the pragmatist project and its transdisciplinary aspiration. This dialogue might also be the first step to a pragmatist perspective on present debates on social cognition, we-intentions, or the evolution of human sociality.

Because it contributes to an elaborate account of its anthropological double-structure Tomasello’s work may be of great importance for an understanding of human action as both evolutionary continuous and qualitatively different. Yet, as has been shown in section IV(d), some remnants of “multi-story-anthropologies” might be found in his work. Then, it sounds like the species-unique skills are just “laid on top of” (Tomasello 2009b: 5) or “added” to (Tomasello 2009b: 39) nonhuman primate cognition.
Most importantly, however, it must be seen that Tomasello can be of crucial importance for an account of the fundamental anthropological foundations of human agency. He cannot, however, answer sociological questions regarding status, emotions, power or social norms. These concepts are necessarily linked to the problems discussed in this paper. How exact the interplay between these processes works, however, needs to be discussed in future sociological research.

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Pragmatism as a Communication-Theoretical Tradition: An Assessment of Craig’s Proposal

Abstract. Of recent attempts to appropriate pragmatism for communication studies, Robert Craig’s inclusion of a pragmatist “tradition” in his influential “metamodel” of communication theories constitutes one of the most prominent proposals to date. In this model, pragmatism is principally understood by contrast to other alternatives, such as phenomenology, semiotics, and rhetoric. As a communication-theoretical tradition in Craig’s sense, the pragmatist approach is expected to provide distinctive articulations of the nature of communication and communication problems, expressed in a particular vocabulary. Useful as such a partitioning may be for analytical and dialogical purposes, the delimitation of pragmatism that emerges from Craig’s efforts is in many respects problematic. After a summary of the background assumptions and disciplinary aims of Craig’s project, this article identifies three serious weaknesses in his account: its neglect of relevant intra-tradition distinctions and debates, its straightforward association of pragmatism with a strongly constitutive approach to communication, and its tendency to disconnect pragmatism from other communication-theoretical positions in ways that are not conducive to his objectives. This discussion highlights the contrast between Craig’s constructionist instrumentalism and the habit-realism of the classical pragmatisms of Peirce and Dewey.

Although pragmatist thought has influenced academic communication studies in a variety of ways over the last hundred years, it is only of late that distinctively pragmatist approaches to the field of communication have begun to be properly articulated. Instead of taking pragmatist philosophy as merely a secondary source of ideas and tools, several communication scholars have endorsed pragmatism as a central communication-theoretical perspective in its own right (e.g. Craig 2007; Danisch 2007; Russill 2004; 2005; 2006; 2007; 2008; Swartz, Campbell and Pestana 2009) – one assumed to be capable of providing a fertile general framework for inquiry into contemporary communicative practices.

Of such attempts to appropriate pragmatism for communication studies, Robert Craig’s (2007) inclusion of a pragmatist tradition in his chart of communication theories constitutes one of the most prominent proposals to date. Prompted by Chris Russill’s (2004; 2005; 2006) reconstruction of pragmatism from a communicative point of view, Craig has revised his “metamodel” to include pragmatism as a central tradition in the field. Craig’s

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2 This paper was originally presented at the Theory, Philosophy and Ethics of Communication division session at the Nordicom conference in Akureyri in August 2011. A part of the paper also formed a part of a longer paper presented at the pragmatism session at the congress of the International Communication Association in Singapore in June 2010. I wish to thank the participants in these sessions for their comments and valuable criticism. In particular, I wish to acknowledge Robert Craig’s generous reply to my paper at the ICA meeting; I may not agree with all aspects of his approach to pragmatism as a communication-theoretical tradition, but his willingness to seriously consider the advantages and disadvantages of different points of view constitutes an exemplar of pluralist pragmatism at its best.

3 Here, “communication theory” is used as an abbreviation for “social communication theory”, and is furthermore restricted to approximately the sense in which Craig employs the term. The broader issue of the proper nature and limits of communication theory is beyond the scope of this brief review.
explication is admittedly more schematic and less historically embedded than Russill’s appropriation; but the former account stands out as a concise attempt to pinpoint the distinctive communication-theoretical contribution of pragmatist thought. The outcome of Craig’s endeavour is a relatively definite articulation of the kernel of pragmatism from a present-day communication-theoretical point of view.

Such a demarcation faces a number of difficulties, of which the variety of different pragmatist perspectives on the market is probably the most obvious. Given the range of pragmatist thought — from the classical pragmatist ideas of Charles Peirce and William James to the neopragmatism of Richard Rorty and beyond — any significant delimitation of the pragmatist approach is likely to provoke suspicions of narrowness and undue omissions. As I will argue, Craig’s revised metamodel tends to compartmentalise the tradition in a way that excludes some of its central characters. However, given Craig’s systematic objectives, simply pointing out that his conception of pragmatism omits this or that figure is not compelling, as he is less concerned with the historical background than he is with moving social communication theory — including its purported pragmatist component — forward. It is therefore not sufficient to note that Craig’s approach is selective and restrictive. But if it is further shown that these exclusions may be detrimental to attempts to tap the full potential of pragmatist thought, and therefore unfavourable to the fruitful development of the communication-theoretical field, the criticism becomes more potent. Consequently, I will here be less concerned with questions of historical representation or misrepresentation than with the issue of the potential implications of Craig’s portrayal of pragmatism for the future development of communication inquiry.

This discussion is rendered particularly pertinent by the somewhat volatile state of communication studies as a social-scientific specialty3. Sometimes viewed as merely a secondary offshoot of sociology or political science, the communication discipline — if that is an appropriate characterisation at all — is marked by self-doubt and periodic “ferments”. The positive aspect of this situation is a certain receptivity to new theoretical and meta-theoretical openings; and it is as such that Craig’s proposal should be viewed and possibly criticised. It is likely that the conception of pragmatism sketched in the revised metamodel will exert a noticeable influence on how the field of communication theory is presented and parsed in textbooks and anthologies of the near future. Thus, what may be at stake in this debate is how the very concept “pragmatism” is going to be understood and used in social-scientific communication studies.

Yet, it should be noted that Craig’s primary focus is not the identification and development of a pragmatist tradition in communication theory per se, but rather the crafting of a constitutive metamodel capable of bringing some focus and genuine cross-paradigm interaction to the fledgling communication-theoretical field. Indeed, in the first version of the model (Craig 1999), pragmatism does not play any explicit role at all; it is only after Russill’s (2004; 2005) attempts to vindicate pragmatism that Craig expands the original seven-tradition matrix of first-order communication theories to include the pragmatist perspective in “Pragmatism in the Field of Communication Theory” (2007). Consequently, in order to scrutinise the particular shape Craig’s conception of pragmatism takes, it is necessary to first grasp the motivations behind and the principles emerging from his ambitious metamodel project.

3This disciplinary association is not self-evident; communication studies tend to spill over into different areas of the humanities as well as into technology studies and the like. But as an academic subject, communication inquiry is usually classified as a social science.
The Constitutive Logic of the Metamodel

As the name suggests, Craig’s “constitutive metamodel” strives to construct a second-order delineation of first-order communication theories. It is driven by the belief that in spite of “the epistemological diversity and currently fragmented state of communication theory ... the field can and should achieve a certain dialogical–dialectical coherence by adopting a common focus on communication problems in society and debating alternative practical approaches” (Craig 2007: 125). This is based on the notion that communication is a socially constructed practice, while communication theory is “a practical way of participating in a societal discourse about the norms of that practice” (Craig 2007: 127).

To a large extent, the metamodel – which might equally well be called a “metatheory”, as Craig (2001: 232) acknowledges in his response to David Myers’s criticism – can be seen as an extension of Craig’s conception of the relationship between first-order theory and practice. According to this view, the development of a social practice is more or less automatically accompanied by a normative discourse, which “is characterized by specific discursive practices, or ways of using language for practical purposes” (Craig 2006: 39). Such discourse is not a neutral representation of the activity in question; it is a constitutive part of the practice, because it articulates standards, norms, techniques, etc., which render the activity culturally meaningful as well as capable of social dissemination and regulation. Consequently, in this first-order constitutive conception, every theory, “considered as an interpretation of practical knowledge, presents an idealized normative standard for practice” (Craig 2006: 44). Following James Carey (1989: 32), Craig (2007: 128) contends that every model of communication is also a model for communication. But such models or theories are themselves higher-order activities, the validity of which depends on the relevance and value of the ideal forms of practice they entail and assemble; consequently, communication theories ought to be open to second-order normative examination on such grounds.

Craig’s metamodel is thus a theory about theories, but it is explicitly constitutive. Whereas a first-order constitutive model of communication posits that the practice under scrutiny “is the primary social process through which our meaningful common world is constructed”, the metalevel constitutive viewpoint conceives of the field of deliberation and argumentation about communication theory as a debate about the practical implications of constituting communication itself in different ways (Craig 2007: 127-8). This entails the denial of an absolute reality of communication as a social practice, apart from its constitution in discourse. As Myers (2001) has noted, this is hardly a neutral standpoint, because the constitutive perspective is clearly employed in the very construction of the metatheory. One could therefore argue that such a metamodel is woefully incapable of providing a level playing field, as critics of constructionism are hardly likely to accept the constitutive supposition and join the discussion. In his reply, Craig (2001) openly acknowledges this, as well as the reflexive paradox which follows from adopting a thoroughly constitutive conception of communication theory4; as he puts it, the constitutive metamodel is “shot through with social constructionism” (Craig 2001: 235). But in a broadly pragmatic fashion, Craig argues that a metamodel of the kind he has envisaged is simply the best alternative for advancing cross-paradigm debate available to us. It is in principle capable of detecting something of value in traditions opposed to its fundamental premises, for every “theory offers a particular way of constituting the process of communication from some practically

4 In Craig’s (2007) words, the paradox entails that the constitutive metamodel “cannot a priori reject first-order models of communication that contradict its own assumptions without thereby contradicting those very assumptions” (Craig 2007: 128).
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tated point of view” (Craig 2007: 128). Not even the oft-vilified linear transmission models are excluded from purview, as they may provide useful ways to talk about communicative phenomena for some particular purposes.

Consequently, the primary justification for positing a constitutive metamodel seems to be that it renders a broad field of communication theory possible, as some ground of comparison between positions that may seem to be wholly incommensurable is identified (Craig 2001: 234). That is, Craig’s proposal purportedly possesses the capacity to coalesce the troublingly divergent field of first-order theories by viewing them as different ways of constructing communication for real-world ends.

The constitutive metamodel is useful because it gives the vast, otherwise disparate array of communication theories a common practical purpose to illuminate, challenge, and enrich everyday ways of talking about communication problems and practices. The constitutive metamodel constructs a coherent field by interpreting the various theories of communication as alternative ways of constituting communication in discourse for practical purposes (Craig 2007: 129).

Furthermore, as suggested, the adoption of the constitutive metaperspective is also motivated instrumentally; supposedly, “it puts at our disposal the sum total of practical value derivable from every communication theory” (Craig 2001: 234).

Arguably, this viewpoint indicates that the constitutive metamodel is meant to be comprehensive in the sense that it can identify every communication theory worthy of the name – although, as a heuristic device, the metamodel does not claim to cover all the work done in the field (Craig 2007: 139). Furthermore, Craig’s rationale for postulating the metamodel also implies that his approach can explicate the crucial distinguishing factors between such genuine first-order models of communication – elements that he articulates in a schematic matrix. Each candidate perspective is then categorised according to its unique definition of communication, its particular conceptualisation of communication problems, its characteristic “metadiscursive vocabulary” that encompasses terms for talking about communication, and the “metadiscursive commonplaces” or everyday assumptions about communication that it either affirms or challenges (Craig 2007: 129). In the second place, a bona fide member of the matrix is expected to be capable of articulating its disagreements with the other approved perspectives, thus opening up the lines of argument between different approaches to practical problems of communication.

In Craig’s (1999) original presentation of the constitutive metamodel, the application of these principles for identifying communication theories results in seven basic perspectives – or, as Craig prefers to designate them, traditions – namely, the rhetorical, the semiotic, the phenomenological, the cybernetic, the sociopsychological, the sociocultural, and the critical. In addition, Craig acknowledges some secondary, hybrid forms, such as the poststructuralist viewpoint. Furthermore, he admits that this particular matrix is only one convenient way of structuring the field; it is therefore always open to corrections and additions that would require fairly substantial adjustments of the scheme.

The only restrictions on adding a tradition to the constitutive metamodel are that the proposed tradition must comprise a substantial body of thought that contributes a unique, practically consequential conceptualization of communication, significantly different from all other traditions, and that it must be incorporated into the matrix of the field by specifying its distinctive view of communication problems, metadiscursive vocabulary, commonplace beliefs it affirms or challenges, and topoi for argumentation vis-à-vis other
traditions. Incorporating a new tradition requires that other traditions be redefined, at least to the extent that each of them has something to say (argumentative topoi) about the new tradition, and possibly in more radical ways as key ideas are reinterpreted in the new tradition (Craig 2007: 130).

So, although the constitutive metamodel is open to changes, such modifications must be performed in an orderly fashion; the way the model is actually assembled depends on purposes at hand, but the freedom of construction is restricted by the requirement that each tradition must be articulated in relation to the other constituents of the metamodel. In other words, no matter how the matrix is actually arranged, it must explicate the relevant differences between basic first-order theories with regard to the unifying question of practical bearings. This is basically what the constitutive metamodel claims to do: to distinguish purported central traditions of communication theory in a way that articulates their differences and thereby facilitates discussion between these perspectives.

**Pragmatism Delineated**

If pragmatism is to be elevated to the status of a basic communication-theoretical tradition in the metamodel matrix, it must be capable of asserting its unique conception of communication in the manner outlined above. According to Craig, Russill’s (2004) identification of the communication-theoretical quintessence of pragmatism succeeds in establishing the pragmatist perspective as a tradition in the sense required, although the account in question falls somewhat short of a full matrix-model articulation. Russill locates the emergence of a distinctive pragmatist approach to communication in William James’s radical empiricism, which supposedly provides pragmatism with a unique perspective on communication problems; in Craig’s (2007) words, “the pragmatist tradition conceptualizes communication in response to the problem of incommensurability — that is, the problem of cooperation in a pluralistic social world characterized by the absence of common, absolute standards for resolving differences” (Craig 2007: 131). This is purportedly a neglected point of view. While pragmatism has influenced communication inquiry in a myriad of different ways over the years, the specifically pragmatist conundrum of communication as the “problem of incommensurabilism in modern democratic and pluralistic societies” has not been recognised as such (Russill 2004: 32).

Next, via an interpretation of John Dewey’s conception of a democratic public, the pragmatist view of communication is distinctively conceptualised in terms of triple contingency and pluralism (Craig 2007: 135).

A critical element in Dewey’s theory for Russill is a triple contingency that fully situates communication in James’s indeterminate, pluralistic universe. In terms of communication models, single contingency can be represented by a linear (A → B) model in which A contingently selects a message to influence B. Double contingency can be represented by an interactionist (A ↔ B) model in which the incommensurable perspectives of A and B jointly determine the message (a moment of relative sameness). Triple contingency introduces a third contingent perspective that forms the context in which A and B must interact. The third perspective is represented in Dewey’s theory by a pluralistic public comprising incommensurable group interests. The interaction of A and B is contingent on their reflexive awareness of the actions and interests of various nonpresent others who constitute the public. Inquiry (investigation of consequences) is needed to inform that reflexive social awareness. “Acting intelligently, on the basis of consequences of habitual and prospective actions, creates a standpoint of action that is neither ego’s nor alter’s but
Communication in society depends critically on Dewey’s vision of a democratic public or pluralistic community as a context for cooperative interaction across incommensurable perspectives (Craig 2007: 132).

The triple-contingency or “transactional” view entails a thoroughgoing contextualist turn. All notions of universal norms or foundational codes of communication are purportedly abandoned, as the pragmatist affirms that “change and contingency go all the way down” (Russill 2004: 172). Communicative meaning is constantly constituted and renegotiated in three different settings of indeterminacy: individual freedom, interactive coordination, and social incommensurability – none of which can be neglected in an adequate account of communication according to this perspective. In particular, pragmatism highlights the third level of contingency, which in Piet Strydom’s (2001) terms can be characterised as “the contingency that the public as the bearer of a third point of view brings into communicative relations and hence into the social process” (Strydom 2001: 165). Put differently, there are three factors that have a constitutive impact on the social situation – the individual, the dialogical pair, and the public – each of which increases the complexity and the indeterminacy of the state of affairs. In practice, this entails that social communication can be construed as a continuous attempt to manage three levels of irreducible contingency of meaning – the possible success of which is always relative, situational, and partial.

Consequently, Russill’s account seems to fulfil the two most basic requirements of the metamodel matrix, as it provides us with a unique articulation of the problem of communication in terms of incommensurability and a distinctive conception of communication in terms of triple contingency. However, although Russill identifies an initial metadiscursive vocabulary consisting of terms such as “democracy”, “publics”, and “criticism” and provides some arguments for the plausibility of the pragmatist viewpoint vis-à-vis other traditions, Craig contends that this articulation of pragmatism only partly fulfils the conditions of the metamodel. Russill neglects to consider metadiscursive commonplaces, does not pursue a systematic criticism of the seven other traditions, and does not properly scrutinise how the inclusion of pragmatism in the metamodel affects the viewpoints of the other basic perspectives; but from Craig’s (2007) point of view, the most serious omission is Russill’s failure “to consider a full range of topoi or lines of argument against pragmatism from the traditions of communication theory, including those all-important topoi for self-criticism of pragmatism from a pragmatist point of view” (Craig 2007: 135). Hence, Craig undertakes to complete the picture.

In Craig’s (2007: 136-8) version of the pragmatist tradition of communication theory, communication is conceptualised as pluralistic community and the “co-ordination of practical activities through discourse and reflexive inquiry”, while problems of communication are extended beyond incommensurability per se to include conditions that are apt to work against pluralistic community, such as nonparticipation, dogmatism, and defective discourse practices. The revised metadiscursive vocabulary includes concepts that refer to co-ordinated management, such as “community”, “pluralism”, “interdependence”, “interests”, “consequences”, “inquiry”, “discourse”, “participation”, and “cooperation”. The pragmatist perspective is construed as plausible when it appeals to metadiscursive commonplaces such as “we need to cooperate despite our differences” and “the real meaning of anything is the practical difference it makes”; and it is taken to be interesting when it disputes metadiscursive commonplaces such as “there are certain truths that cannot be denied” and “there can be no cooperation with evil or falsehood”.
Furthermore, Craig (2007) asserts that a common theme running through the purported pragmatist critique of the other traditions is the contention that they “attempt to restrict the triple contingency of communication, thereby limiting reflexivity through appeals to traditional beliefs (rhetoric), structured codes (semiotics), dialogical focus on the other (phenomenology), formal models (cybernetics), causal predictions (social psychology), persistent cultural patterns and social structures (sociocultural theory), and universal validity claims (Habermasian critical theory)” (Craig 2007: 138). In other words, the Craig-Russill conception of pragmatist communication theory also functions as a critic of the inclination to curb indeterminacy by postulating different kinds of universal or transcendent factors. However, as Craig suggests, the most interesting aspect of this analysis may be pragmatism’s self-criticism, which is divided into two predicaments. Firstly, the pragmatist is purportedly faced with the dilemma of reflexivity, which follows from the fact that pragmatism cannot be brought to fruition “without forming institutions that inevitably routinize and ritualize practices of inquiry and communication, thereby reducing contingency (the always-temporary goal of inquiry) while rendering them nonreflexive (which inhibits inquiry)” (ibid.). On the other hand, pragmatism confronts the paradox of pluralism, because it is in practice adopting a “neutral” stance in its advocacy of a pluralistic community, standing aloof from any particular interests, while at the same time theoretically denying the possibility of assuming such a neutral attitude. It is this predicament that leads to Rorty’s infamous ethnocentrism; since an unbiased, universal standpoint is in principle unachievable, one might as well advocate the values and interests of one’s “ethnic” community (in Rorty’s case, the standards of a purported liberal America). The affirmation of “contingency all the way” comes with a price.

As a full-fledged tradition of communication theory in Craig’s sense, pragmatism is also to be submitted to criticism from the other basic perspectives of the matrix. Frankly, these do not seem to pack much of a punch, which may be an indication of Craig’s tacit pragmatist sympathies. However, from the point of view of critical theory, pragmatism can be accused of providing inadequate accounts of power and underestimating the significance of political conflict – a possible weakness that Russill (2004; 2006) has tried to remedy by introducing Foucauldian perspectives into the pragmatist’s analytical arsenal. Furthermore, in both the cybernetic and sociocultural topoi for argumentation against pragmatism, one finds the critical contention that “pragmatism overestimates agency” (Craig 2007: 137). Although the implications of this charge are not elaborated in Craig’s account, I believe it points to some characteristic difficulties for a strongly constitutive – and nominalistic – conception of pragmatism.

The Significance of Tradition

Craig’s general outline for a meta-approach to communication theory, as well as the subsequent inclusion of pragmatism in the discussion, is in many respects commendable. Rather than indifferently embracing disciplinary diversity, Craig seeks plausible grounds for constructive discussion in a pluralistic environment. Moreover, he does not pursue this end by indiscriminately affirming the legitimacy of every theoretical perspective under the sun, but puts forward what is clearly a normative point of view leading to categorisations of and distinctions between communication theories. Although Craig wisely leaves his meta-model open-ended and revisable, it is also exclusive, offering criteria for what may be construed as appropriate first-order communication theories. Everything does not go.

On the other hand, the benchmarks proposed by Craig provide some fairly obvious targets for criticism. Above, Myers’s (2001) reproof of the constructionist slant of the original
A metamodel was noted. In view of the later revisions proposed by Craig, it seems reasonable to add a bias for pragmatism to this picture. In fact, Craig (2007: 133; 139-40) explicitly acknowledges that Russell is right in holding that the constitutive metamodel is in many respects a pragmatistic conception; the metamodel is a tool for tackling the problem of incommensurability – supposedly characteristic of a pragmatist construal of communication issues – in the field of communication theory. Furthermore, the metamodel adopts a pragmatist stance as it construes theories in terms of their practical orientations and as it replaces truth with utility as the fundamental evaluative criterion. Although Craig’s project purportedly employs facets of all of its traditions, pragmatism belongs to the “favoured traditions” that posit a first-order constitutive model of communication. However, his proposal is also haunted by the paradox of pluralism: although there can be no neutral metamodel, the model in question professes to give a fair hearing to all of the main traditions. To Craig’s (2007) credit, he openly admits that the constitutive metamodel is “a largely pragmatist project rather closely aligned with a first-order pragmatist theory of communication, although it also includes and welcomes dialogue with other incommensurable approaches” (Craig 2007: 141). But it might still be too much to ask of other traditions that they should embrace a debate so heavily loaded in favour of a constitutive pragmatist perspective, which, as we shall shortly see, is in itself a contestable interpretation.

Arguably, the attempt to find a balance between a first-order pragmatist theory of communication and a comprehensive metamodel informed by pragmatism is difficult to maintain. The first- and second-order pragmatisms qualify each other in ways that tend to render both less potent and – perhaps ironically – also less practicable. It is at any rate difficult to see how both can be consistently maintained: according to second-order principles, a first-order pragmatist should be prepared to accept that his or her favoured theory may in certain practical circumstances be inferior to its main rivals, whereas the second-order pragmatist should concede that his or her purportedly inclusive perspective is in fact determined by a restricted first-order commitment. In other words, the full-scale pragmatist must entertain something like a split personality, simultaneously affirming certain theoretical beliefs while at the same time conceding that the beliefs in question are replaceable tools. The first-level commitment – of whatever stripe it may be – is weakened by the broad instrumentalism of the meta-view.

Such arguments cast doubt on the overall feasibility of Craig’s metamodel project. The status of second-order pragmatism as a sufficiently comprehensive vantage point is rendered dubious if it is understood as a product or upshot of a first-order construction. More generally, one might also question whether practical benefit or purpose constitutes a sufficiently comprehensive and neutral reference point for the task at hand. In a broadly Deweyan fashion, Craig does away with the theory/practice dualism. In this process, communication theories tend to become mere tools in the service of a somewhat nebulous sphere of social practice; but in order to pack any punch, this account must assume that “practical aims” are commensurable enough to provide a common ground for productive dialogue. A critic could plausibly inject that “practice” is in fact highly abstract and heavily theory-laden conception. In fact, as a constructionist, Craig ought to agree. But this threatens the metamodel with a potentially debilitating circularity, and the appeal to pragmatism does not provide any respite from this difficulty.

The problem of the status of pragmatism in Craig’s metamodel can also be approached from a different angle. Namely, rather than describing and elucidating anything recognisable as a full pragmatist tradition, his proposal amounts to a particular rendering of the communicative gist of pragmatism. Admittedly, the notion of pragmatism as one tradition
is highly contestable, as is the meaning and upshot of the concept of “tradition”, leaving plenty of room of varying interpretations. Yet, I believe it is fair to say that such references to a tradition are typically understood as entailing a (possibly plural) history and (possibly conflicting) personalities. In this light, Craig’s conception of a “tradition” turns out to be a rather peculiar one. While Russill strives to establish the historical roots of the pragmatist conception of communication – as one might expect of a reconstruction of a tradition – Craig’s constitutive metamodel tends to be synchronic rather than diachronic. Not only is the presentation of the traditions included in the metamodel markedly ahistorical; it is also difficult to shake the suspicion that the metatheoretical matrix is a something of a procustean bed for communication theories. True, the metamodel is construed as a tool for limited purposes, which does not even attempt to capture all the relevant work in the field; but it nonetheless postulates rather strict criteria for traditionhood. Thus, the question of whether the proposed demarcation of the quintessence of pragmatist communication theory constitutes a tradition in any pertinent sense at all ought to be raised. In other words, in order to legitimise the talk of a “tradition” we should be able to identify a substantial number of actual pragmatist communication theorists; one or two self-professed pragmatists does not a tradition make.

Craig provides a partial and somewhat unsatisfying answer to such worries. Based on the criteria he has established, he argues for the inclusion of communication scholars James Carey and Stanley Deetz in the broader circle of pragmatism, while “coordinated management of meaning” is singled out as a particularly pure representative of the breed (Craig 2007: 134). Thus, there would seem to be at least some bona fide pragmatists out there in the field. Yet, it feels a bit farfetched to speak of a “tradition” in this case, especially as “pragmatist” may not be part of the identified scholars’ primary self-identities. What seems to be on offer is more like a normatively constitutive paradigm. That is, it is less a matter of an actual historical practice and more of a postulation of a demarcating standard. However, putting aside these misgivings regarding the terminological fitness of “tradition” in this context, one might argue that such concerns are ultimately trivial and beside the point, as we are not primarily concerned with intellectual history, but rather with the advancement of communication theory. In response, I would contend that the particular delineation of pragmatism proposed by Craig, if taken seriously as an intellectual guiding light, may have the adverse effect of denying communication theory the full access to pragmatism as a living philosophical and social-scientific tradition of thought. Although ostensibly rooted in the work of James and Dewey (as construed by Russill), Craig’s conception of pragmatism does not call for a fuller engagement with their thought, and in effect discounts parallel or alternative strands emerging from other pragmatist thinkers. Ironically, in spite of its professed pluralism, the metamodel conception of pragmatism can be reductive, in effect excluding several vital facets of the broader pragmatist tradition – including its sometimes penetrating intra-tradition disputes. This is an intricate proposition – one which I cannot fully develop in this brief review. However, for our purposes, it is sufficient to identify at least some potentially valuable ingredients of pragmatism that could contribute to the development of the communication-theoretical project, but which may be barred by Craig’s conception. In conclusion, I will therefore identify three such aspects that I believe to be either obscured or excluded by the metamodel demarcation.

One key discussion within pragmatism that ought to be of significance to communication theory – and communication studies more broadly – concerns the nature of inquiry in general and scientific inquiry in particular. Significantly, the original notion of pragmatism...
emerges precisely from C. S. Peirce’s (1877) radical conception of inquiry as a natural striving to resolve such doubts that emerge in everyday life and to replace them with optimally functional belief-habits, in addition to his characterisation of the principal hypothesis of the generic scientific method of settling doubts in terms of realism – the latter entailing that scientific inquiry implicates the hope that any particular question we may pursuing would receive a definite answer, were the investigation carried out to fruition. That is, the Peircean model of inquiry is on the one hand articulated in terms of a tendency to respond to naturally and socially compelled doubts, which are interpreted as dysfunctions or inadequacies in the habits of action that underlie our belief-systems, so that “the sole object of inquiry is the settlement of opinion” (CP 5.375); but on the other hand, this belief-doubt-inquiry-belief cycle tends to evolve into science understood broadly as a social quest for truth (pragmatically equivalent to a belief-habit that would stand, no matter what).

This belief-doubt model is reinterpreted by Dewey (LW 12) in terms of a process by which indeterminate situations are identified as problematic and eventually rendered determinate. However, in contrast to Peirce, who stresses the pursuit of truth, Dewey emphasises the transformative aspect of inquiry; it is not primarily a matter of adjusting individual and subjective habits to accord with reality, but rather a holistic and dynamic process by which entire situations (or contexts) are transformed. Successful inquiry does not entail individual satisfaction; it implies objective changes. But for Dewey, methodical inquiry is not ultimately undertaken to obtain objective knowledge, but to re-organize and improve human life. In other words, Dewey’s project is unambiguously melioristic.

Given these divergent emphases, it is not surprising that Peirce’s and Dewey’s conceptions of inquiry and science are sometimes explicitly pitted against each other (e.g., Sleeper 1986; Talisse 2002). However, this should not lead us to overlook the substantial similarities between these pragmatist outlooks; at heart, the Peircean and Deweyian perspectives agree in replacing the ancient philosophical concern with knowledge with a dynamic conception of inquiry. Their emphasis on scientific method differs markedly from the kind of “conversationalism” associated with Rorty (and accepted by Carey). Rortyan neopragmatists tend to treat the focus on inquiry as a suspect remnant of scientism, without due consideration for the deep epistemological significance of the concept for the classical pragmatists. And although I cannot develop this argument at all here, there are certain reasons to maintain that the apparent divergence between Peirce and Dewey is not as wide as it may at first seem. Both of their perspectives can in the end be interpreted as laboratory approaches focused on the development of individual and social habits of action. The most pregnant point of contention may be Dewey’s insistence that philosophy ought to turn its attention to the concrete problems of this world with the explicit intention of remedying particular social problems; Peirce argues for the need to protect the autonomy of science (including philosophy) from utilitarian demands, and would be quite critical of a rationalistic proposal to treat human society as a social-scientific workshop.

I believe that such on-going intra-tradition discussions can be of great value for the communication disciplines, given their inclination toward self-probing. The articulation of the similarities and differences between Peirce’s and Dewey’s respective views – and the divergence of both from the neopragmatist stance – may cast new light on the tricky question of what kinds of inquiry communication studies and communication theory actually are or can be. Perhaps going against the grain, I predict that the upshot of the inquiry into pragmatistic inquiry may provide us with reasons to curb the tendency toward constructivist/constructionist standpoints, enhancing not only our melioristic sensibilities, but also
deepening our understanding of the limits of transformation and the significance of social habits (surely the main ingredients of a tradition, be it good or bad).

These considerations carry us to another, perhaps more clearly problematic aspect of Craig’s demarcation of pragmatism. As noted, Craig tends to assume that pragmatism is straightforwardly well-matched with what he calls “the constitutive point of view” or simply “constructionism”, in effect leaning toward an instrumentalist rejection of realism. But while it is true that pragmatism is often associated with various strands of construct-thought, and that the term “instrumentalism” can be traced to Dewey, this focus on the transformative side of things conceals the extent to which core pragmatists – Peirce and Dewey, in particular – conceive of themselves as realists in contrast to nominalists and relativists. In fact, after notoriously attempting to distinguish his “pragmaticism” from other brands of pragmatism,5 Peirce quite perceptively lists a series of core “truths” purportedly accepted by all pragmatists in the broader sense of the word. Notably, these include the “acknowledgment that there are, in a Pragmatistical sense, Real habits (which Really would produce effects, under circumstances that may not happen to get actualized, and are thus Real generals)” and the “insistence upon interpreting all hypostatic abstractions in terms of what they would or might (not actually will) come to in the concrete” (CP 6.485). This habit-realism (or “scholastic” realism literally interpreted), and its accompanying conception of the pragmatistic import of abstractions, is what the realism of pragmatism most generally amounts to. In Dewey’s reading, such a realist stance is not only compatible with a moderate transformative perspective, but its very basis (LW 11:108 n. 4).

I do not think Craig necessarily needs to reject a realism of this kind, as it is in fact largely in tune with his conception of the normative implication of practices; but in conjunction with the constitutive perspective, his nominal demarcation tends to pit pragmatism against realism in a way that muddles matters and produces pseudo-problems for the hypothetical communication-theoretical pragmatist. Recall how Craig characterises the “dilemma of reflexivity” plaguing pragmatist inquiry: it leads to habits (routines, rituals, etc.) of inquiry and communication that reduce contingency but render them nonreflexive (thereby inhibiting inquiry). From a Peircean-Deweyan point of view, this entails an undeservedly negative assessment of habit. Without real habits – that is, habits of action that truly work, as many of our ways of doing things seem to do – inquiry is not even possible. Instead of treating habitualisation as an obstacle to inquiry, it is more appropriate to view optimally functional habits as enablers of inquiry. Or, to put the matter differently, the pragmatist affirms the real (pragmatic) efficacy of habits (including theoretical concepts) – their consequentiality – and is therefore normatively faced with the constant challenge of producing the habits most conducive to inquiry and amelioration. In a sense, this broad kind of realism can embrace a moderate “constructionism”, as inquiry entails the transformation of (real) habits; but it does not imply that belief-habits would be nothing but constructions of discourse or inquiry.

My final – and perhaps most pregnant – critical observation is that Craig’s metamodel tends to disconnect pragmatism from other “traditions” in a way that may not be conducive to the stated objectives of his project. No doubt, the same point could be made with refer-

5 Peirce’s “pragmaticism” is frequently misinterpreted as a full-scale rejection of the pragmatisms of James and F. C. S. Schiller by both Peirceans and anti-Peircean pragmatists. In fact, Peirce original introduction of the “ugly” concept clearly indicated that the “lawless rovers” that caused him concern were not his fellow-pragmatists, but certain unnamed writers in literary journals who misused the concept of “pragmatism”. Yet, it is true that Peirce was critical of nominalistic and anti-logical tendencies in James and Schiller; at least once (MS 289: 11, c.1905), he referred to such thinkers as “neopragmatists” – perhaps the first use of that particular term.
ence to many of the principal approaches he identifies, but the adverse consequences of the severance may be most tangible in the case of semiotics and pragmatism. Namely, as Craig identifies distinctive semiotic and pragmatist traditions, he in effect obscures the fact that these approaches have common roots in Peirce’s rejection of Cartesianism. More than that, from a Peircean point of view, pragmatism cannot be straightforwardly removed from its semiotic context without losing something vital. By identifying the semiotic and the pragmatic as independent traditions in communication theory, Craig seems to leave no place for the Peircean point of view, where pragmatism is primarily a theory of the clarification of meaning, closely aligned to a permeating semiotic point of view as well as a variant of common-sensist philosophy. This impression is rendered even stronger by Craig’s decisively social-theoretic starting point, which seems to exclude questions pertaining to communication (or communication-like processes and phenomena) beyond the realm of the strictly social. For a semiotician of Peirce’s stripe – and not incidentally, also for pragmatists like Dewey and George H. Mead – such philosophical issues should not be excluded from the purview of communication theory on the basis of disciplinary postulation.

Craig seems to have an answer handy to the worry about separating the pragmatic from the semiotic tradition: Peirce’s position may be construed as a hybrid, including elements from both traditions. However, this will not work, as Craig defines traditions as mutually incommensurable, with only “practice” providing a common point of reference. What his account will inevitably miss and exclude is the Peircean conception of a profound interconnection between the semiotic and the pragmatistic; and thereby the metamodel arguably fails to cover the full range of communication-theoretical options in the way promised. Part of the trouble is the rather unfortunate use of “incommensurable” in this context, which tends to turn Craig’s traditions into mere instruments for solving particular practical problems of social communication. While such an approach may superficially appear to be in line with Deweyan “instrumentalism”, it in effect postulates that the first-order practitioner of communication studies has a more or less definite set of discrete implements at his or her disposal – a toolbox from which this or that conceptual framework or intellectual instrument may be picked as need arises.

In a sense, Craig’s own partialities demonstrate why such an eclectic approach is not feasible. Whether due to logical or psychological constraints, human inquirers – even on a purported metalevel – tend to look for coherent explanations and interpretations, although perfect consistency is always beyond mortal reach. Consequently, Craig must acknowledge that he views the bigger picture – the meta-metalevel – from some perspective, be it constructionist or pragmatist. As noted, he is open about his biases; but he does not appropriately recognise that this renders his postulation of incommensurable traditions incongruous, as he does not seem to find it all that difficult to explicate them within one framework of communication. For plausibility’s sake, it might have been better if Craig – in good pragmatist fashion – would have chosen to stand more solidly behind his first-order beliefs while generally acknowledging the fallibility of all such perspectives.

To a large extent, the problems identified above are attributable to an attempt to maintain a degree of impartiality on the metalevel while at the same time acknowledging that no such pluralistic neutrality is pragmatically possible (and perhaps not even desirable) in view of first-level commitments. Craig’s project sets out from the premise that genuine communication-theoretical paradigms are incommensurable and then moves on to postulate theoretical demarcations of major traditions that affirm this proposition. The justification for this move is that it should on the one hand elucidate the main alternatives in the field and on the other hand promote discussion between otherwise fenced-in perspectives. In my
judgment, Craig’s model does make a genuine contribution to the pragmatic clarification of certain major theoretical positions, although the identification of these as “traditions” is not altogether viable. If it is further acknowledged that the purported “pragmatist tradition” of communication theory is more accurately identified as a specific variant of pragmatism, then Craig’s account provides a welcome opening for scrutiny of certain potential contributions of the broader pragmatist tradition to communication theory. But I feel that there is little to be gained in defining the pragmatist tradition along the lines drafted by Craig.  

With regard to the aim of promoting discussion between communication-theoretical traditions, the proposal may serve a valuable function in instigating broader debate about the nature and scope of different theoretical perspectives, but I do not foresee a productive dialogue as envisaged by Craig. If one accepts his incommensurabilist premise, but rejects the constitutive and instrumentalistic principles underlying the metamodel on first-order grounds, then meaningful exchange and cross-paradigm fertilisation ends up being both theoretically and practically impossible. That is, a non-pragmatist reading of the model on the meta-level would produce clearly defined but ultimately isolated pockets of theory on the ground. Inquiry would be blocked. But of course the reality of the field is more complex, confusing, and fecund than this schematic model would suggest. The way forward, I believe, is not the elevation of the researcher to a constitutive-pragmatist meta-level, but rather the investigation of the ways in which pragmatist philosophy may provide better (or worse) platforms for explicating communicative phenomena and developing communicative habits than its alternatives.

References


In spite of the Peircean slant of my criticism, I remain skeptical of strict delimitations of pragmatism as a movement. Peirce himself was somewhat ambivalent regarding attempts to define pragmatism, in spite of his numerous attempts to characterise pragmatism as a philosophical principle. In a letter to Schiller he asserted: “I think we had better let pragmatism mean a vague tendency to look for the intellectual import of thought, not in what is in the mind at the time, but in the consequences. However, I do not wish to define it at present. I would let it grow and then say that it is what a certain group of thinkers who seem to understand one another think, and thus make it the name of a natural class in the Natural History fashion” (published in Scott 1973: 371).


Walter Feinberg*

Critical Pragmatist and the Reconnection of Science and Values in Educational Research

Abstract. Randomized field experiments, which in the United States has been proposed as the gold standard of educational research, (National Research Council, 2002) is dismissed by some critics as “positivistic”. Although this dismissal over identifies positivism with a specific research method, the larger point is accurate: the “gold standard” is often insensitive to local situations and human value and philosophical positivism supports and encourages this insensitivity. In this paper I examine the way positivism is limited in terms of its understanding of the role of values in educational research and I offer pragmatism as a productive alternative to these limitations. In contrast to the view of some critics I show that pragmatism would not reject out of hand randomized field experiments. Rather it would contextualize them as one of a number of valuable research tools. I argue here that pragmatism provides a more complete understanding of the research process because unlike positivism it does not dismiss value claims as meaningless, but provides a way to rationally address them. Thus its understanding of the research process is better suited to the process of educating which is inherently infused with values. I also expand on the ideas of traditional pragmatism by introducing a variation that I call critical pragmatism.

I. Meaning and Nonsense: A Review of the Basic Tenets of Positivism

A brief review of the familiar idea of positivism and post positivist revisions will help to ground my argument. For the positivist there are but two types of meaningful statements. Those called “analytic” are true (or false) by virtue of conformity (or non-conformity) to a definition. “One Plus one equals two” and “all bachelors are unmarried men” are common examples of analytic statements. Those called synthetic or empirical statements are those that are true (or false) by virtue of conformity (or non conformity) to experience. “There is one bachelor in this room” and “The Chinese population is over a billion people” are both synthetic statements. For the positivist therefore scientific statements are a form of empirical claim and as such they need to be verified, in principle, by some directly observable or some inferred event that is directly observable. There are differences within positivism about the status of the object of knowledge and whether scientific claims actually mirror reality, or simply record information and try to describe patterns. By allowing only empirical and analytic statements to be meaningful it discounts value claims relegating them to what it would call mere preferences – like whether you prefer chocolate to vanilla – or to ejaculatory sounds like a sigh or a chuckle. They are like the kind of noise that people make when they are perhaps overly stimulated. In a clever play on words these are labeled “nonsense” – signifying both meaningless gibberish and assertions that have no sense content.

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II. Post Positivism

Many post-positivist agree with the critics of classical positivism that the claims that propositions are meaningful only if they can be subject to verification through experience, is too strict and too neat. Too neat because as Imre Lakatos (Lakatos 1970) has shown, scientists will often protect their pet but immature and potentially productive theories like a hawk protects her immature chicks, using non-rational as well as rational weapons to ward off real threats. For Lakatos the emotional element has an important function in enabling new theories to develop while they are young and vulnerable to criticism by older, more established ones. Traditional positivism is also too strict because as Quine (Quine 1953) has nicely shown, any theoretical claim, even those of logic and math, is always open to challenge. For Quine this also holds even for direct observation, like pointing (Quine 1960: 1-26).

The recent history of philosophy of science has been one of relaxing the standard of what to count as science, first from the idea of verification advanced by A. J. Ayer (Ayer 1936), to the notion of falsification provided by Popper (Popper 1959), to the notion of the progressive nature of an overall research program as developed by Lakatos (Lakatos 1970). The affinity of each of these approaches is that they focus on the activity that occurs in the laboratory or in the field and they model the scientific enterprise in general after a certain image they have of physics (Habermas). And, much like the earlier positivists, they discount the place of values in science, as anything but motivational.

Because historically positivists tend to see physics as the quintessential science it has developed a reputation for preferring physics-like research. Controlled field experiments along with statistical analysis and probability statements are thought to be as close as one can get to the certainty of physics. Economics and some forms of psychology such as behaviorism have been favored as close to the real thing, while much of anthropology has been dismissed as not scientific enough. Yet this is somewhat arbitrary, and much that appears as scientific in the social science has a peculiar self-confirming quality (Chomsky). Some are concerned that to take physics as the model of science and apply it to the human sciences must leave out much that is unique to human beings.

III. Positivism and Pragmatism on Science

As a way of understanding science, positivism has a number of competitors, of which pragmatism is one. Yet pragmatism would find much that is useful in randomized field study and quantitative analysis. It is useful to recall that John Dewey often saw the social sciences as an immature science where he saw the natural sciences as already developed (LW 12). While this observation could have many different implications it is most likely that a pragmatist like Dewey would applaud the appropriate use of randomized field experiments. However, he would contextualize them within a value infused understanding of the world.

The quarrel between positivism and pragmatism is not over the usefulness of certain methods. It is about whether it is reasonable to determine the appropriate method independently of the problem it intends to address. For someone like Dewey, positivists are too restrictive in this matter and too willing to prescribe before hand what can and what cannot be counted as good science (LW 13).

While this may seem less true of Lakatos who allows that personal ambition may motivate the scientific enterprise, he understand values largely as nonrational motivators rather than factors in the scientific process itself.
An important element of that quarrel is about the role of values in research and whether values claims can be addressed in rational and objective ways. For the pragmatist the positivist’s understanding of value claims as meaningless or as ejaculatory utterances is a big mistake. As Dewey nicely points out, even an ejaculatory utterance like child’s cry has meaning and demands a response. Hence it cannot simply be dismissed by reclassifying as nonsense (LW 13). To put this somewhat differently, a positivist and a pragmatist may find themselves at some stage of a project recommending the use of a randomized field study. However, they will likely differ, as I will show shortly, over what should come before and after the randomized aspect of the study, in how the terms are defined and how the findings are reported.

IV. Values and the Relationship Between the Researcher and the Researched

To be anti-positivist in the pragmatic sense is then not to be against field studies or measurement, or zealously for qualitative research. It is simply to calibrate the research enterprise in a different way by being more open to the interplay between valuing and knowing, between reporting and measuring. This involves a self-reflective understanding of the way different ways of reporting data can influence subsequent behavior.

The image of the relationship between researcher and researched, or in Dewey’s terms, the knower and the known (LW 16), is not one of distance and detachment where the knower, as Nagel describes it, surveys the known from the point of view of nowhere (Nagel 1986), and where description has no influence on the behavior of the described. For the pragmatist this self-reflection about values is a critical part of the research enterprise, especially where social research is concerned. Knower and the known are interconnected, and values influence the definition of initial concepts, the methods selected to investigate problems and the language used to report results. A community of inquirers is important to pragmatists not just to verify conclusions but also to enable researchers to become self-conscious about their own values and how they influence the research process. Historically, pragmatists like James and Dewey have embraced the potential of a variety of methods of inquiry.

V. An example of the Implications of Positivism and Pragmatism for an Important Contemporary Educational Issue

A few years ago the city of Chicago initiated a policy that requires public schools be closed if their students tests scores fall below a set minimum for a certain number of years. When they are closed the students are sent to other schools with different teachers and administrators. This policy is in line with the Federal guidelines mandated in the No Child Left Behind legislation first initiated during the Bush administration. The assumption driving this policy is that poor test scores mean poor teaching and that poor teaching signals inadequate administration (de la Torre and Gwynne 2009). However there is an additional story that needs to be told.

As more schools closed, student violence, including murder, increased. Local activists, including some teachers, believed that there was a connection between the closing of schools and the increase in violence. They pointed out that the effect of the policy was to

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3 To the extent that the policy was based on an assumption that closing schools would improve test scores recent survey research has shown that except for a very few students who were sent to high performing schools, most of the students who were displaced did not improve their test scores. Cf. Torre and Gwynne 2009.
mix together students from rival gangs in the same schools and it required that more students walk to school and cross rival gang territory. The increase in violence has not just impacting gang members. Non-gang members and even honor students have been attacked and some killed. These activists believe that the initial policy wrongly assumed poor tests scores necessarily means poor schools, and that the side effects of school closing were never fully thought out.

The activist’s concern is about policy, but it has even wider implications about the conception of research that supports the policy. Given that statistical studies have alerted the community to the increase in the murder rate, the problem is not with statistics as such, but with the way values were incorporated into the research project to begin with and with the failure to consider local definitions of a “good school”. Most likely safety would have been quite high on any local person’s list of the qualities of a good school.

For the pragmatist the definition of a good research must take into account different kinds of values and different levels of understandings, local as well as bureaucratic ones. Unlike some critics of testing and randomized controlled experiments as such pragmatists would not a-priori reject the use of standardized tests in large school systems. Many pragmatists would allow that well designed tests could serve as one important reporting tool among others. However, the pragmatist would be reluctant to allow tests scores alone to define what it means to be a good or a failing school. Pragmatism’s commitment to a communal approach would lead it to endorse a consultative research process to define and address educational needs.

For the pragmatists both local and expert understandings are important. Local agents add depth to the understanding a particular school and its environment; experts provides context showing, for example, how one school compares to others in certain kinds of environments. Chicago is now working to incorporate these two forms of understanding as experts work to identify more closely students who are at risk for violent engagement and as community members employ their understanding to try to reduce that risk.

VI. The Calibration of Facts and Values in Research

The radical fact/value dichotomy proposed by positivism is problematic for the pragmatist to the extent that it dismisses discussions about values as meaningless, or to the extent that it allows some values to dominate the discourse by passing as “facts”.

Consider, for example, the difference between a research question that asks about the death rate in Nanking in 1938 and another that asks about the murder rate in the same place during the same time. Researchers can answer both questions in ways that accurately meet the positivist standard, but one requires a much fuller understanding of the situation than the other4.

The real danger of the positivist fact value/dichotomy is not that it rids education of values, but that it creates a value vacuum, which is likely to be filled by unquestioned procedures that automatically determine the fate of a school community. The effect is to reproduce the values of the most dominant groups, and help their values masquerade as facts5.

4 The pragmatist would understand that background understanding would determine the legitimacy of the question and the first question could well lead to an important insight if asked by someone unfamiliar with the situation. In other words, the extreme spike in the death rate could, given an unknowing investigator, lead to questions about causation. For an already knowledgeable investigator to speak only of deaths and not murder would be a cover up.

5 My appreciation to Eric Bredo for some of this wording.
An example would be the way IQ tests are normed to produce a Bell Curve and thereby create tests that always rank people as smart and stupid according to that same curve, albeit now expressed in numbers, hence reinforcing the impression that intelligence is a linear, one dimensional product.

To be against positivism in a pragmatic way is not to be against testing and measurement. It is to be concerned about narrowly calibrating the researchers’ radar so that some reasonable concerns are excluded as “just opinions” and others are allowed to pass by as hard “fact”, subject neither to challenge nor inquiry. In contrast Pragmatism, especially of the more critical kind, allows that fact are vested with values and potentially can always be deconstructed and the values they conceal can be unveiled and re-evaluated in light of new considerations.

For the positivist good educational research requires that researchers restrict themselves to what are assumed to be testable tasks, such as determining ways to increase the rate of growth of human capital development. Under this conception philosophy is limited to policy research so as to determine in this narrow sense whether or not it is scientific. If its claim can be empirically tested it is scientific, and it is “good science” if the conclusion are verified or falsified by the well-structured experiments or observations. Here the critical distinction is believed to be between the refined knowledge of the expert and the unrefined understandings and values of local actors. But this distinction can create problems.

For the pragmatist the problem with “experts” occurs when they assume that they know the problem better and in the same way as those experiencing it. For the pragmatist the subject has a special relation to the problem that should not be ignored. To take a simple example, a person knows his or her own tooth ache in a special way even if she does not know what caused it or what can cure it. For the expert to dismiss this knowledge as unimportant is to dismiss the subject as emotionally impulsive, narrowly self-interested or conflicted with other subjects. This in turn creates a view for the subject of the experts as cold, unengaged, and ignorant about local needs and concerns. For the pragmatist, given these different relation to the experience there is a need for collaboration in defining a problematic situation and addressing it.

For the pragmatist good educational research arises out of human needs and serves to improve the conditions of real people. One of the tests of good research is whether it takes into account a wide range of values and whether it ultimately serves both to improve the situations of people and to provide them with the intellectual tools to help them reflect on their own interests and to address their own future need. This entails the following starting points:

1. Value claims are not meaningless;
2. Local understanding may be incomplete but not inherently defective;
3. Conflicting value claims can productively be viewed as an invitation to a conversation and the beginning of an inquiry;
4. Expert knowledge can enhance that inquiry;
5. Education as the transfer of the means for continuing growth and development is at the heart of good educational research;
6. The inquiry process should leave those affected in a better condition to handle their own future difficulties.

While pragmatism acknowledges that specialists have developed methods of refining knowledge, it also allows that local actor enjoy a privileged position in terms of the depth of experience. Yet without the other both may lack the conceptual tools required for changing the situation for the better. Local actors may have the insights but lack the wider per-
perspective and the tools that long lasting change requires. Experts may have the tools but lack the local insight needed to apply them effectively.

Specialized methods can be especially helpful when local understandings are unclear, when conflicting interests block further inquiry, or when there is an inadequate understanding of the wider context or historical factors that favor one view over others. They can also be helpful when conventional power and status gets in the way of inquiry. In these cases experts can be helpful in opening up paths for new experiences by generating new understandings. Local understandings are critical, however, in locating problematic situations, developing working hypothesis, defining initial terms and judging the adequacy of general solutions for individual cases. They are also important in exposing the prejudice or unacknowledged interests of the expert.

VII. Two Other Alternatives: Absolutism and Relativism

Two other alternatives vie with pragmatism in the modern world. The first is absolutism as represented in the richly textured, highly nuanced, but often confused work of Alasdair MacIntyre who seeks resolution to value conflicts by appealing to the Aristotelian and neo-Thomism traditions. The second is neo-relativism often associated with post-modernism. MacIntyre (MacIntyre, 1981) rejects positivism and allows, with pragmatism, that values are to be taken seriously. He holds that value expressions are meaningful because they are connected to a certain kind practice like science, art, sports, family life, etc, and as such, they are verifiable. For example, given a knowledge of a practice, say like basketball, we have little trouble identifying, a good defense from a mediocre or poor ones. Hence, once we understand a practice and the tradition in which it is embedded, we should have little difficulty appraising value judgments about that practice. However, although MacIntyre often implies that some traditions are more worthy than others, he offers few tools through which a tradition can be critically examined, save through its capacity to resolve internal contradictions. Yet, very complex, rich traditions are likely to have significant contradictions where as some simpler, yet shallow traditions may be free of contradictions.

MacIntyre’s model depends on a radical separation between different traditions, and only when contradictions can no longer be resolved can a tradition be evaluated. In contrast pragmatism is willing to acknowledge that the world is often messy and solutions to problems may be partial, at best. MacIntyre’s is a neat and tidy world where we should always know, at least in theory, just what practice we are engaged in, what tradition it is apart of and what standards should be used in judging its performance. In real life, however, there is often uncertainty about what kind of practice we are engaged in and what tradition it belongs. Pragmatism is able to acknowledge this fact: MacIntyre is not.

Any parent who has had to confront a conflict between the responsibility to their children and their responsibility to their job runs into the same issue on a personal level. What practice am I engaged in—worker or parent? And to what tradition do I belong? Under one tradition a mother should not even be working and thus should feel extra guilt if she has a job outside the home. Under another, as a woman she should have the same right to employment as a man and thus is justified in feeling extra resentment if she is denied this right just because she is a mother. MacIntyre writes as if he has answers to these predicaments, but he does not. He simply fails to acknowledge the push and pull of different roles and the overlapping of different traditions and presupposes a coherent, settled, isolated tradition as the norm.
The failure to provide a convincing account of absolutism is relevant for the assessment of pragmatism. Because pragmatists reject absolutism in its various forms, it is thought that it must embrace an arbitrary relativism where power and wit determine what can pass for truth. The critics however fail to distinguish here between truth with a small “t” and Absolute Truth with a capital “T” where the term carries with it a kind of divinely guaranteed certainty.

For the pragmatist a true claim is one that stands up to rigorous tests and has the status of a warranted assertion. Certainly some future test may come along that de-warrants the assertion, but this only calls into question whether any reasonably justified claim to truth is immune from modification. It does not equate warranted claims with arbitrary claims that people accept simply because they are forced or tricked into doing so. Indeed, one of the main goals of Dewey’s philosophy of education and its emphasis on science and experience was to create a population that would guard against the acceptance of arbitrary claims. Sometime neo-pragmatists like Richard Rorty have fueled this criticism with quips like: “Truth is what our peers will, ceteris paribus, let us get away with saying”, (quoted in Braddock 2009: 442) but the broader import of this for most pragmatists, including Rorty, is that our understanding of truth is always subject to revision.

For the pragmatist the emphasis is on truth (small “t”) as an instrument for engaging the world. We understand the limits of our truth claims not just through the way others respond but also as the world pushed back to tell them and us “you do not have it quite right”. Other people are an important part of this but they are not the only part. Often when they reject our truth claims it is because they quite rightly see just how firmly the physical and social environments are pushing back. Rorty does not miss this point, and when he does acknowledge it, his pragmatism seems in evidence.

Experience, not guile, is the arbiter. For Dewey and for Peirce when the world pushes back it helps us to decide whether a belief should continue to serve as a guide to action. This is why for Dewey, “true” and “false” are not quite the right terms. Rather a claim is “warranted” or not depending on whether it seems a sound guide for action. Whatever our motives for affirming a claim, it may be status, stubbornness or power, the verification of the claim—however tentative—will depend on the evidence available to support it, and the role it plays in developing possibilities for new experience. T (t)truth, including moral truth, is prospective for pragmatists and grows.

VIII. Moral Invention: An example

There are many examples of the way in which moral knowledge grows but the debate over euthanasia can serve as a brief example. Here one side holds that mercy killing is murder, clear and simple while the other believes that intense and chronic suffering justifies aiding a person in accomplishing a self-willed death and that not to allow it is simple cruelty. Some traditions, including Catholicism, have helped lay the ground work for a partial reconciliation of these views by drawing a distinction between taking active steps to kill someone, such as administering poison, on the one hand, and letting a person die, by say removing life support systems, on the other. While this moral invention certainly does not solve all the issues regarding mercy killing, it does help in those cases where patients need life support systems if they are to continue living.

\[\text{It is worth noting that traditional positivism draws on both with analytic truth having the character of "T" truth (without the divine guarantee) and synthetic truth enjoying only the little "t".}\]

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Another moral invention along this line has been developed in response to an ever-improving capacity to enable vital organs such as the heart and lung to continue functioning by mechanical means. Here a refinement of the concept of death allows that a person may be declared dead if there is no brain activity even if other vital organs, such as the lungs and heart are still functioning. In these cases the pragmatist joins with the absolutist in seeking a resolution that is respectful of the traditional view, but she joins with the relativist in providing more flexible interpretations of established dogma. Some times these innovations come from within a tradition as, for example, when the Catholic Church decided that not all lending was usury and redefined the concept as human exploitation in general (Feinberg, 2006). At other time the innovation may be initiated from outside a tradition in response to some general need. A good moral invention is a way of resolving the absolutism of tradition with the flexibility of relativism. Of course invention does not always end controversy, but it points in a productive direction that allows apparently dead ends to be reviewed for possible paths of escape.

IX. The Pragmatism and Values: Or, How Does the Chicken get across the Road?

There is a famous paradox by the ancient Greek philosopher Zeno that describes the plight of a chicken that is trying to cross a road. According to Zeno, before the chicken can get across the road she must cross the half way point and before reaching the half way point, she must cross the half way point to that point and so on. Since there is always a new halfway point the only conclusion that we can draw is that the chicken could never begin to cross the road. Now, ask a pragmatist to solve the paradox and the answer to how the chicken could even cross the road likely will be a rather simple: “one step at a time and with an occasional forward flutter”.

Just as this response dismisses the problem as a mere exercise for formal logicians and beginning philosophy students to puzzle about, the pragmatist would provide a similar response to the positivists understanding of value claims. Chickens have no problem crossing roads (assuming no traffic) and people have no problem understanding and coming to terms with value claims, assuming sufficient information and an openness to the possibility that, under certain circumstances, they may have to revise their own standpoint.

The interesting things about values are the ways people argue about them, explain why they believe one to be better than another, and arrange their lives according to them. Not only that. They also test their goodness. There’s a prospective aspect here that checks desire as, for example, when someone asks: “Is my desire for cigarettes good for me?” Surely value claims are not meaningless. People fight, negotiate, compromise over and cooperate through them all the time. So, if positivists can’t find an appropriate way to understand the significance of values other than dismissing them as a modern version of Zeno’s paradox, then so much the worse for positivism.

The pragmatist is more in tune with intuition and everyday practice than the positivist, more open to judgment of better and worse than the relativist, and more willing to eschew the ideal for the acceptable than the absolutist. In the abstract of course there is nothing about the logic of this response that must convince the positivist, except that it speaks to life; not simply to logic.

Pragmatism rejects the fact/value dichotomy as an artificial ontological distinction. Facts without human interest do not have a reality of their own. Facts are the outcomes of inquiries. No inquirers, no facts. And values do not exist independent of the means to realize them. Hence, it is an illusion to speak of either fact or value independent of human in-
terest and it is also an illusion to hold the view of many religions that there is some ultimate end to human life above and beyond the strivings of human beings.

Essences, even in MacIntyre’s watered down formulation as virtues inherent in a practice, simply do not exist, except as constructed through and by human experience and reflection. Virtue is a socially approved quality of human activity as refined over time; and “tradition” is simply a shorthand way of describing the codification of these virtues across generations of human beings. To reify tradition in the way that MacIntyre does is to obscure the fact that any one person may shape their life within, across or beyond recognizable traditions. It also leads us to look backwards rather than forwards and to assume that the tried and true is always best even when new experiences are encountered. In doing so MacIntyre’s absolutism, ignores the fact that some forms of conduct viewed now as virtuous may be subject to radical revision in the future.

In contrast, for the pragmatist, the requirements of even a simple virtue like honesty change depending on circumstances. Honesty requires one thing when, say, deciding whether to tell the clerk he has given you too much change when you are right in the store. It requires another if you notice the small amount of extra change after driving miles to your home. A virtue like honesty also requires discretion in and when it should be applied. If your uncle tells you that he really wants your honest opinion about the poem he has just composed it may not always be the best course to tell him that you think it should be shredded and burned, even though you do think it should be shredded and burned.

X. Values in Science

Pragmatists reject the radical positivist idea of value-free science and point to various ways values interpenetrate science. On a practical level value issues are present in critical debates about what kind of science will be funded. Will it be big science that requires billions of dollars to build say a huge particle accelerator, or small science that requires say a few thousand dollars to investigate many different projects, say like the health issues in fast food consumption?

On the theoretical level values are involved in decisions about which theories to adopt. For example at the time in which the heliocentric theory of the universe was first proposed and until Newton developed his theory of gravitation, there were serious problems that the heliocentric theory could not adequately address. Perhaps the most embarrassing was the question of why the earth did not lose its atmosphere as it traveled around the sun? This problem simply did not exist under the earth-centered theory where the earth stood still. Moreover, the earth-centered theory was able to explain many of the successful predictions first proposed by the heliocentric one. Ultimately the latter was accepted not just because of Newton’s answer to the puzzle about the atmosphere, or because the heliocentric theory could not provide explanations for the newly observed celestial phenomena, but also because it was a simpler theory, one that was more aesthetically pleasing. It also proved more productive as well. This meant that it was able to generate new and confirmable predictions and not just to explain them after they were confirmed.

Values also enter into science whenever a decision is made about how to define or classify something. Water is H2O only when it enters into experiments or other similar activity. Otherwise it is a thirst quencher, vodka chaser, or drought stopper. Values are even more obviously implicated in social “facts”. It makes a big difference whether the study of group behavior is called a “crowd” or a “mob”. These difference may go quite deep into the foundational logic of science, complicating something as fundamental as the identity principle,
A=A. Take the following example, which counters both the logic of identity and the positivist’s definition of analytic as true by virtue of definition

Premise:
Major premise: all bachelors are unmarried (true by definition).
Minor premise: all the men in car A are married (empirical claim).
Identity qualifier: all men in car A are the same men as in car B.
Question: are all the men in car B married?

Answer: no, because car A was in Massachusetts, which recognizes same sex marriage, and car B crossed the state line into Road Island where same sex marriage is not recognized. Now clearly clever logicians can neaten this so that the apparent inconsistency disappears, but in doing so they must acknowledge the value-laden feature of a factual claim like “there are six married men in this car”.

XI. On the Objectivity of Values

One of the intuitive appeals of the positivist understanding of the relationship between facts and values is the view that facts are simply out there to be discovered and therefore are essentially objective where as values are somewhere in-here—in my heart or in my mind—and are thus inherently subjective⁷. Further it is thought that when we decide something on the basis of the facts of the case we are being fair, whereas when we decide matters on the basis of values we are deciding matters subjectively and hence we are arbitrary. Hilary Putnam a modern pragmatist rejects these associations (Putnam 2002). First, he rejects the out-there-ness of facts and the in-here-ness of values⁸. Second, he rejects the essential objectivity of facts and the essential subjectivity of values and third he rejects the distinction drawn between factual judgments as fair and value judgments as arbitrary.

Because Putnam’s is one the most logically sophisticated contemporary pragmatist, it is worth spending a moment examining his position. Putnam lists some of the value norms that go into deciding the worth of a scientific theory. These include: epistemological norms used in judging the merit of scientific theory such as coherence, consistency and the like; aesthetic norms such as simplicity, the beauty of theory and its internal perfection. There are also moral norms that determine whether a scientific experiment is worth performing no matter how much knowledge it yields⁹.

Social science often conceals moral judgment by re-labeling common sense terms. Intelligence becomes “IQ”, punishment becomes “negative reinforcement” and reward is transformed into “positive reinforcement”. To the extent that this relabeling allows for a reasonable and systematic reconstruction of common sense understandings it can be very important. However, to the extent that it rejects common sense experience it can be destructive.

For Dewey and Putnam labels such as “cruel”, “just”, or “brave” have an objective standing in that they appeal to evaluative standards as developed and shaped through the needs and common sense understanding of a community. In that sense an observer could

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⁷ Granted this requires a commonsense understanding of “heart and mind”“in-here”, and “subjective” which a strict positivist would question.
⁸ These are my terms.
⁹ An example of the rejection of potentially useful research findings occurred after WW II when the allies sealed the research of the notorious Nazi Doctor, Joseph Mengele.
take a sample of behaviors that the community labels brave and provide a reasonable reconstruction of what these standards are and how they are applied. Moreover judgments of standards change depending upon changes in the environmental, the social conditions, and are influenced by the development of new knowledge and understandings an insight which is at the foundation of many important novels (Coetze 2000; Ishiguro 1989).

One of the mistakes the positivist makes involves an unstated assumption that when something is rational and objective it must result in agreement (Dewey himself sometimes fell into this position, especially when extolling the virtues of “the scientific method”). This is the basis of the positivist’s mistrust of value disputes as meaningless.

For Putnam value differences and moral commitments are rational not when they insist on agreement but when they leave an opening for repudiation. For example, if someone committed to justice and equality but then always acts in ways that benefit her own race, then she needs to re-examine what she means by justice.

For Putnam, we do not need agreement to live in same moral world but we do need to respect differences. For Dewey there was a slightly different emphasis to the objectivity of values. He believed that ultimately coordination of action—both on the individual level, as I coordinate my hand with my mouth when I eat, and on the social level, as individuals coordinate with one another in pulling on a heavy object with a rope, – would serve as a measure of value. Yet the more prominent side of Dewey is quite consistent with Putnam. For both of them values become valuable through a process of criticism and evaluation (LW 13). For both the emphasis is more on process than product, more on ends in view rather than ultimate ends.

To the positivist the researcher is thus like a neutral umpire who just calls things as they are. For Putnam the relationship is more complex and values inform the research process at every stage. For example, values may indicate what the researcher counts as successful intervention. In medical research, for example, what to counts as a cure may be different depending on the age of the patient. For older men with prostate cancer, medicine that slows the progression rate in half may be as good as surgery which removes the prostate altogether. If not a cure in some conventional sense such medicine might be preferred to surgery, considering side effects and estimated longevity. Here “cure” may be defined either in terms of eliminating the cancer or improving quality of life.

Values also enter the picture in determining the appropriate restraints on scientific studies. The famous Milgram (Milgram 1963) experiments at Yale that tested people’s willingness to obey authority, even when doing so went against their own conscience, came under heavy criticism for deception and for placing the subjects under severe stress. This criticism was one of the motivations for the development of a new moral invention, the requirement of informed consent, where researchers have to explain the level of danger or stress that subjects might experience and get their written consent to perform the experiment.

In addition values enter into scientific work in decisions about threshold levels. For example, one of the factors involved in the Challenger space probe failure which killed all aboard was the way the company, Morton Thiokol, in cooperation with the space agency set the burden of proof. At the time, the burden was placed on those engineers who thought a launch was unsafe. They had to prove their case. Since the O rings had never been tested under the exceptionally cold temperature expected for the launch no one could say for certain what would happen to them, and so the mission was launched. An alternative threshold

10 Such change in standards is often a theme of literary works. See, for example, Coetze 2000, a book that explores how a reevaluation of the colonial experience in South Africa paralyzes any action based on previous moral expectations. Also see Ishiguro 1989.
would have required the burden of proof be placed on those who thought that it was safe to launch. If this could not be shown then the mission would have to have been postponed but lives saved. (Davis 1998)\textsuperscript{11}.

\textbf{XII. Neo Positivists and Pragmatists on the calibration of the fact/value continuum}

Neo positivist would likely have little problem acknowledging that values do in fact play these roles in research but would then argue that there is a line between science and non-science and when values enter the picture the line has been crossed. However, for the pragmatist, this is less a problem of demarcation, as the post-positivists would call it, and more an issue of calibration. The model advanced by positivists calibrates the research enterprise in a way that defocuses attention from value concerns as if they were not really important for the conduct of science. Questions like “who is framing the problem?” and “who is defining the terms?” are not easily placed inside the post-positivist’s radar, and hence there is little inclination to examine the goodness of the initial frames and definitions. This results in part from equating rational deliberation with empirical, testable studies, and then joining with the relativist in allowing that all else is opinion. Of course there is a legitimate concern behind this, one shared by pragmatist as well, that the researcher’s private values not drive the findings of the research. There is good reason to distrust the tobacco company “scientists” who, on the basis of a missing chemical link between smoking and cancer, declared cigarettes had not been shown to be unsafe.

For the pragmatist the argument about whether values belong in science is unproductive. Rather research needs to be calibration so as to provide room for exploring the implications for human well being. The researcher should be open to inquiring into the consequences of a certain way of framing a problem and to the benefits one or another way of framing can provide for different groups. The fact that this calibration entails valuation does not require that values override science, say in some Lysenko – like program. It simply means that pragmatism opens up value claims to rational deliberation.

While pragmatism is friendly to experimental and statistical research, it calibrates its idea of good research in a way that can capture the unstated values that implicitly drive the conducting and reporting of research findings. And part of the job of pragmatism is to then open up these values for inspection and to engage people in discussions about them. That specialized experts have a crucial role in research goes without saying (LW 2), but the fact that values are imbedded in different aspects of a research project means that there is considerable room for local actors to interrogate the findings. One of the functions of scientific and professional education for the critical pragmatist is to teach researchers how to be mindful of value issues and how to engage the public in productive discussions regarding the value implications of their work.

Pragmatism certainly endorses the usefulness of statistical and experimental research. For example this research has been invaluable in understanding the importance of class size on the improvement of reading in the United States (Mosteller and Boruch 2002). Yet when used alone and without the insight of practitioners it is limited in understanding why this is the case. In some instances these factors may be fairly obvious. Smaller classes mean that teachers can spend more time with each student and can isolate and treat his or her specific problem. Sometime this may be quite simple. A youngster who had trouble keeping up with the class in singing from a written songbook may have only to be shown that in Western

\textsuperscript{11} My appreciation to Fred Lighthall who is writing a book on this episode.
music the convention of reading stanzas of songs differs from the convention of reading lines in a storybook.

Sometimes a problematic educational situation is more complex, as revealed for example in the studies of Ray McDermott (McDermott 1993) who, through hours of recording classrooms and observing video tapes, shows how a teacher and the poorest reader in the class unconsciously work together in a kind of dance that assures the student is never embarrassed by being called upon to read, but also assures that she is never taught how to read. As a pragmatist would point out, tests may be useful in helping to determine the reading level of a child, but McDermott’s research shows other issues that may need to be addressed if reading is to improve. For a pragmatist research methods are tools. The best methods are those most likely to help understand and address the problem at hand.

One of the important contributions of pragmatism is to connect science to common sense to refined methods of inquiry. As Dewey wrote in his Logic: “Scientific subject matter and procedures grow out of the direct problems and methods of common sense, of practical uses and enjoyments, and react into the latter in a way that enormously refines, expands and liberates the contents and the agencies at the disposal of common sense” (LW 2: 71-72). Science then adds to common sense by opening up new ways to understand relationships and possibilities. It expands judgment based on previously constricted experience and provides new tools that aid thought and action.

Consider, for example, the simple but obvious ways in which common sense grows. Take the historical evolution of a common sense of direction from pointing; to “here/there”; to “left/right/front/back”; to “North/South/East/West”; to “degrees of longitude and latitude”; to the technology of triangulation used in global positioning systems or the directional instruments and concepts used in space travel. Each stage has expanded the possibilities for navigation and an early advance becomes the common sense of a new one. As science moves beyond the latest innovative sense of direction and it gets re-incorporated back into a new and expanded common sense of direction. The old sense is not discarded – we still point and we still say “here” and “there” – but is rather augmented. Even astronauts in space with the most advanced navigational equipment at their fingertips will still point to a wrench and say “See that over there. Could you bring it here?” The big insight of pragmatism then is that science creates new conceptual and technical instruments that can then serve to liberate common sense not trespass over it.

XIII. The Contribution of Critical Pragmatism

Critical pragmatism allows that everyday understanding is sometimes inadequate in defining a situation as problematic, especially in cases where power or experience is unequal. Here common sense may simply accept the situation as a fact of life. In these cases critical pragmatism encourages a dialogue between refined research, and every day understanding about the systematic silences that often mark subordinate or oppressed status.

Critical pragmatism thus supplements traditional pragmatism by highlighting those situations of inequality where local understandings may be systemically silenced or unrecognized. This means a greater sensitivity to the historical relations between groups where unequal power or experience results in the domination and systematic silencing of the one by the other. Here the primary need is not to resolve a predefined problematic situation – in Dewey’s terms – but rather to provide discursive structures that will give voice to the dominated group, thereby enabling its members to identify certain situations as problematic. For example, feminist researchers have observed classes in which girls are called upon much
less frequently than boys, partly because boys raise their hands more often and more vigorously than girls. One practical suggestion has been for teachers to wait longer before calling on a student and to encourage girls to speak out.

For the critical pragmatist the goal is not to police research so as to purify it from value claims, as the positivist would do. Nor is it just to link research to common sense understanding. It is to also give expression to those private, isolated, serially undergone experiences of marginalized group members by exploring the historical inequities that render them publicly inexpressible and unrecognized. This requires familiarity with the conditions that silence some people as well as of the potential avenues and organizations that can give them voice. Critical pragmatism is aligned with traditional pragmatism and especially with the ideas of Dewey, but whereas Dewey starts inquiry with recognition of a problematic situation the critical pragmatism may begin an inquiry with the awareness that oppressive social structures can sometimes silence the expression of values or render their expression incoherent or inappropriate. This was often the case with adolescents where their emerging individual sexuality was often unacknowledged by schools, leaving many teenagers to feel isolated and perverse.

The awareness of the unarticulated aspects of problematic situations brings with it a consciousness of the significance of subgroup identities, or, of groups of people, whether minorities, teenagers, women, gays or bisexuals, who share a common yet unarticulated needs. This recognition is one of the important distinguishing factors between traditional and critical pragmatism.

Historically in the United States much of the traditional pragmatist’s early educational efforts involved the inclusion of individuals through assimilation and an educational process that sometimes involved disengaging the individual from a subgroup identity (Feinberg 1975). Today much of the effort of critical pragmatism involves increasing the recognition of oppressed groups and their members, with considerably less emphasis on assimilation (Glaude, Jr.). Nevertheless, in contrast to the positivists who tend to dismiss value claims as meaningless or redundant, pragmatists, both traditional and critical, see differences in value utterances and conflicts as an invitation to a conversation and inquiry. In this sense, value differences for the pragmatist are not to be dismissed as matters of opinion with the conclusion that they are not subject to inquiry, but as moments for pause, and humility in the awareness that other forms of life and other modes of reason are valued.

Critical pragmatism is concerned with repressed needs and silences resulting from systematic, long-standing and severe inequalities. Like traditional pragmatism it acknowledges the link between local experience and refined knowledge but it takes one step back from the traditional pragmatist and wants to know how each is constructed, especially in situations of systematic, historically generated political, social and economic inequality.

Critical Pragmatism allows that there are situations where inequality has been so ubiquitous that it has been bred into common sense understandings at all levels and that here there is a strong disconnect between the local experience of inequality and its local expression. In these cases, critical pragmatism looks for the silences that blocks expression and analyzes the history of common sense and its construction in order to understand how it serves to perpetuate systematic inequality. In these cases philosophy can help educators become aware of ways that they unreflectively endorse values of inequality. And it can help researchers understand how they can serve to develop new understandings. Its goal is to enhance critical reflection within the arena of common sense, and to use this understanding to develop new research projects.
Critical pragmatism needs to be distinguished from critical theory in its various Continental forms. It does not assume, for example, the hermeneutics of suspicion, typical of the French theorists like Foucault (Foucault 1965; 1970) or Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977); nor does it assume a priori that one form of ideal discourse fits all, as with Habermas (Habermas 1968). Critical pragmatism is open to whether there is a problem that needs to be addressed and it is also open regarding what might count as a reasonable resolution of that problem. It does not begin by assuming, as dogmatic followers of Freire do, that oppression is at the basis of all educational differences, although sometimes oppression is indeed the critical factor. Nor does it begin with the belief that all problems can be reduced to distortions in communication, although this too is sometimes the source of the problem. Nor, on the other side, does it assume that the problem must lie with unmotivated students, incompetent teachers or unresponsive bureaucrats. Yet to find out just where the problem and its source(s) lie, it must often interrupt common sense and the self-understanding that goes along with it.

**XIV. Interrupting Common Sense Logic**

Common sense is the shared understanding that peoples have of everyday situations, the default logic appropriated to support it, and the judgments that issue from it. Often common sense is articulated in brief exchanges that virtually everyone accepts as true, and that at the same time reinforces the conditions required to sustain it as true. One example would be girls who were discouraged from becoming doctors, until the feminist movement began to challenge certain stereotypes.

Very often this was done with the best interest of the student in mind and with an eye to “reality” as defined by the existing situation. Women were not doctor. Few applied and few medical schools accepted them. Some girls who might have wished to be medical doctors bowed to reality and altered their expectations to fit it. The common sense understanding here was that women could not enter medicine and that few girls would want to do so anyway.

Today, when there is about an equal number of women and men graduating from medical school in the United States, the lie has been given to that common sense understanding. To change the earlier situation the critical pragmatist would not have social science build on existing common sense but would need to critically deconstruct it, showing how the mutually supporting standpoints result in perpetuating an existing but taken for granted inequality. Consider the following example that would have been common up until a couple of decades ago:

Girl: I want to be a doctor, what courses do I need to take?
Middle school teacher: There are good careers in nursing or occupational therapy. I would not advise medicine.
Girl to parents: Ms Jones says I should be a nurse rather than a doctor
Parent: that is a good idea
Girl: Ok, I wonder what I have to do to become a nurse.

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12 I use the term suspicion here to indicate a certain response to modernity, and, in Bourdieu’s case, toward the possibility of education to advance human well-being. While both are powerful instruments in shedding light on particular form of oppression in Bourdieu’s case the suspicion is build into his very definition of terms and in Foucault’s into his methodology itself.
The decision of the girl to change career goal would have been practical one, given a reality constructed through existing common sense, and the fact that medical colleges were reluctant to admit women and few women practiced medicine. However, given the fact that medicine was, for all practical purposes, closed to talented women existing common sense was also a violation of a basic principle of democracy, i.e. equal opportunity. Given too that certain medical conditions are experienced exclusively or more commonly by women, and that male doctors and researchers were often insensitive to them, existing common sense also had the real consequence of limiting understanding on female health issues.

Nevertheless there was a very clear logic that supported the existing situation. The logic was predicated on a strong division of labor where women were supposed to marry and raise children and men were supposed to work outside the home and have careers.

Medical schools hence felt that an expensive medical education for women would be a poor long-term social investment. And woman who looked at medical schools found that indeed, almost all the students were men. So what was the use of applying? And if one was not going to apply why take all those chemistry and math courses, etc.

Given these expectations a certain reinforcing logic developed with the result that few women applied to medical school and very, very few were accepted. From the standpoint of any key stake holder in the process this result was not only sensible, in the way in which common sense is sensible, it was challenged very infrequently and mostly in private. It made sense because of a series of interlocking syllogisms, where, whether accurate or not, one could have the best interest of girls in mind and still support the existing situation. Yet because the situation is self reinforcing, because it violates the ideal of equal opportunity, because it risks poorer health care for women, and because the doctor/nurse relationship mirrors the dominance of men over women, there was good reason to interrupt this reinforcing logic and explore the openings for change.

Intervention involved both understanding the different common sense logics and some of the more subtle ways in which they mutually reinforced each other. Suppose, for example, the intervention on behalf of women was to be led by a male doctor. Here the very relation of dominance that the reform was intended to challenge would be reinforced. Hence, critical pragmatism must not only be aware of the goodness of a reform and the common sense logic that may retard it, it also must be aware of the process used to implement it and to determine its direction. In many cases this means that sympathetic members of a dominant group must step to the side, providing needed service but not leadership, as the reform is developing.

XV. The Pragmatic Temperament

In reconnecting science and values it is useful to think of pragmatism not as a set of fixed principles, but as a certain kind of temperament. This pragmatic temperament calibrates the scope of rational discourse and appraisal to includes to include values and, in contrast to positivism, seeks to connect science to common sense as it works to refine each of them. To do this, the pragmatic temperament is skeptical of the positivist claim that values are simply individual preferences and instead it understands differences about values as an invitation to a conversation. This invitation holds out the possibility that values can be rationally considered and objectively appraised (LW 13). To say that a value claim is objective means that it meet the following conditions as suggested by Elizabeth Anderson:
• There is a sincere acknowledgement of possibility of error and possibility of changing minds, including one’s own.
• Authority to give reasons is granted to the different claimants.
• Claims by the same party do not contradict one another, and when they do it calls for critical self-reflection each party is willing to apply critical reasoning to their own proposals as well as to those of others.
• There is good faith effort to seek a common point of agreement from which justification can proceed.
• There is openness to the introduction of novel considerations as reasons (Anderson 1993).

XVI. Conclusion

A value claim does more than simply express an opinion or a subjective desire, as the positivists believe. It directs attention: “Look at the sunset!” It makes a promise: “There is something worth seeing”. It affirms a hypothetical basis for agreement, and it proposes approaches for living together even in midst of disagreement. The pragmatic approach to value emphasizes conversation and a mutual effort to convert by reason – not by force or violence. Given its understanding of values, pragmatism views research as both value infused and value concerned. The role of the researcher is to enrich the experience of the researched. Critical pragmatism adds the requirement of critical self-reflection and the engagement of others in jointly defining the problem and closing the gap between the researcher and the researched. The pragmatic temperament when applied to education would bring local understanding in conversation with expert knowledge allowing that the latter serves as an instrument to enrich the experience of the former.

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A Symposium on R. Shusterman, Pragmatist Aesthetics 20 years later
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Pragmatist Aesthetics by Richard Shusterman: A bridge between the analytics and continental

When the first edition of Pragmatist Aesthetics came out in 1992, it was immediately perceived as an important new step in Anglo-American philosophy. The aesthetics of the English language were clearly dominated by the analytic current, and the ties with the “continental” debate at that time were quite tenuous. Shusterman, however, reconnected with the pragmatic tradition, and in particular with the aesthetics of John Dewey, thus breaking with many consolidated schemes of thinking, which was immediately evident. Today, however, we can measure another significant effect of Shusterman’s work. Now that the analytic and continental traditions, even in aesthetics, are no longer two entirely separate provinces, and they have begun to take cognizance of each other, it can be seen that Shusterman’s pragmatist aesthetics also acted as a sort of channel of communication between these two traditions. This is a somewhat paradoxical effect, given that Shusterman belonged to neither school of thought, but this was made possible precisely because of this double extraneousness. Referring to pragmatism, Shusterman brought to light certain intrinsic limits of the analytic approach, and he did so based on a line of thought that although tied to its origins and its development in the New World, seemed closer to other modes of philosophy of the Old Continent. In this paper we will deal with the relationship between Pragmatist Aesthetics and analytic aesthetics, and then and look at two questions which have already been mentioned, that is, the aesthetic experience and popular art..

In 1987 Shusterman edited a special issue of “The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism” entitled Analytic Aesthetics: Retrospect and Prospect, which was anything but a simple informative recapitulation of the issue. In reconstructing the origins and development of analytic aesthetics, Shusterman brought to light some very salient limits. Beginning with a broad conception of analytic aesthetics, which included authors such as N. Goodman, R. Wollheim and A. Danto, and thus went far beyond the traditional images of analytic philosophy as a force for the clarification of language, Shusterman pointed out the difficulties which were at the heart of analytic aesthetics due to the claim of doing without any evaluation cultivating the myth of a purely classificatory analysis of a work of art; and he saw in the “neglect of the socially charged context of art” a negative heredity passed on from the formalistic critical orientation of analytic aesthetics, and noted how the latter paid very little attention to history. He was aware of the removal of natural beauty that the exclusive orientation of the work of art carried in itself. At the time Shusterman was writing, a growing uneasiness in analytic aesthetics was beginning to be felt towards the newer forms that were gaining critical acclaim. There was the advent of deconstructionism and cultural studies, with which the dialogue was becoming ever more difficult, and a questioning of a discipline that had always been thought of as a sort of “philosophy of criticism” in both the

literary and artistic fields. In the publication in a single volume of the essays initially collected from the special issue of the Journal, Shusterman also added contributions from authors who were extraneous to the analytic tradition such as P. Bourdieu, Ch. Norris and Ch. Altieri, with the stated purpose of favoring a confrontation with the “Continental Theory”\(^2\).

With a background that included Adorno and Bourdieu, Shusterman is much more equipped to discuss the recent developments of literary and artistic criticism, and a book such as *Pragmatist Aesthetics* demonstrates this very well. In this volume, one of the central themes of the analytics in aesthetics debate, the definition of art, is brought to question. When Shusterman examines G. Dickie’s Institutional Theory, Levinson’s Historical Theory as well as the efforts of Danto to define art starting from “artworld” and “aboutness”, he does not do it merely to demonstrate the difficulties in each of these attempts, but also to push the investigation further along, Shusterman asks if we really need a definition of art. Do we need a definition of art in order to appreciate a work of art? Here not only the pragmatist statement but also the sociology of art begins to bring forth their fruits, because they force Shusterman to distrust every abstract attempt of a definition and to keep in mind that art is a social practice rather than a formalized institution. With this as a basis, a true diatribe against the obsession for definition can be seen, which has conditioned analytic aesthetics for more than three decades. These pages of *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, written when the problem of the definition of art was still at the center of the analytic debate, today assume a very singular value and can even appear prophetic. From the beginning of the new century the same analytic philosophers have noticed with more clarity the innate limits of the search for the definition of art in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. An early significant symptom, a search for “definition” in “narrative” terms proposed by N. Carrol, already existed in the 1990s. Shusterman deemed this the best possible definition to be found within the framework of analytic theory, and it does not strictly speak of definition in terms of conditions, but it attempts to reconstruct the historical and traditional ties that permit the identification of certain practices as “artistic”. Shusterman’s doubts are confirmed by the return to the neo-Wittgensteinian skepticism with the essays by B. Gaut, *Art as a Cluster Concept*, by J.T. Dean *The Nature of Concepts and the Definition of Art*\(^3\). The interventions on the theme, practically ubiquitous between 1970 and 1990 became rarer and more cautious and the position previously occupied by the problem of definition seemed to be taken over by other themes, such as the ontology of art or the debate over imagination.

Instead of the formal problem of the definition of art, Shusterman looked at a strong re-statement of the notion of *aesthetic experience*. Even in this case he encountered deep rooted closure in the analytic field. If at the beginning of the analytic project the notion of aesthetic experience played an important role, as witnessed in *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* by Monroe C. Beardsley, it later faced a series of criticisms which considered it in a destructive way. One needs only think of the categorical rejection of the aesthetic experience brought forth in G. Dickie’s essay *The Myth of Aesthetic

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\(^2\) R. Shusterman (ed), (1989), *Analytic Aesthetics*, Oxford-New York, Basil Blackwell. With respect to the edition stated there must also be noted the intervention of J. Margolis, another American aesthetics scholar where the pragmatic influence is very strong.


tude\textsuperscript{3} which was followed by an attack to Beardsely in Beardsley’s Phantom Aesthetic Experience and restated in Art and the Aesthetic. There are no characteristic features that differentiate the aesthetic experience from other experiences, and therefore the latter can be identified only if it comes first and independently defines what an aesthetic object is. The path does not go from the aesthetic experience to art, but on the contrary in the opposite direction, from a work of art to the aesthetic experience\textsuperscript{4}. Nor has criticism of the notion of aesthetic experience remained the prerogative of Dickie, whose attacks are known for their bluntness and oversimplification. Even a philosopher infinitely more capable of nuance, such as A. Danto, has made it one of the fundamental aces of his own theory. In fact, for Danto an aesthetic definition of a work of art (meaning a definition based on a particular type of experience that includes all of art) is threatened by circularity. Now, however, according to Danto in order to aesthetically appreciate the sensitive qualities of an object of art, we must already know that the object is a work of art, and this is not known by experiencing the object itself, but from the theory and history of art\textsuperscript{5}. In Danto’s opinion this is confirmed by the fact that there exist works of art that do not at all present aesthetic requisites, meaning that they are totally without aesthetically measurable qualities or values. Therefore, between an object which is a work of art and one that is not, there can be differences that in no manner can be considered perceptive differences. Not all artistically relevant differences are of a perceptive nature. It is not, then, the aesthetic experience which allows us to decide what is or what is not a work of art, but rather an interpretive act which is based on theory and historic tradition. For Danto, interpretation must take the place that in traditional theory was occupied by aesthetic experience.

Shusterman knows the objections to the concept of aesthetic experience and its usability. His article The End of Aesthetic Experience in the “Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism” published in 1997 demonstrates it very well. The title plays with the ambiguity of the term “end”. On one hand it wants to be “a reasoned account of the demise” of the notion of aesthetic experience, but on the other hand it tries to furnish “an argument for reconceiving and thus redeeming its purpose”\textsuperscript{6}. Characteristic of Shusterman’s procedure is the fact that he does not limit himself to giving an account of the criticism of the notion of aesthetic experience studied in the analytic field but also extends his investigation to continental philosophy, and thus doing, shows a surprising convergence of the two traditions. In the 20\textsuperscript{th} century even great European philosophy rejected the aesthetic experience. It was criticized by Heidegger (remember, for example, the restrained attacks in Nachwort to Der Ursprung des Kunswerkes to the notion of Erlebnis, or in other words “the lived experience”), by Gadamer (for whom the aesthetic experience was strictly linked with the aesthetische Unterscheidung which both sterilized and made the contact with a work of art unproductive). It was also criticized by Adorno. The rejection of aesthetic pleasure, a pivotal point in Adorno’s rigoristic theory, is in the first place a rejection of the aesthetic experience and of its gratifying and life-enhancing aspects.

There is also a tradition in continental aesthetics which safeguards the role of aesthetic experience; for example the phenomenological line (M. Dufrenne’s Phénoméologie de l’expérience esthétique or Jauss’ Rezeptionsaesthetik; not by chance was an active and positive role in aesthetic pleasure retrieved, in direct opposition to Adorno’s position). Shus-
Shusterman does not find anything that is analogous in the analytic tradition and turns to the pragmatic one, in particular to Dewey, in which the centrality of the notion of experience is found. Shusterman does not attempt to hide the difficulty that Dewey encounters when he tries to transform his concept of aesthetic experience into “a theoretical definition of art”. However, there remains the fact that by insisting “on privileging dynamic aesthetic experience over the physical object that conventional dogma identifies and that fetishizes as art” the philosopher “frees art from object fetishism (and) also from its confinement to the traditional domain of fine art”.

Shusterman emphasizes the fact that the rejection of aesthetic experience has created many more problems than it has resolved. In fact, this rejection has enclosed the aesthetic debate in a sterility of procedural theories, focusing solely on art, forgetting the existence of an aesthetic experience in and derived from nature and preventing the thematizing of the phenomenon of widespread anesthetization which is so characteristic of our times. To divide and oppose pleasure and meaning, sentiment and consciousness, enjoyment and understanding, as Danto and Adorno do for different reasons, means losing sight of the fact that what art does is literally hold together these pairs of presumed opposites. The criticisms of the aesthetic experience have shown that it furnishes neither sufficient nor necessary conditions for the application of our concept of art, but this does not mean that it does not constitute “a more general background condition for art”. By conciliating the anaesthetization of aesthetics Dickie and Danto brought nothing good to it, because reflecting on the art itself, it closed it even more into itself in a self-referential and intellectualistic circuit far removed from popular taste. It is therefore worth recalling the notion of aesthetic experience, “not for a formal definition but for art’s reorientation toward values and populations that could restore its vitality and sense of purpose”.

Perfectly consistent with the reclamation of aesthetic experience – where the influence exercised on Pragmatist Aesthetics by the Aesthetics of John Dewey is absolutely clear – we find another qualifying aspect of Shusterman’s aesthetics, the re-evaluation of popular art. Even in this case Shusterman does not receive immediate support from either the analytic tradition or from the continental one. The very terminology chosen by these two traditions to indicate this totally modern phenomenon of art directed to a vast portion of the population and which seems enjoyable, owing to the techniques of reproduction, for spectators from the most varied extractions and without any limits to time and place, are indicative of the attitude of depreciation and superiority. Adorno and Horkheimer, in a celebrated chapter of Dialektik der Aufklärung, speak of Kulturelle Industrie, Industrial Culture, thus highlighting the commercial, and at the same time the stereotyped, character of this type of artistic production. Analytic aesthetics was late at facing these types of problems – the first contributions to these themes did not appear until the end of the 1980s – and although it did so by claiming that it wished to maintain a distance from an evaluative position, it often accepted the current expression of “mass art” without being able to free this art from the prejudices that accompanied it. This is evident, for example, in the work which is probably considered the most exhaustive on this theme, A Philosophy of Mass Art by N. Carroll.

Shusterman on the other hand speaks of popular art, and, in the fourth chapter of his book, goes on to challenge, point by point, the current prejudices towards mass art: its negative social and political influence, its ephemeral nature, its superficiality, the lack of active involvement by its consumer, and its inability to truly rise to pure form. The arguments used by Shusterman to dismantle each one of these objections are very persuasive, but his criticism of current prejudices towards popular art is not carried out only on the level of theoretic analysis. The analytic approaches to the problem of mass art normally focus on the ontology of art and are above all interested in the ontological requisites that the artistic product must possess in order to have mass appeal (the possibility of mechanical reproduction, the fact of being a token of a type, a work of multiple instances, etc). However, Shusterman is primarily interested in the cultural and social implications of popular art. Even in this case, he reacts directly to the Dewey’s legacy, if we consider the suspicion that Dewey nurtured toward art confined to museums and incapable of truly entering the life of the people.

Shusterman is thus moved by an authentic interest in the mass spread of art, an interest that comes from involvement and direct knowledge, that has none of the suspect and disparaging attitudes of “refined” intellectuals. And if a demonstration is needed, read the pages of the chapter dedicated to The Fine Art of Rap in Pragmatist Aesthetics or Affect and Authenticity in Country Musicals in Performing Live, a book published by Shusterman in 2000, and in which the first part is entirely dedicated to Aesthetic Experience and Popular Art.

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**Enjoying the Doubtful On Transformative Suspensions in Pragmatist Aesthetics**

Richard Shusterman’s pragmatism is an important voice in the pluralist choir of pragmatist philosophers and has crucially contributed to refine some of the most important pragmatist concerns, particularly those of Dewey. While he, like Dewey, criticizes the compartmentalization of the art-sphere and shows in detail the entanglement of the aesthetic and the ordinary, adopting and further developing his critical insights, Shusterman also detects some flaws in Dewey’s vision. Rather “than pursuing Dewey’s totalizing definition-al quest” in dealing with aesthetic experience, he instead aims, “in the spirit of piecemeal pragmatist labor, to make a more specific case for widening art’s borders to forms of popular culture and to the ethical art of fashioning one’s life”.

But Shusterman also radicalized and broadened the pragmatist method or way of thinking, legitimizing a closer interaction of philosophy and the everyday (than Dewey allowed for), of which popular culture forms an integral part. Applying this approach to his own work, Shusterman has been the first philosopher to explore and appreciate philosophically the world of hip hop, not only by familiarizing himself with its culture and making its culture recognizable for an academic audience through his publications, but by arguing for its philosophical and aesthetic significance and legitimacy, and by showing how its culture challenges some flaws of academic philosophy, offering intriguing alternatives.

Although generally benevolent in his discussions of philosophical positions, Shusterman for a long time has been surprisingly critical towards the aesthetic theory of Kant. This is partly understandable, as Kant’s philosophy viewed as a system is in fact incompatible with pragmatism, and there are good reasons to reject some of his premises and limitations. Nevertheless there are some aspects in Shusterman’s thinking which come quite close to Kantian ideas (and they already have – in some subcutaneous ways – influenced pragmatist aesthetics via Emerson and Peirce). I believe that a careful connection could be beneficial and enriching both for Kantian and for pragmatist aesthetics. Shusterman himself writes in a recent article that he had “all too readily followed James (and Dewey) in being hypercritical of Kant, though my own pragmatist aesthetics shares with him (much more than with Hegel) an emphasis on pleasure, perception, and the experiential particularity of aesthetic reactions that cannot be reduced to the conceptual”.  

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So in what follows, my paper explores some of the familiarities and tensions between their reflections on pleasure and on the particularity of aesthetic experience, thereby arguing that the transformatory element in aesthetic pleasure is doubt.

Why is it so crucial to underline the positive aesthetic experience of pleasure instead of concentrating on the critical examination of negative experiences (and their opposition and prevention through political philosophy and action) like pain, humiliation, and alienation, which dominate contemporary philosophical debates on feelings, as Shusterman rightly criticizes? Not only do late capitalist societies continue to reproduce the fatal and violent split between mind and body (besides innumerable other dualisms, e.g. subject/object, self/world, male/female, art/life, thought/feeling) and the corresponding depreciation of the somatic in contrast to the mental and linguistic, this split moreover resonates in the hierarchical dualism between popular and high culture, and this hierarchy in turn reverberates in those philosophical discourses which continue to neglect the somatic, and particularly the positive somatic and aesthetic experiences, a problem that “might be termed a radical an-aestheticization of aesthetics” (PL: 31). Instead of taking a critical stance towards body-hostile tendencies in society (of which the mediately inculcated fanaticism for violently standardized body-images and the equally standardized sensationalism of emotions, which are being confounded with pleasure, represent nothing more than the other Janus-faced side), contemporary philosophy tends to exacerbate the problem. Shusterman’s insistence on pleasure should be understood as a critical response to the tendency to disdain pleasure and hence a part of ourselves (PA: 170).

A lot of misunderstanding regarding Shusterman’s philosophical reevaluation of aesthetic pleasure can be attributed to a lack of understanding its essential and indispensable transformatory power (PA: 58, 59, 145). The problem, e.g., of many (post-)structuralist theories is that they tend to describe the subject in terms of an irreducible deficiency. The tendency towards an ever evanescent, and always somehow violently subjected subject not only reflects and partly reproduces the societal violence of the mind-body dualism. It also makes the problem of embodied agency seem increasingly unsolvable, other than to be content (in a very sad way) with the anonymous iterations and ruptures the unpredictability of discourses and the mishaps of speech-acts might offer as only source for renewal and change. Even more so, because these ruptures will always, at least partly, reproduce the implicit or explicit violence of its subjection, whereas unconstrained aesthetic pleasure involves the option of temporarily freeing the self from (at least some) boundaries by getting to know the new. And it is not only the fullness of unconstrained pleasure, but also the surplus of this experience, which Shusterman notes. “That aesthetic experience extends beyond the historically established practice of art should be obvious” (PA: 47). One of the reasons why he advocates popular culture is a consequence of this problem, as the experience of aesthetic pleasure hasn’t been suppressed on such a scale in popular culture as in the so-called high art and its correspondingly expected aesthetic attitude. Furthermore this one-sided aesthetic attitude is inseparable from social hierarchies, in which – as Bourdieu has powerfully demonstrated – distinguished taste is instrumentalized to reinforce social classes, more perfidiously so, as the aesthetic, allegedly authentic and free judgment serves for social positioning. But neither does this entail a determination through social classes nor the nonexistence of valid aesthetic judgments or experiences altogether. The cultivation of rather intellectual aesthetic works, labeled as high art, and their reception is not per se problematic, but it is because of its implications: the exclusions, and the consolidation of those exclusions of social classes and of parts of our own self.
It would be trivial to make pleasure a philosophical key concept, if the point was to merely *compensate* for its negligence in our societies (without touching the societal structures which produced the problem in the first place). The significance of the recognition of aesthetic pleasure lies instead in its *transformatory power*. And this power can be best activated, in my view, when it is not separated from understanding, as Peirce famously wrote, describing the creative state of musement, as an “open conversation with yourself, … however, not a conversation in words alone”\(^5\). In this I see a strong connection between Kantian and pragmatist aesthetics, although Kant needs a pragmatist correction of his formalistic and body-hostile tendencies, whereas pragmatism could benefit from a stronger focus on the formation of a critical standpoint through aesthetic pleasure and aesthetic judgment. In his latest book on *Somaesthetics*, the discipline he has been unfolding in the last decade, Shusterman proposes that we should rely on our feelings and habits “until they prove problematic in experience.” But it seems to me, that aesthetic pleasure (which, as I have learned from Shusterman, always is somehow somaesthetic) has more to offer: it not only opens the horizon to a more refined attention toward the somatic processes of our body, but also opens the horizon to a more refined attention on *our own problematic positioning in the world*. It is important temporarily to enjoy the problematic in an unconstrained way. Otherwise (soma)esthetic pleasure runs the danger of promising on the one hand “the richest and deepest palate of experiential fulfillments because it can draw on the profusion of cosmic resources, including an uplifting sense of cosmic unity,” while being on the other hand subordinated to the fact “that habits must engage and assimilate the environments in which they function, particularly those environmental elements that support or enable their function”\(^7\). Shusterman’s analysis at times contains, in my understanding, a somehow not quite connected opposition between the ideas of a cosmic somaesthetic experience, in which Emerson resonates, versus a functionalistic scientific vocabulary. The insistence on (soma)esthetic pleasure would run the danger, then, to be misunderstood as *compensatory* to our functioning instead of being *transformatory*, including the questioning of what is being conceived nowadays as functional, but might turn out to be problematic.

But how does pleasure mobilize transformations or serve as a compass in the process of transformation? In his essay *The End of Aesthetic Experience*, Shusterman proposes an interesting thought experiment to elucidate the indispensability of pleasure: imagine two visually identical viewers who offer identical interpretations of an artwork. One is human, the other one a cyborg, one is thrilled, the other one is not, for he only processes data in a way programmers told him to. The cyborg is capable of producing an interpretation of the given artwork, based on the information stored up in his software and the algorithms that process and combine them. But we “would surely say here”, Shusterman concludes, “that the cyborg, in an important sense, doesn’t really understand these works. He doesn’t, in a big way, get to the point of such art, … he does not really grasp what art is all about” (PL: 30, 31). Now, the cyborg does not lack one particular feature or capacity, which could in principle be installed, e.g., by adding a program that makes him express the required kind of pleasure. The cyborg does not grasp what art is *altogether*, because he does not grasp what pleasure is all about. To experience aesthetic pleasure in a big way means, in my view, that

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\(^7\) R. Shusterman, *Body Consciousness*, cit., p. 214; p. 216.
the human self, in Kantian terms, “feels itself”, whereas the cyborg is unable to do so.\(^8\) It means for the self, furthermore, to “feel itself” in a double sense: the self notices how it feels when facing an aesthetic situation (whether this is constituted by a work of art, nature, or an aesthetic experience in the wider sense of pragmatism, is a question I prefer to leave open), e.g. being excited, calmed, delighted, etc. But the self simultaneously focuses its attention on itself: its subjectivity becomes the object of its attention\(^9\). Corresponding to this double sense of “feeling itself”, a double movement takes place: the self might feel immediately attracted or unsettled by an aesthetic situation. But in contrast to other daily situations, which might pass by automatically, driven by established habits, the aesthetic situation lingers on, because it is pleasurable in a peculiar way. “We linger”, Kant writes, “over the consideration of the beautiful because this consideration strengthens and reproduces itself” (CPW: 107).

This lingering consists for Kant in the free play of the faculties (of imagination and understanding), and pleasure is a result of that free play (CPW: §9, 103). Kant at this point distinguishes between pleasure and the agreeable, which denotes the sensual, rather passive enjoyment without reflection. Whereas the agreeable is driven by interest, pleasure is disinterested. One of the strongest objections to Kant’s aesthetics articulated by Dewey and Shusterman is that the attitude of disinterestedness is not only artificial, but an attitude, which can only be taken on by the socio-economically and culturally privileged (PA: 263, fn. 11). It seems problematic, however, to establish a strict dichotomy by excluding the disinterestedness altogether in favor of a pure interestedness, and in fact Shusterman elsewhere insists that the means-end-dichotomy needs to be overcome by a view that art “is thus at once instrumentally valuable and a satisfying end in itself”. The interest in aesthetic pleasure involves “enhancing our immediate experience which invigorates and vitalizes us, thus aiding our achievement of whatever further ends we pursue” (PA: 9). There is, contra Kant, no reason for excluding the interest-led agreeable, but the artistic shouldn’t be reduced to it. This would be a problem, because a reduction of a situation to the agreeable would stop the lingering too soon, and that would be a problematic constraint, if it could be undergone in a transformative way. The attractions of a fashionable pair of sneakers or a fashionable production of a Wagnerian opera have their aesthetic worth, as long as they include an ongoing lingering. Other than that they are merely agreeable commodities. The decision whether something is considered as part of an ‘agreeable’ and often violently inculcated mass (or deceitful high) culture, or of a potentially critical and pleasurable popular (or unpopular) culture amounts, in my view, to the question of how much lingering takes place. When we agree with Bourdieu in that the seemingly disinterested aesthetic judgment actually represents a positioning in a social class, then the disinterested conceals a very strong interest, namely one of being recognized as part of a distinguished class by excluding others, in which case the alleged pleasure of ‘high art’ would turn out to be nothing more than agreeable, when reduced to that interest. On the other hand popular culture can (as well as any other aesthetic situation, depending on the given context) mobilize a lingering, which might transform the self.

It seems more fruitful to me, rather than to scrutinize exegetically Kant’s transcendental system at this point, to adapt his ideas pragmatically, even to sample and recombine his

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\(^9\) The question of somaesthetic attention is treated in detail in Shusterman’s Body Consciousness, particularly in chapt. 5.
valuable insights for the problem in question, namely the question of the transformatory power of pleasure. For Kant, pleasurable lingering is crucial, because it allows an unconstrained aesthetic (or reflective) judgment to take place. In opposition to determining judgments, which subsume something particular under a general concept, the aesthetic judgment has no rule. As Kant points out, it differs from practical or theoretical judgments in that it always judges a singular situation. While in a scientific experiment an example is given, which is in principle exchangeable, in the aesthetic situation it is not. It is, in Kant’s words, exemplary (CPJ: §18, 121). The self, moreover, does not have a clear idea about the character of its exemplary situation: it needs to find out what the situation is about, including the open question, who itself is in this specific singular situation and, thus, who it could be in the future. The self tries to situate itself in relation to the aesthetic situation. “Beautiful things”, Kant writes, “indicate that human beings find the world to be a place suited to them”\textsuperscript{11}. This important aspect of pleasure includes the capacity of not only feeling the pleasure in reaching out for the new, but of feeling compatible with the social and natural world. But this does not mean that the self needs to adapt to the social and natural world and to succumb to its criteria. It should instead be interpreted as actively imagining and anticipating a situation, in which the self could feel at home.\textsuperscript{12} So, paradoxically, to feel itself, the self needs not only to free itself from constraints on itself, but, to a certain extent, needs to be freed of its constrained self, as the restrictions which limit its possibilities aren’t something external it could take off like a hat. Unconstrained aesthetic pleasure can temporarily suspend the subjected self, which in turn implies, as Cavell once put it, to open to “our beyond”\textsuperscript{13}. This is why Kant (echoing in Cavell through Emerson) supposed that in aesthetic pleasure others are implied: we wish to share our aesthetic pleasure with others because we already appeal to them virtually in search for new criteria, for a different, a modified self. Translated into pragmatist vocabulary: suspending the self temporarily means opening up to those vaguely conceived but forgotten or repressed alternative options of thinking, feeling and acting (with James: to the fringes of the self)\textsuperscript{14}, left out in habitual action. Aesthetic pleasure temporarily opens up an unconstrained space in which the suspended self reaches out to alternatives, in Cavell’s words, to “open to the further self, in oneself and in others, which means holding oneself in knowledge of the need for change”\textsuperscript{15}. The problem with Cavell is, as Shusterman convincingly diagnoses, that his perfectionism tends to reproduce a depreciative posture towards the body and its pleasures, thereby confining his perfectionist striving to a rigorously self-critical regimen of reading and writing, and thereby constraining the possible unconstrained lingering which is so important. Only through unconstrained loosening of the borders of habitual thinking and feeling, the fringes of the intelligible are being mobilized and the “internalized practice [which] is always already marked by conflict and points in different directions” (PA: 60) can be perceived in a

\textsuperscript{10} In Kuhn’s vocabulary: of the normal science, not of the revolutionary science. Of course, Kant’s compartmentalization of practical, theoretical, and aesthetic judgments is highly contentious. There is no room to discuss the problem in this essay, but suffice it to note that the development of the new in every area implies an aesthetic dimension, as, e.g., Peirce’s analysis of the abduction shows.


\textsuperscript{12} For a political interpretation of this quote see L. Zerilli, (2005), “We feel our freedom”. Imagination and Judgment in the thought of Hannah Arendt”, Political Theory, 33, 2, pp. 158-188.


\textsuperscript{14} To which Shusterman refers in his “The Pragmatist Aesthetics of William James”, cit., p. 359.

\textsuperscript{15} S. Cavell, Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome, cit., p. 125; See also PP: 103.
different light: the formerly unnoticed (or, due to conflicts, the seemingly incompatible) can be noticed (or be seen in a new connection) and, by this, help to overcome not only entrenched habits, but as well – in the long run – to transform the formerly taken for granted common sense. To appeal to others in aesthetic pleasure means to appeal to a partly utopian sensus communis.16

The lingering makes the formerly unknown or the new accessible. That, “with which the imagination can play in an unstudied and purposive way is always new to us, and we are never tired of looking at it” (CPW: 126). In the process of searching the self lets its thinking go loose, the status as a self with a firm identity is temporarily being suspended, in suspense. The aim is to restructure the known habits and vocabularies facing something not yet understood, which mobilizes a whole variety of imaginings in a pleasurable manner. The concrete instrumental interests of the self are transitorily suspended in favor of a different kind of interest. This disinterested “interest” or urge does not have to do primarily with concretely desired objects, but with a repositioning of the self through the aesthetic exploratory movement. It is rather comparable to the urge to solve a riddle (and not to solve it to impress others, but just to solve it), only that the riddle is the self. Another way to say it would be that the self finds itself in a situation of enjoying the doubtful, mainly the doubtful of itself. A pleasurable self-doubt is mobilized in the search for new criteria in a dubitable aesthetic situation.

Unconstrained pleasurable doubting involves a resolution of a somehow unresolved situation of the self: do I like what I see (hear, feel, taste)? If the answer were clear, no aesthetic entanglement would take place. But in contrast to many postmodern or poststructuralist accounts of the subject, it is not the lack or deficiency, which fuels the exploratory movement of searching for new ways (of feeling, thinking, acting), it is on the contrary the abundance of not yet disentangled associations and feelings, which move the self. This kind of abundance Kant has in mind resembles the “spilling over” Shusterman sees in connection with aesthetic experience (PA: 10). And to feel pleasure in the face of something yet unknown, it seems to me, is exactly what Dewey had in mind when he pointed out the possibility of “enjoying the doubtful”17.

This unconstrained enjoyment of the doubtful implies a positive rivalry between imagination and understanding, as the former continues to produce associations, diving deeper into the situation, whereas the latter seeks to grasp the yet uncomprehended, to make the unutterable utterable. This lingering on the verge of the conceptual, as there is something new, “spilling over” the familiar vocabularies and habits, is another aspect pragmatism and Kant have in common. But pragmatism tends to discern the aesthetic experience from the process of doubting, which is mostly being associated with negative feelings of tension. In my view, however, aesthetic experience implies a positive tension between habitual pleasures and doubts. This idea of pleasurable doubts even resonates in James’ famous definition of truth, which – taking into account the pragmatist dismissal of the classical compartmentalization between the good, the true, and the beautiful, or, with Shusterman, that “the aesthetic is continuous with the practical and cognitive and that all these different factors or interests can be integrated in the unity of experience”18 – is applicable to the process just

16 I develop a pragmatist interpretation of Kant’s sensus communis (in conjunction with and comparison to pragmatist, critical common sense) in H. Salaverría, Spielräume des Selbst. Pragmatismus und Kreatives Handeln, cit., pp. 227-266.


described: “New truth is always a go-between, a smoother-over of transitions. It marries old opinion to new fact so as ever to show a minimum of jolt, a maximum of continuity. … The reason why we call things true is the reason why they are true, for ‘to be true’ means only to perform this marriage function”\(^\text{19}\). The free play of imagination and understanding could then be translated pragmatically into the free play of the old (concepts of understanding, old beliefs, and habits) and the new (imagination, somatic experiences, and associations).

The metaphor of marriage charmingly suggests an erotic entanglement of ‘old’ and ‘new’. Accordingly, ‘Old’ and ‘New’ have fallen in love with each other, thus establishing a positive tension (as in the tension between understanding and imagination), but this tension implies doubts with respect to the uncertain future and the question over how the matter will play out. The capacity for transformation or creativity in a strong sense requires doubting\(^\text{20}\).

Moreover, in the aesthetic experience and judgment activity is included, as Kant and Dewey advocate\(^\text{21}\). But this kind of activity is, as Shusterman underlines, not fully controllable by the self. The “reduction of appreciation to self-assertive critical production denies us the enrichment and pleasure gained from submitting ourselves to art’s alterity and seductive power” (PA: 54). It is rather a process, which in a pleasurable way puts into question what was taken for granted before. Rorty had something similar in mind when, talking of creativity, he wrote of “flirtations with the meaningless”, quoting Frye\(^\text{22}\). Rorty, however, limited creative self-doubts to the invention of new vocabularies, a *limitation* to the linguistic, for which, as Shusterman has convincingly shown, there exists no good reason, because, if “we can emancipate and transform the self through new language, we can also perhaps liberate and transfigure it through new bodily practices” (PA: 260).

One could object that the unconstrained lingering of pleasure doesn’t provide us either with an answer to the question of embodied agency nor to the question of how to counteract societal and individual constraints, violence and cruelty. “We cannot be reminded too often”, Shusterman writes, “of the aesthetically refined Nazi officers who would weep at Beethoven to express their human emotions while inhumanly orchestrating the wholesale slaughter of innocent children” (PA: 155). I absolutely agree. In the case of the aesthetically refined Nazi a particularly sick version of ‘aesthetic experience’ is at work, in which not even the slightest self-doubt is being heard. But – as Shusterman rightly underlines – this kind of immoral compartmentalization repeats itself constantly in less extreme forms in our everyday behavior.

This is why it is so important to emphasize the *doubtful*, particularly the self-doubts. It is crucial for the embodied agency of the self as doubting implies the ambiguity of unsettling and resettling the self and its habits. Doubts do not only *unsettle* the self, signalizing an error committed by the self or experienced in the environment (e.g. the structures of society). They also *resettle* the self by signalizing an emerging new contour of the own positioning. Some part of the self, allegedly known, is being weakened, and simultaneously some part of the self, yet unknown, is being encouraged through the enjoyment of the uncertain. In contrast to poststructuralist accounts on the subject driven by lack, aesthetic


doubts enable the self to experience the ‘lack’ of temporarily being uncertain in an unconstrained way, inviting a diving into unknown terrains, which might bring up something helpful. Doubting urges the self to position, its singularity being at stake by connecting to something new, because the “creative ameliorative reshaping of life is an endless task”, in which “each person must reckon with her own color and thickness of lens”23. Only if we cultivate our individual radar for the doubtful in us and in society, if we train ourselves somaesthetically to endure and even to enjoy the tensions of the uncertain instead of impatiently shrugging them off can we contribute to a new partage du sensible, as Rancière calls it, by transforming the rigid limitations of our perception that can do so much harm24.


Owing largely to his influential work on pragmatist aesthetics and somaesthetics Richard Shusterman is one of the most renowned aestheticians in the world. The release of Pragmatist Aesthetics in 1992 greatly influenced the scholarly landscape; judging by the outpouring of translations, reviews, conference papers, MA and PhD theses written on related topics, indeed, one might say that the book inaugurated a new chapter in aesthetics. Shusterman’s training as an analytic philosopher, and prior association with an analytic orientation in aesthetics, undoubtedly added to the book’s appeal.

Shusterman is not the only philosopher to make a turn from the analytic to the pragmatist. Still, he is the only one to do so so radically, on such scale, and within the aesthetic domain. In Pragmatist Aesthetics he openly admits that his vision was largely inspired by the writings of John Dewey. Nonetheless, eight years later, in the preface to his book’s second edition, the claim that “pragmatist aesthetics began with Dewey” seems too bold for Shusterman. He points to the early contributions of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Alain Locke, whose works were more or less directly known to Dewey; Dewey nonetheless omits mentioning Emerson and Locke as his, quite potent (according to Shusterman) sources of inspiration. Although it is impossible to deny aesthetic threads in the writings of the thinkers mentioned above, still, in my opinion they are not proof enough to weaken Dewey’s leading role as the founder of pragmatist aesthetics.

Of the classical pragmatists, Dewey supplied the foundations for pragmatist aesthetics. His Art as Experience was published in 1934, yet for a number of reasons remained unnoticed during his lifetime. Firstly, pragmatism itself was at the time rather unpopular in Europe. Secondly, Dewey was no aesthetician, and his “philosophy of aesthetics” (his own term), returning art to real life and building fully on his own concept of experience, strongly opposed any acknowledged continental notions (such as the autonomy of the work of art or the uniqueness of an aesthetic experience). Dewey’s aesthetic thought was continued on American soil, especially after his death in 1952, by followers foreshadowed by a dynamically developing analytic philosophy and aesthetics. Particularly the efforts of John McDermott, as well as Thomas Alexander and others, grouped in SAAP, are not to be underestimated. Within their works they not only strived to reconstruct Dewey’s original ideas, but also to develop them, uncovering their hidden potential in emerging fields such as ecology, technology or urban design. Particularly important is McDermott’s book The Culture of Experience (1976), which uses the basic assumptions of Dewey’s (and James’) philosophy of experience to show and diagnose the changes taking place in culture since the 1960s. These were changes of great proportions and radicalism, and when used for Deweyen-based aesthetic examination, they proved to be a most effective instrument, leading to conclusions that later emerged as highly accurate and significant. By way of example, we might mention here the role of touch and the whole sensory apparatus, as well as aesthetic sensibility, urban consciousness, operativeness of environmental and contextual terms and a general return to everyday practices while discovering their aesthetic dimension. By tak-

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ing advantage of an anti-fundamentalistic and anti-dualistic approach, McDermott’s book constitutes a big step in the development of pragmatist aesthetics. MEANWHILE IN HIS PREFACE TO Pragmatist Aesthetics Shusterman writes: “Pragmatist aesthetics began with John Dewey – and almost ended there” and “the philosophical influence of his aesthetic theory was very short-lived. Pragmatist aesthetics was soon eclipsed and rejected by analytic aesthetics…”(xvi). The words that follow (three lines later) may awake controversy: “This is not to deny important contributions by contemporary pragmatists to certain aesthetic issues – for example, Rorty on the ethical role of literature, and Margolis and Fish on interpretation”. Indeed, narrowing down contemporary pragmatist thinkers to post-analytic philosophers searching for inspiration in pragmatism seems a limiting perspective.

In his article on Bernstein, Roberto Frega stresses the still-evident tension between the philosophy of language and the philosophy of experience. Some, like Rorty, approaching pragmatism via analytic philosophy and postmodernism failed to acknowledge the importance of experience. Shusterman’s progression also has its specificity, visible in extracts from his works. The author admits: “Pragmatism was not taught to me in Jerusalem or Oxford; nor did I teach it in the Negev. Philosophy there meant analytic philosophy, and aesthetics analytic aesthetics. Pragmatism emerged for me as a philosophical horizon only when I returned to America in 1985…”. This was the time of so-called neopragmatism in the States, with which Shusterman seems to have come in contact. In his article bearing the significant title “The End of the Aesthetic Experience” Shusterman names (apart from Dewey) Beardsley, Goodman and Danto (as well as Margolis and Rorty) as “the leading figures of the aesthetic tradition”, who contributed to his own views on the subject. He adds: “While Dewey celebrated aesthetic experience, making it the very centre of his philosophy of art, Danto virtually shuns the concept…”. His tense and dramatic intellectual transformation finally leads him to writing Pragmatist Aesthetics, where Shusterman definitely opts for the philosophy of experience.

A similar dramaturgy might be witnessed on the subject of interpretation. On his arrival at Temple, Shusterman encountered Joseph Margolis’ concept of interpretation. He took part in discussions organized by the Institute on Interpretation, which shaped his understanding of interpretation. In “Pragmatist Aesthetics”, one of the chapters is dedicated to the topic of “Pragmatism and Interpretation”, another bears the title “Beneath Interpretation”. Indeed, almost one fifth of the entire work is dedicated to the problem of interpretation. Pragmatist Aesthetics was translated into Polish in 1998 with omission, on the author’s request, of the chapter “Pragmatism and Interpretation”. In his preface to the Polish edition the author justified this decision as follows: “…this translation, however more complete than any of the seven preceding it, does not contain one of the chapters present in the English original. It seemed too long, too technical to me, as well as containing too much internal tensions of pragmatists of the time…”. The omission of the chapter, however, led to half of the preface being dedicated to remarks on interpretation.

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1 John S. Smith in the Foreword to McDermott’s book The Culture of Experience wrote of the influence Dewey’s Art as Experience had on McDermott’s thought: ‘He finds there ideas essential for understanding present dilemmas in culture and for reconstructing affective values which grow out of actual experience and are in no need of imposition from without’.


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I could not assess whether the chapter was also omitted in other translations. I do not want to overestimate the importance of the Polish edition, but only to refer to it in making a more general point. The removal of the chapter may have a deeper importance. I believe that stressing the topic of interpretation in a work on pragmatist aesthetics is somehow misleading, given that the problem of interpretation is not one of the major issues of an aesthetics constructed on pragmatism (with its central notion of experience). Shusterman seems to be aware of this, yet it is not clear from which moment onwards. We are led to ask: (1) Was Shusterman already aware of this when writing *Pragmatist Aesthetics* and so decided to address his book to the American reader, and especially to analytic thinkers, taking into account their interest in the problem of interpretation? or (2) did he become aware years later (preparing the book for translation) that the problem of interpretation was not an integral part of pragmatist aesthetics? This latter interpretation would prove that in a sense the author gradually freed himself from the burden of the tradition he was trained in.

In *Art and Experience* Dewey does not use the term “interpretation” at all. Shusterman introduces a whole chapter on interpretation to prove, as he himself writes, the value of pragmatism to both the analytic, as well as deconstructionist traditions – though this value is of a different kind. A pragmatist interpretation enables one to avoid extremes: the existence of an objective meaning that interpretation is only meant to discover, on the one hand, and the denial of such prior meaning (stripping the work of its own identity and leaving it open to a plurality of interpretations arising from contextually dependent linguistic games) on the other.

I must admit I do not fully accept the strategy adopted by the author. Despite the fact that during the writing of *Pragmatist Aesthetics* analytic and deconstructionist orientations were dominant, this does not explain why regard for them had to be included in the construction of pragmatist aesthetics. The Deweyan concept of experience no doubt carries a potential that could inspire (also on the question on interpretation) the orientations Shusterman points to. Instead of considering the problem of interpretation in detail, within “pragmatist aesthetics” it would be more helpful to present all aspects and consequences of the pragmatist concept of experience.

Although the term “interpretation” hardly appears in *Art and Experience*, the term “interaction” may be found on nearly every page, as a fundamental characteristic of experience. Reconstruction is a form of interaction, which may take on an interpretative character. Both reconstruction and interpretation provoke a mutual subject-object transformation. In explaining the merit of pragmatist interpretation, Shusterman defines it as no so much discovering an existing sense but rather as giving sense. I am sceptical of this approach; interpreting is not giving, but merely co-shaping meanings. In an interaction of interpretative experience the subject is not fully in control, since the object resists. This renders the interaction a correlation of subject-object tensions, resulting in the transformation of subject and object, making them defined. Still, the author claims that the freedom of the subject is limited through the cultural education we receive, which makes us interpret works of art in specific, conventional ways. I want to stress once more - the way interaction takes its course and the layers of meaning it activates in the subject depend on the object and vice versa - what the subject discovers in the object depends on consecutive phases of an ongoing experience. Such experience is different each time, and so are its effects. It is even possible for the work of art’s power to impel the interpreter into resigning his habits, or the subject’s power of habit and convention to block the work’s innovative character. To conclude, I will consider Shusterman’s opinions in this context to be still determined by understanding interpretative experience as subject’s experience.
In the second edition of *Pragmatist Aesthetics* (2000) the chapter on interpretation was not removed, and the newly added chapter, entitled “Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal” (similarly to the 1997 *Practicing Philosophy. Pragmatism and the Philosophical Life*) traces and develops somatic and sensual aspects of aesthetic experience present in Dewey’s writings. In his preface to the second edition, the author addresses the reception his book received internationally, trying to counter the critical opinions received to this date. Amongst the themes discussed, the question of interpretation did not arise. This leads us to think that the relation of pragmatism and interpretation either did not cause any controversy, or the attempt to direct the interest of analytic and deconstructionist philosophy to pragmatism in this field has gone unnoticed. Be that as it may, the discussion over the book was dominated by doubts concerning the chapter on rap music, or, more precisely, the attitude of the author towards popular art. This was quite unfortunate for the book’s reception, in my opinion, for the debate on rap foreshadowed important theses reshaping aesthetics according to pragmatist thought, which rap only served to exemplify. Instead, an attempt at attaching value to pop art resulted in excessive criticism, and the real value of Shusterman’s book (consisting in the construction of a model of pragmatist aesthetics) was not sufficiently appreciated.

The author felt obliged to respond and explain the ongoing misunderstanding, devoting most of the preface to the second edition to popular art as well, an issue that does not seem the most essential to the project. This felt obligation proves how difficult it is for the pragmatist option in aesthetics to break through the habit of dualistic thinking, embedded so deeply in our tradition. For all that the author seeks to explain in the preface to the second edition was already present in the first. What is more, to reach his readers more effectively, the author settles on a commonly accepted explanatory procedure (binary logics). This in turn, in my opinion, undermines the idea of pragmatist thinking. And so, in trying to legitimize his benevolent outlook on popular art, and admitting it into the sphere of interest of contemporary aesthetics, to which pragmatist aesthetics compiles due to its basic assumptions, the author succumbs to the temptation of using argumentation based on alternative of exclusion and that of inclusion. He does so to prove his deliberations were not aimed at exclusion (either of pop art or high-brow art) but at including both. The word “both” becomes essential. Even though the explanation will most probably serve its purpose, it is unfortunate that the author was forced to defend a statement clearly based on pragmatist convictions through the use of non-pragmatist language. Especially since his stance is fully clear even if not written into the dualistic matrix of opposites. Instead, conceptual oppositions are only hipostatized extremes of a polarised spectrum, where continuity and gradation, as well as the dynamics of change are impossible to apprehend within the framework of traditional logic. The demarcation between high-brow art and popular art loses its justification when faced with practice (and for pragmatist aesthetics this is essential).

In practice both the work of art and the work that aspires to be art don’t just belong to the category of fine art or the category of popular art. They are located somewhere in between these two, having certain aspects closer to one or the other. The same applies to deep pleasure, traditionally linked to aesthetic experience, and shallow hedonistic pleasure. Argumentation grounded on including such alternatives would not be fully adequate here (we have a choice between one option or the other, or of even both, but the division remains explicit). If we were to use concepts of continuity and gradation, they would portray real-life cases more accurately, as the deepness of pleasure of experience is gradeable, sometimes, and sometimes only, adopting maximum polarisation. The fact of pragmatist aesthetics preferring the sphere of “between”, as being closest to real-life praxis, over polar oppo-
positions, deserves constant stress. To put it in Deweyan terms, nouns are all too often hipostases of adjectives, and these can be graded. If we were to grasp art in an adjectival way, the dilemma of whether something is or isn’t a work of art gives way to the dilemma to what extent it is a work of art.

Twenty years have passed since the publication of Pragmatist Aesthetics. I wouldn’t want to appear pessimistic, but I believe the understanding of this new approach, despite its popularity, has since progressed to just a small extent. This in turn means that the wearisome toil of explaining and setting things straight must be continued. I am confident that excessive attention the author devotes to interpretation, and readers devote to popular art, have distorted or foreshadowed the essential shape and importance of the “pragmatist aesthetics” project. A project contains as vital theses contrasting traditional aesthetics as theses concerning the aesthetic not standing in opposition to the practical, or the one stating that the task of aesthetic theory does not consist in describing the state of things but in meliorating human experience.

Looking back at these matters of reception may seem obsolete. Still, the book’s twentieth anniversary may also become an occasion for reconsideration and retrospective. “Pragmatist Aesthetics” still remains the only work containing a full and comprehensive outline of what pragmatist aesthetics is. Perhaps it is time to consider a re-edition, unencumbered with the problems of the 80s, and presenting an updated vision of pragmatist aesthetics fit for the 21st century.

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5 That is not the case with somaesthetics. Although it does constitute a part of pragmatist aesthetics, it tends to function independently. I get the impression Shusterman is now mostly renowned as the creator of somaesthetics, and it is no surprise why. Pragmatist aesthetics introduced solutions that strongly disrupted conventional aesthetic thinking. Somaesthetics also seemed highly innovative, but (quite fortunately) it was born during the period of strong bodily fascination, present on various levels of human activity, reaching from philosophical theory to everyday practice.
Roberta Dreon *

Pragmatist Aesthetics, twenty years later. Understanding Interpretation, Interpreting Understanding

Pragmatist Aesthetics was published in 1992, by now twenty years ago. Through his book Richard Shusterman was able to revitalize a debate in the aesthetic field, which tended to stagnate. But its claims, implications and consequences went beyond the narrow limits of aesthetics, understood as philosophy of art according to a traditional modern approach.

His reinterpretation of pragmatist aesthetics, expressly derived from Dewey’s work, was able to show not only that those defining anxieties characterizing the analytical debate were not particularly successful, but also that the recent tendency to neglect aesthetic elements in favour of a complete translation in semantic terms of art’s questions was not satisfactory. He recovered the basic pragmatist instance according to which aesthetic arguments, philosophical theses and, more generally, any intellectual elaboration must respond more or less indirectly to our everyday experiences, must explicitly pose the problem of improving our lives, of making them more meaningful and more satisfying for a wider number of people.

In comparison to continental approaches toward aesthetics, Pragmatist Aesthetics claimed the urgent need to risk a positive formulation of aesthetics. Those negative instances, as Adorno’s ones, were able to resist a mere confirmation of existing institutions. Nevertheless they were characterised by a strong elitism, which tended to support social cleavages and to deny human structural needs of enjoying their own experiences.

Three basic guidelines therefore emerged from that book. The first one was to question the gap between authentic and popular arts, showing that we need no rigid dichotomy, which in its turn reveals itself as dogmatic and unfounded. Rather, we should discriminate within both artistic ‘family groups’ those relatives who are betters from the worse ones. More precisely, we should differentiate between regressive and fertile interaction modalities with works of art, between useless and enhancing artistic practices. His careful analysis of rap music (though probably not of the more recent commercial proposals) showed it can be very rich in terms of implications and references, and that it is characterised by an explicit awareness of its basic transformative and appropriative powers.

The second project concerned the opportunity to develop those forms of reception of the so called Fine Arts, which can be able to reinforce critical attitudes toward ethical and social conditions of existence – and in this sense Shusterman proposed a detailed analysis of Eliot’s Portrait of a Lady, which insisted on its basic ambiguities.

Finally, a pragmatist aesthetics should recover the continuity of aesthetic aspects with ordinary life and put in question the habitual absence of aesthetic meanings from work, politics or science. Richard Shusterman insisted particularly on the necessity to restore the centrality of the body: despite its often neglected role in feeling, it is recognized as capable of peculiar forms of awareness, deeply relevant in our lives.

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A current reader is also impressed by a basic pluralistic and anti-foundationalist attitude, we still need twenty years later. This kind of approach is proved in some pages problematizing the late romantic myth of artistic creation, and interpreting in a rather anti-dogmatic way the relations between common energies and ordinary materials, on the one hand, and individual instances, on the other one. This sincere non foundationalist attitude emerges also in the chapter devoted to interpretation, where Shusterman propose to think in circular terms the relations between more habitual and widely unreflective modes of understanding and more explicit and voluntary acts of interpretation, of critical stance – that is by denying the pervasiveness of interpretation when it is understood as the product of voluntary and primarily verbal acts.

It is this latter specific subject I propose to consider here, in order to confront its results with the recent philosophical debate. This is a topic that does not seem central among Richard Shusterman’s latest interests. I suspect that he considers it as a rearguard matter and there are no doubt he prefers to explore without a safety net the new territories of a somaesthetics under construction. However I think it is still necessary to discuss these concepts that perhaps deserve a more explicit ontological stance, as I shall argue later, with respect to a certain return to realism in philosophy.

Besides it could also contribute to a more pluralistic view of the relations between linguistic and bodily aspects of our world experience, after the various turns that have played the leading role in the philosophical scene one after the other.

1. Describing and interpreting

In his book two central chapters, “Pragmatism and Interpretation” and especially “Beneath Interpretation” – which do not appear in the Italian translation of Pragmatist Aesthetics – Shusterman advances the need to avoid monolithic solutions and to draw fine and elastic distinctions when speaking of interpretation. In general it emerges the thesis that supporting a strong form of contextualism about meanings, together with a resolutely anti-foundationalist and anti-representational approach in the epistemological field, does not imply falling into the simplistic formula according to which “there are no facts, only interpretations”, that is to a radical constructivist reading of Nietzsche’s expression, whose ontological consequences would be the lost of the ‘outside’ world in favour of a certain range of subjective productions of our reality.

Richard Shusterman’s greatest merit in this respect, as I mentioned before, is to dissolve the universal claims of interpretation in the interplay between forms of understanding and interpretive activities. Therefore I will consider here some significant steps of his reflections. The chapter titled “Pragmatism and Interpretation” is dedicated to the issue of interpretation in literature, but it is quite clear that a certain conception of interpretation in this area is not considered as an independent one, on the contrary having broader implications - and we can remember that the continuity of eminently artistic practices with our daily interactions with our environment is one of the thesis opening Dewey’s Art as Experience.

Is it possible to distinguish between description and interpretation when having to cope with a novel or a poem? Shusterman’s answer is at first open, pragmatically possibilist: it depends on how we understand description. There are no difficulties if we do not think of it as a kind of picture just recording existing data, but as a particular collection of ‘facts’ on which a certain readers community agree in fairly stable circumstances, that is as selection of the most relevant aspects for interpretation. Moreover, such a distinction can be sustained if we do not mean the relationship between this kind of description and interpretation
in foundational terms, because a new interpretation can react on the alleged initial data and revise them, correct them and eventually select other ones.

But Shusterman affirms that from a certain point of view just the removal of each descriptive layer in favour of a total interpreting, sustained by more radical deconstructionists, is connected to a reifying conception of meaning: if one assumes that there is something like an overt or a hidden meaning of the text, regardless of the readings that we can make of it, as Wolfgang Iser could say, interpretation becomes the only play in town, because in the absence of an already given meaning, we can attribute arbitrary meanings to the text. What you need doing is rather to stop thinking about meaning as a particular thing to decipher – the author’s intention, the spirit of the time, an ideological message, a removed truth – and to understand interpretation differently. Interpreting a text is a kind of practice, is making something, giving it a meaningful answer in the sense that under certain conditions of experience – my reading, ours or that of someone other – it makes sense, it produces a certain experience of the world.

Clearly this is a “general hermeneutics direction”, but it is not pervasive, because from the beginnings it is specified by two sets of considerations.

The first one concerns the fact that not all our answers to a text are guided by cognitive intents. For instance, we read for the pleasure we derive from a certain story, or because it is fertile for new imaginative possibilities. In other terms, the cognitive approach is not always the dominant one in reading: I do not read train timetables in order to know them, but to choose a train that takes me to my appointment at the appointed time. Furthermore, the response capable of making some literary work understandable is not necessarily a verbal one, but can be more direct and immediate. If the reading of the academic critic fits the idea of interpretation, our ordinarily reading can be adapted to the formula of “simply reading” or of understanding, while the idea that we are interpreting the text seems forced to us.

But while considering those aspects, Shusterman sketches a contextualist and anti-dogmatic background, where every single word has its own weight.

It is clear that the critique of description conceived as a mirror of real data, together with the refusal of a reifying conception of meaning, are related to the rejection of a correspondentist version of truth. However the correspondence of our statements or our thoughts with independent objects “in itself” or with alleged facts is unacceptable to the American pragmatist, not because the ones and the others are linguistically constructed, but because “independent objects … like facts, can not be isolated from our discoursive practices”. The linguistic mediation is inevitable and makes unfeasible a world description from God’s transcendental point of view, but that does not mean that it idealistically produces the world. In stark contrast with Rorty’s familiar thesis according to which the liberating outcome of the linguistic turn would be the loss of the world, Shusterman noted in a footnote that this does not imply to reduce the world and its experience to language. By making explicit an assumption not stated by the philosopher himself, I would simply say that in our experience we meet just the world and not our subjective projections, it is with our world that we are busy, not only thanks to a tangle of words, but also of habits, gestures, postures, feelings, practices, actions. It is this last point - that of non-interpretive and non-linguistic aspects of our experience – that takes

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Shusterman’s attention. I understand his being ontological cautious in the name of a healthy pragmatic pluralism, but sometimes we need to make our ontological assumptions explicit.

If we can maintain the hermeneutical, understanding and interpretative character of our experiences, as I will explain later, it is because we think we are talking about it from the inside, and most of all to practice it from the inside. Therefore our postures, our gestures and our movements – from concrete to abstract and virtual ones – allow us to access our environment selectively and always in pre-oriented ways, but in fact it deals with an access to our shared world and not to our subjective constructions. In other words, it is our inheritance to the world from its inside that produces the prospective character of our experience of things and ensures in the same time that it is our experience of things and not of mere mental projections.

2. Preserving immediate understanding

The heart of the matter for the American philosopher is to distinguish between understanding and interpretation in order to preserve the forms of immediate understanding. It seems to me that this is the underlying reason bringing him to criticize a pervasive notion of interpretation, while sharing an anti-foundationalist conception of human relationships with things – according to which our knowledge of what they are in themselves would ultimately be anchored in a perception of neutral data, that is of non-interpreted data, which would be given before additional meanings we could eventually attribute to them.

Shusterman begins his argument by claiming he shares the anti-foundationalist position supported by hermeneutic universalism, namely the rejection of the idea of a reality in itself, independently determined from the experience we have of it. Furthermore he explicitly recognizes that interpretation plays an important role in our experience of the world – indeed an irreplaceable one. However he says that “our intelligent and meaningful intercourse with the world includes non-interpretational experience, activity and understanding, so that we should not think that interpretation is the only game in town”\(^4\). Therefore it appears to be more fertile to draw a functional distinction between interpretation and understanding, rather then a strictly ontological one, that is between interpreting and equally selective forms of experience, which are context specific and perspective, but not explicit, thoughtful or deliberate.

If it is wrong to believe that interpreting consists in discovering hidden layers of meaning, recognizing the structural perspective, partial, pre-oriented character of our experiences in the world does not imply that any form of understanding is interpretative. In everyday situations, but when we read a novel too, we implicitly orient ourselves according to our interests, prejudices, impulses, needs and habits, which, far from hindering our encounter with the world, allow us to understand it, as acknowledged by both supporters of hermeneutics and pragmatists. But it should be noted, against the alleged pervasiveness of interpretation, that very often our focus is implicit, unreflective, immediate. At least it functions this way all the times things work for themselves, when there is no problem, when, in Dewey’s words, we are not faced with an indeterminate situation, where we do not know what to do, and we need to return analytically on various critical aspects to find a way-out, a solution. The role of interpretation is of this type. Clearly this is an absolutely central role in any critical situation, but not everywhere. Otherwise we would fall into the fallacy that all our intellectual selective behaviour should be guided by a clear thought and deliberate decisions. Instead, very often our behaviours are driven by habits, which are more or less intelligent

but not conscious, so we know immediately what to do, how we have to relate to that individual in that situation, or to that text.

Shusterman’s idea is therefore that interpretation is a behaviour, a type of reflective practice, knowingly and intentionally structured – a form of inquiry, to use Dewey’s term. On the contrary understanding concerns the soil of our immediate experience, which are nevertheless mediated by words, habits, feelings, or more. But they are immediate in the sense that they pose no difficulties: individual and social habits, motor and conceptual patterns, intellectual and emotional biases work and we need not to put them in question. The point is not to assimilate all forms of active and selective intelligence to intellectual reflections, to differentiating and interpreting analysis, in order to preserve immediately significant environmental experiences.

The hermeneutical circle should be understood as a hermeneutic circularity of understanding and interpretation, characterized by complex stratification and mutual relations. The distinction between understanding and interpretation proposed by Shusterman is not strictly ontological, but based on their function, which in turn is not definitive, but open and, in certain situations, interchangeable. Generally, understanding works in the background, as basis and guide of interpretation, which, in its turn, explores, modifies, articulates its meaning. While understanding is unconscious, silent, because, proceeding from itself, it does not need to be said, to be noticed, interpretation requires an explicit stance, a conscious reflection aimed at resolving a crisis. Moreover, while when I am interpreting, I am usually aware of a plurality of possible alternatives, when I simply understand something without posing problems to myself, while being prospectively oriented, I am often blind to other alternatives. Finally, while interpretation is above all linguistically drawn, understanding is often not verbal but rather gestural, affective, habitual. It is not certain ineffable in the alleged mystical sense of the term: quite simply it often does not need to be said, does not require a speech because it simply works, and indeed there is no need to talk about it. But here it is, according to Shusterman’s opinion, the critical point of hermeneutic universalism. It requires not only the thesis that all understanding is a form of interpretation but also the further one according to which every kind of understanding would be linguistic, since interpretation is eminently linguistic. If Gadamer argues that being that can be understood is language and, on the other side, Rorty and Derrida deny the existence of any “hors-texte”, Shusterman warns us that the need for linguistic mediation does not exclude experiences that are meaningful without being linguistic, because they concern “those unmanageably illiterate and darkly somatic neighborhoods of town that we philosophers and literary theorists are occupationally accostomed to avoid and ignore, but on which we rely for our non-professional sustenance and satisfactions”.

3. Something about language

It is a merit we can undoubtedly attribute to the American philosopher having recovered from pragmatist pluralism the need to recognize the richness of our experiences of the world, which are significant not only because of the language we speak, but also because of the way in which we move in it, of the orientation we assume, of the feelings we experience, of postural and behavioural habits we acquire, thoughts we largely implicitly adopt,
bodily techniques and, I would add, extracorporeal technologies we commonly use. We do not always need say things, and nonetheless they are already significant for us.

The hermeneutical strategy of expanding the meaning of language, since to include nonverbal forms of experience, communication or signification, has been much discussed and it remains indeed questionable. If it can bring out the already significant and almost interlocutory structure of perception, of bodily movements, and of the various human practices, from an other point of view it risks to transform verbal language in a sort of transcendental condition of all forms of experience. But let me propose two sets of considerations in the spirit that characterizes Shusterman’s frankly anti-dogmatic work.

The first one, whose the American philosopher is well conscious, but prefers leaving at the edge of his text, concerns the placement of language in the strict sense of the term with respect to the play between understanding and interpretation. It is clear that words constitute an outstanding way of analysis and reworking of the different elements of our experience and certainly more explicitly critical phases of our interactions with the world favour verbal language powerful determination and classificatory capacities. Therefore there is no doubt that interpretive practices do not require it as a tool simply intended as carrying out something already established by itself – of mental images or of state of things ‘out there’. It is rather a powerful mean to actively intervene in the new elaboration of existential materials.

Shusterman rightly criticizes Davidson’s thesis that all understanding of the interlocutor’s speech would require a radical interpretation, because when we are moving ourselves in our mother tongue, and especially when words work and do not pose difficulties, understanding is largely habitual, implicit, immediate.

However, in these chapters the qualitative and almost bodily dimension of language remains largely neglected. I refer to those aspects of language such as, while we are reading a verse or a novel page, meaning is not only or not eminently given in referential forms, but it is based also on the sensual and affective texture of words, producing not primarily intellectual responses in the reader: pleasure, enjoyment, repulsion, attraction or an ambiguous mixture of both in front of obscenity or violence, for example. But this aesthetic dimension of language also affects our daily conversations, the components of timbre, melodic interjections, exclamations, pauses, or all those aspects that contribute to structure our relationships with others.

A second set of considerations concerns a certain primacy that seems to be attributed to an already fully significant but not linguistic bodily dimension. Of course when I feel pain – because of a wound or of a death – that is not a primarily linguistic experience, although it can be said in words, it may need it or not. However I am not entirely convinced we would feel pain - not physical and psychological, but somatic pain, in the anti-dualistic sense Shusterman rightly promoted – just as we human feel it, if we were not already immersed in a language before actually becoming able to speak and even before acquiring referentially oriented passive language skills.

This is not to support a new primacy of language, but to sustain – perhaps trivially – that interrelationships between linguistic and bodily aspects of our experience are always already behind us. We could talk about a form of mutual conditioning or of circularity between mostly bodily aspects and eminently linguistic ones, by which in the same time we

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feel and mean the world. Relations with it are played from the inside: they are therefore se-
lective, prospective, already pre-oriented from our specific anchorage in it, but they are just
about the world we belong to. They are not relations between a supposed inert subject and
his private or shared hallucinations. On the other hand, if we want to talk about circularity,
this is not analogous to the circle between understanding and interpretation, because there
are no specific places or fixed means for the implicit, on the one hand, and for reflection, on
the other.

As Shusterman taught us, there are forms of bodily awareness which are very attentive,
and on the other side words may also have an immediate very strong emotional impact on
us. To learn how to swim I have to be able to coordinate inhalation with the exit of my head
from water and exhaling through the next dive, I have to pay attention to a breathing physi-
ological habit as old as me, in order to change it in special circumstances. But the cry of a
child who has finally learned to stay afloat, not to swallow water and then he does not even
know how he moves his arms, unless you ask him, is completely natural and spontaneous,
not mediated by reflection. On the other hand, to focus attention on the peculiar movement
of the arm in freestyle, rather than in the frog, I learn to isolate on a both motor and linguis-
tic level a certain analytic portion of an unitary practice. Then, when I learned well, I just
enjoy the energetic pleasure of swimming - and calling it ‘energetic’ in retrospect I under-
stand more clearly what I felt.
Richard Shusterman

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Reviewing Pragmatist Aesthetics: History, Critique, and Interpretation – After Twenty Years

Grateful to the European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy for organizing this symposium to mark the twentieth anniversary of Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), I should begin by explaining why the European context for discussing this book seems especially pertinent. Although known as an American philosopher, I was not academically trained in America; my philosophical education was more European in style – first at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and then at Oxford. Second, I wrote the final draft of Pragmatist Aesthetics while on a year’s study leave in Paris (supported by both American and French institutions). Third, the book was in fact published in Europe before it appeared in English. It was officially released in French as L’art à l’état vif: la pensée pragmatiste et l’esthétique populaire by the Parisian publisher Minuit the first week of January 1992 (after its printing and “depot legal” in December 1991). The original English version was not released by Blackwell until April (in Britain and elsewhere in Europe); and the American publication date was much later, since copies did not get there before June. By April, the French version was already blessed with wonderfully enthusiastic reviews in Le Monde, Libération, and Le Nouvelle Observateur; so in one sense Pragmatist Aesthetics was a European book before its American emergence. Furthermore, of the fourteen languages into which the book is now translated, eleven of them are European. Without these European translations, the cultural impact of the book would have been much diminished, and I gratefully acknowledge the work of my excellent translators, some of them excellent philosophers in their own right.

Finally, the book was blessed with two shrewd European editors whose suggestions greatly aided its reception. Blackwell’s Stephan Chambers insisted that my originally planned title “Living Beauty, Rethinking Art: A Pragmatist Aesthetic” was too vague, and that I should make the main title “Pragmatist Aesthetics” both to complement my earlier book Analytic Aesthetics (Blackwell, 1989) and to provide a generic, descriptive title that would work well for catalog sales. This proved a prescient stroke of genius when internet searches emerged several years later; for the book appeared at the top of the list in all searches with the paired hit words of “pragmatism and aesthetics” or “pragmatism and art.”

My editor at Minuit (the legendary Jérôme Lindon, who also owned that publishing house and was a close friend of Samuel Beckett) reshaped the book in even more significant ways. Insisting that the book’s chapters on interpretation and ontological issues were too demandingly academic for the general intellectual reader and that such readers were necessary to make the book economically viable in France (a country where college students are not obliged to buy books and where university libraries are small in numbers and budgets), Lindon required my removing those three chapters for the French edition. I overcame my initial reluctance and trusted his judgment, which proved marvelously astute. In its reduced form and with its own bold French title, L’art à l’état vif was not too scholarly for non-specialists to enjoy it, so the book’s audience extended far beyond philosophers and
other academics to artists, journalists, and cultural mediators, and even the rock and rap community. The book was widely reviewed in the general press and featured on the M6 TV show “Rapline,” on which I was interviewed. To my relief, as Lindon (and Pierre Bourdieu) had predicted, the media success did not spoil its academic reception. In fact, this success inspired another fine Paris publisher (L’éclat) to publish two of the missing chapters plus some other texts of mine in an independent book, *Sous l’interprétation* (1994), translated by the distinguished French pragmatist Jean-Pierre Cometti. The next European translation (published by the large German trade publisher Fischer) stripped off another of the book’s original chapters (the one comparing analytic and pragmatist aesthetics) so as to present the book’s main arguments in an inexpensive “pocket” edition entitled *Kunst Leben: Die Ästhetik des Pragmatismus* (1994). Widely distributed, even in train-station kiosks, it was also widely discussed. Here again, media attention opened a way to independently publish the most important of the omitted chapters in a German version of *Sous l’interprétation*, entitled *Vor der Interpretation* (Vienna: Passagen, 1996), the first publication in which my concept of somaesthetics appears (again before its first English mention).

I learned important lessons from these editorial reductions. It not only confirmed my Jamesian intuition that rigorous philosophical reasoning can be rendered enjoyably accessible to the general reader; it also taught me that philosophy needs to take account of the socioeconomic realities that shape its possible forms of expression, if it wants to be expressed and disseminated in the most effective way. No matter how utopian and idealist one’s pragmatist vision is, one must work with the material constraints of the institutions that enable it to be properly conveyed. I also learned that a book is essentially a tool for communicative learning rather than an object to be fetishized. If different contexts require different tools, then there was every reason to adjust the book to fit the new cultural contexts of translation. Thus in my future negotiations with editors and publishers about the book’s translation in other languages, I expressed my willingness to work with them on what would be the best version (and book title) for that linguistic and cultural field, even if this meant a reduced version (or variant title). I likewise offered to write a special preface for each translation to contextualize *Pragmatist Aesthetics* in that country’s aesthetic field so as to aid the book’s reception. Whether or not this preface-strategy was a key to the book’s translation success, it certainly gave me an international cultural education.

Different publishers reduced the book in different ways (depending on their budget and their judgment of what would be best for their cultural field), while some translated the entire book, even when it came to the ten chapters of its second English edition. Even scholars love the comfort of their native language, so my commentators sometimes refer to the book’s version in their own language, mentioning chapter numbers that don’t correspond to the English original (or other translations). If pragmatism affirms the virtues of pluralism and flexible functionality while highlighting contextuality and enjoyable user experience, then the publication history of *Pragmatist Aesthetics* certainly manifests this orientation. As this symposium aims to document the diverse impact of the book, I provide an Appendix of its variant editions in different translations so that readers can decode the symposiasts’ chapter references and trace the book’s different forms, but also to acknowledge my debt to the book’s translators.

I am grateful to this symposium’s four commentaries for helping me to clarify the book’s origins and aims and to explain its role in my overall project and situate my position in the philosophical field; they also spur me to make some of my commitments more ex-

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1 Bourdieu was the person who brought the manuscript to Lindon’s attention, and the book was eventually published in the Minuit series Bourdieu directed.
plicit and consider some new ideas. The principal points of these commentaries relate to the following general themes: the genealogy of Pragmatist Aesthetics and its relationship to other philosophical traditions or movements; the topics of aesthetic experience and popular art; and the more strictly philosophical questions of experience, interpretation, ontology and the role and limits of language.

**Genealogy and Position in the Philosophical Field**

Pragmatist Aesthetics is my third authored book, but the first in which I explicitly identified my philosophical position as something other than firmly analytic. Despite the great virtues of analytic aesthetics, I saw there were important issues that were treated with greater richness in continental traditions (e.g., hermeneutics, critical theory, poststructuralism, and neo-Marxism). Paolo D’Angelo has written an excellent paper showing how Pragmatist Aesthetics serves as a bridge between analytic and continental philosophy, but I should correct his suggestion that I was an effective as a bridge because I “belonged to neither school of thought,” enjoying “this double extraneousness.” In fact, I was very much in the mainstream of analytic aesthetics until my gradual turn to pragmatism in the late 1980s. This mainstream status explains why I was asked by The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism –then (as now) a bastion of analytic aesthetics– to guest-edit a special issue on this topic, which was then published by Blackwell, then famous for cutting-edge anthologies in this field. My reputation as an analytic philosopher also, I think, helps explain some of the book’s success. As Krystyna Wilkoszewska notes, “The work’s status was strengthened by the fact that until that time its author had been associated with an analytic orientation in aesthetics.” This strengthening, I hope, is not only because being an established analytic philosopher allowed me to wield the symbolic power of that authoritative tradition, but also because my style of argumentation in Pragmatism Aesthetics remained largely analytic even though I contested some of the reigning dogmas and preoccupations of analytic aesthetics. The book therefore could appeal to a broad range of readers (particularly younger academics) who were trained in the analytic tradition in aesthetics and appreciated its merits but were also sensitive, as I was, to its serious limitations. They wanted a pragmatism that could engage with the dominant theories and thinkers in the analytic philosophical field and that could formulate Dewey’s key insights in a rhetoric that respected the analytic virtues of clarity, concision, and linear argument more than Dewey’s great Art of Experience was perceived to do. (The philosophical-rhetorical style of Dewey’s book, I confess, had earlier blinded me to its wonderful insights; and much later, in the early 1990s, when I tried to interest French theorists in translating it, they almost always replied that his style was too prolix and unattractive. That was what convinced me to publish my own book Pragmatist Aesthetics in an attractively streamlined French version.)

Like Wilkoszewska, I deeply respect the fine pragmatist scholarship of John McDermott and other members of the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy, but it had no real impact on the field of American aesthetics and (to the extent that it was noticed in this field) was perceived as essentially historical commentary or belle-lettrist essays without the rigor of systematic philosophical exploratory analysis. In contrast, Richard Rorty, Nelson Goodman, Joseph Margolis, and Stanley Fish strongly influenced the Anglo-American field of aesthetics; Rorty and Fish being especially influential in literary studies as well. These thinkers along with Arthur Danto and Pierre Bourdieu (himself an admirer of Wittensteinian and Austinian analytic philosophy) significantly shaped my thinking and helped
make Pragmatist Aesthetics a book whose pragmatism is less pure in its sources but which I hope for that reason is more pragmatically pluralist and successful by being less parochial.”

For better or for worse, I belong to the tradition of post-analytic pragmatists; and I understand the “post” as not a simple rejection of analytic questions, methods, terms, and values but rather as going beyond their limitations. If I differ sharply from most post-analytic pragmatists (particularly Rorty, Goodman, Brandom, and Margolis) in insisting on the continuing philosophical value of experience – including non-linguistic, non-interpretive experience, this does not mean devaluing interpretation (or language) as crucial issues for aesthetics and philosophy. But it does mean that I also take somatic experience and disciplines of somatic practice quite seriously. I revisit the topic of interpretation later in my remarks, since both Wilkoszewska and Roberta Dreon discuss it at length. But for now, in this genealogical section, I should at least correct Wilkoszewska’s narrative by insisting that interpretation was a key topic of my research long before I came to Temple University in the mid-1980s. Indeed it formed one of the major chapters of my Oxford doctoral dissertation, and I published an earlier version of that chapter (while still a graduate student) in the important analytic journal, Philosophical Quarterly.

I came to pragmatism in mid-career and first entered it through the portal of Dewey’s aesthetics, since philosophy of art was my chief focus at the time. When I first wrote Pragmatist Aesthetics my knowledge of the earlier classical pragmatists was still very limited, and so (as Wilkoszewska notes) I initially saw Dewey’s aesthetics as the clear and absolute origin of pragmatist aesthetics, though I always contested the view she here expresses that Dewey’s aesthetics “remained unnoticed during his time.” In fact, as I argue in the first chapter of Pragmatist Aesthetics and elsewhere, Dewey’s Art as Experience stimulated considerable interest both among artists and theorists, and even among some famous aestheticians like the great Italian thinker Benedetto Croce. Dewey’s decline in aesthetic reputation and influence came after his death. As I became more deeply immersed in the pragmatist tradition, I began to see that many of Dewey’s key ideas were anticipated by Emerson, Alain Locke, and William James. As Emerson and Locke highlight many of the social, democratic, and pragmatic themes of Dewey’s Art as Experience, so James strikingly prefigures the philosophy of mind that shapes Dewey’s key notion of aesthetic experience, which clearly echoes James’s account of the unity of consciousness in The Principles of Psychology. Dewey hailed that masterpiece as the book that most influenced his thought; and it repeatedly insists on the continuity of practical, aesthetic, and cognitive interests – themes central to the pragmatist aesthetics that Dewey later developed in Art as Experience (which he initially wrote for delivery as the first William James Lectures at Harvard). Having elsewhere presented a detailed case for pragmatist aesthetics’ Jamesian roots, I should not rehearse it here.

That Dewey’s aesthetics drew on earlier thinkers linked to pragmatism does not diminish his impressive achievement. I still regard Art as Experience as providing the first systematic account of pragmatist aesthetics, though I should remind readers that Dewey never identified his aesthetic theory as pragmatist, and in fact the terms “pragmatism” or “pragmatist” do not even appear in the book. Dewey had good tactical reasons at that time to...

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2 I should note that Bourdieu first took an interest in me because of my analytic writings, especially my work on Wittgenstein, which he cites in his book Les Règles de l’art (Paris: Seuil, 1992).

3 The thesis was titled “The Object of Literary Criticism” submitted and defended in 1979 and later published in (Rodopi, 1984); the article was “The Logic of Interpretation,” Philosophical Quarterly 28 (1978): 310-324.

avoid identifying his aesthetic theory as distinctively pragmatist, and some distinguished Dewey scholars today still reject using this term to describe his aesthetic theory. Is pragmatist aesthetics then a neo-pragmatist notion read back into Dewey’s aesthetics? In any case, Dewey remains (in my eyes) the most influential, systematic source of pragmatist aesthetics, and I’m sure he would have encouraged its development beyond his own particular theories in order to advance continued, progressive cultural flourishing.

**Aesthetic Experience and Popular Art**

Paolo D’Angelo rightly identifies aesthetic experience as a key theme through which *Pragmatist Aesthetics* seeks to displace the analytic preoccupation with formal definitions of art while at the same time mediating between analytic and continental philosophy through their affirmations and criticisms of the concept of aesthetic experience. He shrewdly notes how this theme of aesthetic experience productively connects with the book’s defense of popular art, where pragmatist meliorism is presented as a middle road between global celebrations and condemnations of popular culture. Recognizing how the book’s account of popular art (which closely examines its socio-political and aesthetic features and cultural import) differs sharply both from the typical analytic focus on formal or ontological issues of mass-media art and from the typical continental denunciation of the mass culture industry, D’Angelo also appreciates how my discussion goes beyond Dewey’s vague (and at times somewhat condescending) theoretical gesturing toward popular art. He sympathetically sees how my defence of the popular “...is moved by an authentic interest... and direct knowledge” and goes beyond “the level of theoretic analysis” in order to illustrate the rich meanings of popular art through interpretive analysis. Conversely, it is perhaps Wilkoszewksa’s loyalty to the more limited scope of Dewey’s aesthetic interests that makes her uncomfortable with the attention I give to popular art. I remain convinced that such attention was indeed essential for advocating a pragmatist aesthetics relevant to the lifeworld of the 1990s and remains necessary today if we want to pursue the pragmatist meliorist project of improving aesthetic expression and experience while maintaining the essentially democratic orientation that inspires the classical pragmatist tradition from its prehistory in Emerson through James and Dewey.

Aesthetic experience is the focus of Heidi Salaverria’s paper, which ambitiously seeks to develop my treatment of this concept in three interrelated ways: first, to show how my theory of aesthetic experience displays important and fruitful convergences with Kant’s aesthetics, although Kant is typically painted as a villain in *Pragmatist Aesthetics*; second, to argue that the distinctive pleasure of aesthetic experience (implicit in Kantian and pragmatist aesthetics) is essentially transformatory; third, that this distinctive transformatory pleasure is a pleasure of doubt. Let me begin by repeating my earlier confession (cited by Salaverria from my paper on James’s pragmatism aesthetics) of having been too harsh in my criticism of Kant’s aesthetics and failing to highlight that “my own pragmatist aesthetics shares with him (much more than with Hegel) an emphasis on pleasure, perception, and

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the experiential particularity of aesthetic reactions that cannot be reduced to the conceptual.” Because Kant’s signature aesthetic themes of disinterestedness, purposelessness, and intellectualist formalism still divide us, I uncritically followed my admired forerunners in pragmatist aesthetics – James, Dewey, and Rorty – in their acute antipathy toward Kant’s aesthetics. Dewey, of course, had a soft spot for Hegelian holism; and Rorty’s textualism, holism, and advocacy of philosophy as edifying narrative also bespeak a conceptualism that favors Hegelian Begrifflichkeit and ideas over perceptual pleasure; James and I seem closer to Kant in highlighting the sensory pleasures of aesthetic perception and judgment that depend on the particular subject’s lived experience and that cannot be reduced to conceptual rules, descriptive formulae, or verbal generalizations (though Dewey, of course, also insisted that aesthetics could not be reduced to the conceptual or to generalizations). The paradigm of aesthetic experience or judgment is thus a particular experience or a singular judgment: not an experience of, say, sculpture or poetry in general, but rather of this or that particular sculpture or poem.

This is what I meant in saying that I shared Kant’s view of “the experiential particularity of aesthetic reactions that cannot be reduced to the conceptual.” I did not mean to suggest that there was one particular kind of reaction that defines all aesthetic experience or even all good aesthetic experience. But I worry that Salaverria is interpreting (or extending) my views in this essentialist way; so let me here reaffirm my pluralism with respect to aesthetic experience and its pleasures. There are many different kinds of aesthetic experience, especially if we take into account the complex and contested character of that concept and do not try to legislate that only one usage of the term is appropriate. Not all of the experiences or reactions that we call aesthetic are experiences of pleasure; not only are there bad aesthetic experiences that provide no pleasure (except by the relief of their ending), but there are also valuable aesthetic experiences that cannot be described as pleasurable. Some works of contemporary art are valuable in creating intensities of perception, feeling, or intellectual insight that are not really pleasurable (and could even be somewhat painful or unpleasant) but such experiences can nevertheless be aesthetically powerful and rewarding. Moreover, even if we confine ourselves to pleasurable aesthetic experiences, we need to recognize a variety of pleasures. This plurality of aesthetic pleasures goes beyond the traditional Burkean distinction between the pleasure of beauty and the delight of the sublime: there is pleasantness, amusement, merriment, elation, bliss, rapture, exultation, exhilaration, enjoyment, diversion, entertainment, titillation, fun, gratification, satisfaction, contentment – and so on. I share Kant’s affirmation of the centrality of pleasure for aesthetics, but my palate of the aesthetic seems wider: I would not exclude experiences or judgments in which sensual delight or “charm and emotion have a share” (Critique of Judgement, I.i § 14). Though admiring Kant’s amazing analytic skill in trying to define the pure aesthetic judgment or experience, I do not share this quest for purity in aesthetics any more than I endorse the Cartesian quest for apodictic certainty. Perfect purity in aesthetics is an overrated ideal, if not also a chimera. Pragmatist Aesthetic appreciates the aesthetic richness of mixing, which is why its rap chapter is important and emblematic.

Salaverria rightly insists that aesthetic pleasures can be transformatory and be especially powerful and valuable for that reason, but we should not let this obscure the existence and value of aesthetic pleasures that are not transformatory. In other words, aesthetic experience and its pleasures can serve other worthy ends besides transformation. Compensatory pleasures have their place too; entertainment is not a dirty word, and even pragmatists like myself who appreciate the Jamesian ideal of “the strenuous life” can recognize that we need moments of relaxing as well as effortful engagement and that some of our aesthetic enjoy-
ment can be more soothingly gratifying than demandingly stressful. Aesthetic experience (including the aesthetic experience of popular art) should not be identified narrowly with passive, escapist pleasures; but nor should it be confined to ascetic experiences of the “the new,” the difficult or “problematic.” The latter exclusive position is not the pluralist pragmatism I favor but instead a one-sided, restrictive modernism, exemplified by Shklovsky’s formalist demand for defamiliarization or “making strange.” Moreover, I would not want to limit “the transformatory element in aesthetic pleasure [to] doubt.” An aesthetic experience can transform someone by being so overwhelming in its compelling, pleasurable power that it leaves no room for the lingering experience of doubt. One is simply transformed or converted. (I therefore resist the idea that all aesthetic pleasures require a lengthy lingering, though certainly the hermeneutic pleasures of art often demand it). Aesthetic experience can also transform by reinforcing previous, implicit convictions so powerfully that the person is transformed to see those convictions more clearly so that she not only explicitly entertains or in terms of a willingness to entertain alternatives to our entrenched beliefs a will suspends disbelief. It cannot be Peirce’s unpleasant notion of doubt; Salaverría indeed cites Peirce but rather than referring to his view of doubt, she invokes his notion of “aesthetic contemplation” (among other topics) and which he describes in very pleasant terms of play, musing, and free speculation (CP 6.458) that are liberated from the rigors of strict inquiry and the disturbing irritation of real doubt. Perhaps Salaverría’s theory would be more convincing if it were reformulated in terms of Peircian musement or in terms of a willingness to entertain alternatives to our entrenched beliefs and values. Such bracketing of our beliefs in order to engage in imaginative consideration of alternative views is not real doubt but rather what might be called a willing suspension of belief so as to contemplate other possibilities in aesthetic experience; a useful counterpart of the “willing suspension of disbelief” that Coleridge urged as necessary for us to enjoy fiction.


7 I also cannot understand the point of Salaverría’s apparent critique of an aesthetic/functional opposition in my work between asserting that heightened somaesthetic consciousness of the body’s essential connection with its environment might provide “the richest and deepest palate of experiential fulfillments because it can draw on the profusion of cosmic resources, including an uplifting sense of cosmic unity” and asserting that “that [somatic] habit its must engage and assimilate the environments in which they function, particularly those environmental elements that support or enable their functioning.” It is precisely because of the soma’s necessary engagement and communication with the surrounding environment that the environing cosmic resources are available to appreciate through greater somaesthetic consciousness. It would, moreover, be against my pragmatist view to suppose there is an essential conflict between aesthetic experience and functionality or between aesthetic appreciation of cosmic unity and scientific understanding. The presumed opposition between the functional, the aesthetic, and the scientific seem to be a Kantian specter that haunts Salaverría’s analysis.
Interpretation, Language, and the World

Professor Wilkoszewska instructive paper raises some useful issues about interpretation’s central role in the original English version of Pragmatist Aesthetics. She notes how one of the two interpretation chapters was dropped in the Polish edition and wonders whether this is also true of other translations and whether this indicates that I realized that “the problem of interpretation is not an integral part [of] pragmatist aesthetics.” Convinced that it isn’t, she claims that I originally dealt with interpretation because it was fashionable in analytic aesthetics and deconstruction, and she argues that the book might have been better and more pragmatist if I had not treated this topic but confined myself to Dewey’s key concepts of “experience” and “interaction.” Before considering her claims, let me first set the bibliographical record straight. I omitted both chapters on interpretation along with a chapter on (the aesthetics, logic, and ontology of) organic unity in seven of the book’s fourteen translations, including the French translation preceding the English original. The reason was always a question of economy because these chapters were more technically philosophical and less accessible to non-specialists: the principal economical question was financial because adding the three chapters would make the book both bigger and costlier while also reducing its appeal for the general reader who would have more trouble than interest in reading the technical chapters. But this points also to economical questions of time and effort – both for the reader and for the translators. The Polish translation (generously undertaken initially by two fine philosophers with no financial incentive) was taking a very long time to be completed, even as new members were added to the translation team; so I thought that sacrificing the most specialist chapter on interpretation would help bring the book more quickly to completion and be less costly to a Polish university Press that was rightly worried about costs. Professor Wilkoszewska who superbly coordinated the Polish translation and publication of my later books Practicing Philosophy and Body Consciousness can, I hope, appreciate these economic considerations, just as I admire how she was able to avoid sacrificing any of the chapters in the books of mine that she published with such masterful quality and efficiency.

An aesthetic theory today cannot, I think, be complete without a serious treatment of interpretation – not merely because it is a topic central to most contemporary philosophical traditions – analytic philosophy and deconstruction, hermeneutics, poststructuralism, critical theory, phenomenology, and indeed also pragmatism (just think of Peirce and neopragmatists such as Rorty, Margolis, Davidson, and Fish) – but primarily because interpretation is a crucial function in the practical criticism of the arts, perhaps the most common critical activity not only of academic critics but of journalist reviewers, students of literature, and ordinary readers who elaborate and share their interpretations of books, movies, music, theatre, dance, and visual artworks with their friends. Yet despite the enormous consensus on its practical importance the logic and methods and limits of interpretation are much contested. As a philosophy that takes practice seriously, pragmatism cannot afford to abandon this issue whose practical impact is immense. I cannot agree with Wilkoszewska’s implied argument that if Dewey does not really discuss the concept of interpretation in his aesthetic theory, then it is not important to pragmatist aesthetics. I draw a different conclusion: that pragmatist aesthetics needs more than what Dewey provides. By the same mistaken logic, one could argue that since Dewey does not deploy the term “pragmatism” in his aesthetics, then pragmatism should not be integral to pragmatist aesthetics.

I am sure Wilkoszewska knows that my respect for interpretation does not imply a disrespect for experience; not only for interpretive experience but for uninterpreted experience. Pragmatist Aesthetics and my subsequent writings show a continuing advocacy of the
value of experience as a philosophical concept, against continued attacks on it from powerful philosophical currents (including the neopragmatism of Rorty and Brandom). To ensure a secure place for experience we need to show the limits of interpretation, but to do that we need to treat interpretation seriously. That is the logic that structures my arguments in “Below Interpretation.” We need both experience and interpretation as central concepts in pragmatist aesthetics; they should be complementary (since each concept alone has its limits) rather than be erected as one more dichotomy which requires choosing one against the other instead of using one together with the other. Experience and interpretation should work together, and T.S. Eliot (in “Little Gidding”) poetically expresses one of their collaborative connections:

We had the experience but missed the meaning  
And approach to the meaning restores the experience  
In a different form, beyond any meaning  
We can assign to happiness. I have said before  
That the past experience revived in the meaning  
Is not the experience of one life only  
But of many generations – not forgetting  
Something that is probably quite ineffable.

These lines further evoke my theory of interpretation as an interactive process of making sense in which the interpreter’s understanding and interpretation are shaped not only by her own personal experiences, interests, knowledge, methods, and habits but even more largely by the traditional understandings, interests, meanings, and values that she has inherited from her cultural and social traditions and that are embodied significantly in the object she interprets.

Roberta Dreon’s perceptive contribution helpfully underlines the importance of interpretation for pragmatist aesthetics, while also articulating “the pluralistic and anti-foundationalist attitude” that structures my account of interpretation and experience, of language and the non-linguistic, of somatic spontaneity and reflection. Rather than one-sidedly choosing or privileging one over the other, my pragmatist strategy is to recognize how these contrasted factors intertwine and to explore how they can both be used to complement each other so as to improve our understanding and our lives. Dreon also recognizes my ontological commitment to a real, “shared world” beyond linguistic representations. But commitment to that world and to understandings beneath interpretation does not entail that such understandings are “neutral” in the sense of grasping “neutral data” unshaped by our interests, desires, needs, and entrenched categories and habits of thought. Our basic understandings are always partial both in the sense of being incomplete and in the sense of being biased or shaped by our interests. My interpretation of the preceding symposiasts’ contributions is similarly partial, though I hope it is adequate in engaging their views and in expressing my sincere appreciation for their enlightening efforts.

Appendix

As this special symposium on Pragmatist Aesthetics is concerned with its impact in diverse cultures, and since some of the symposiasts refer to different editions and translations of the book that contain different chapters, it seems useful to provide this appendix of bibliographical details regarding the book’s different versions and the particular chapters of each version.


Translations (For each translation I provided an additional preface to situate the book in its cultural field).

Essays
Maria Luisi*

Pragmatism, Ethics and Democracy. YEP SEMINAR, May 4th 2011, Rome

Abstract. The first international conference of “Associazione Pragma”, that took place in Rome on May 3 and 4 2011, welcomed in its last session the first meeting of YEP (Young European Pragmatists): a group of Pragmatism and American philosophy’s young scholars, born in 2011 in cooperation with “Pragma” and the “European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy”. The aim of the group is to encourage the cooperation among young European students whose research focuses on pragmatism of whatever stripe, and to promote meetings, seminars and publications about pragmatism and its application to contemporary theoretical and practical issues. The group is now well organized in Italy, but we would like to extend our network in Europe, so we invite whoever is interested in the project to contact us, writing to our email address (youveuneuropeanpragmatists@gmail.com; luisi.mary@gmail.com) or visiting us on facebook (http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=49334734565&ref=ts).

In occasion of this first meeting, YEP invited David Hildebrand and Gregory Pappas to have a seminar on “Pragmatism, Ethics and Democracy”. The two professors suggested some texts they wrote as a starting point for the discussion¹. In this paper we’ll first introduce the main topics presented in their texts and then we’ll briefly report the questions we made and Pappas’ and Hildebrand’s answers.

The notion of democracy cannot be reduced to some political mechanisms, but must constantly be reinvented and justified. As Dewey clearly explained, democracy is a “way of life”, a “mode of associated living, of conjoint of communicated experience”². Democracy, as a way of life, expresses itself in a community of individuals; when a conflict arises, in fact, we often appeal to objective function of a democratic government to regain the balance between the community’s members. Hence the notion of objectivity turns out to be very important and deeply connected with that of democracy.

Objectivity is often thought as a proposition’s reference to a “pure truth”, regarding the latter to be absolute and independent of any particular interest. Such a conception is very ambiguous, insofar as it supposes a person or a government to operate from an abstractly neutral basis, detached from all of his/her feelings and believes. Since it is impossible to reach such an attitude, this interpretation frequently leads to a dogmatic and violent conception of objectivity.

On the other side we could endorse a relativistic interpretation of objectivity, thus conceiving the truth as an illusion that should be replaced with the practical need of discussion and conversation. As Richard Rorty writes: “The desire for objectivity – the desire to be in touch with a reality which is more than some community with which we identify ourselves”, should be replaced “with the desire for solidarity with that community”³. But, even

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if the notion of objectivity is a masquerade, why is it so important? Why do we appeal to it so frequently?

Is it possible to define objectivity in a new way, independent of any metaphysical commitment? Overcoming the opposition between dogmatism and relativism, Dewey’s conception of objectivity represents a middle way, called “pragmatic objectivity”. From this standpoint objectivity is not an end-state of inquiry, rather it is a *virtue* of practice, a *regulative ideal* for inquiry. Neutrality is a utopia, since we cannot completely free ourselves from our prejudices and we always look at problems from a particular point of view; still, there are points of view which are better than others: “A standpoint which is nowhere in particular is an absurdity. But one may have an affection for a standpoint which gives a rich and ordered landscape rather than for one from which things are seen confusedly and meagerly”.

In order for us to gain a better standpoint we need some form of *detachment* from our position; not the kind of self-abnegation that Descartes suggests, but the “ability to achieve some distance from one’s own spontaneous perceptions and convictions”. We cannot and do not want to reach neutrality, but it is possible to attain that “vital minimum of ascetic self discipline that enables a person to do such things as abandon wishful thinking, assimilate bad news, and discard pleasing interpretations that cannot pass elementary tests of evidence and logic”. Detachment is not an end in itself, but a way of constructing the most powerful arguments, which raise, rather than defeat, the *best versions* of opponent’s arguments.

**Question:** The conception of pragmatic objectivity claims to be free from any metaphysical commitment and from relativism as well. At the same time, however, this very conception is described by expressions like “to achieve a rich and ordered standpoint”, “to discard interpretations that cannot pass tests of evidence” or “to raise the best versions of opponent’s arguments”. If we cannot refer to an absolute truth, which are the criteria or rules enabling us to determine what is evident, which is the most rich and ordered standpoint or which are the best versions of opponent’s standpoint?

Pappas: This is a typical objection to Dewey, which can be properly labeled “contextualism”. Contextualism asserts that it is not possible to set up criteria or rules in advance to determine good judgments about a situation. What is useful and good in a particular context may be dangerous in a different one. Some critics may object: “it is not enough to say that good is “what works”, because “what works” is always relative to some ends that people may disagree on”. This objector is asking for an ultimate standard of evaluation, which is precisely what cannot be provided, according to Dewey. For Dewey “what works” is not what meets a standard but “what fits or resolves this present problematic situation”. The concept of “evidence” depends on context as well. You may think Dewey’s approach is relativistic, but it is so only in the sense that every judgment refers to a particular situation. Some contextualists regard the language or a conceptual scheme to be the ultimate context, but they do not consider that, even if we have different conceptual schemes, we are always sharing some part of our experiences. For instance, we are sitting on the opposite sides of a

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5 Hildebrand refers here to the work of Thomas Haskell; the quotation is from T. Haskell, (1997), *Objectivity Is Not Neutrality: Explanatory Schemes in History*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University press.
table and we have opposite perspectives on the table, but we don’t doubt we are in the same room.

In Dewey you can find a normative prescription about knowledge, but such a prescription is not about a rule or a criterion, it is about how you approach the problem. I cannot give you an absolute rule, I do not know in advance which is the solution of the problem, but I can suggest you the best approach to the problem itself. For example, I know that to be open-minded is really helpful, but this is not a definitive and dogmatic rule for reasoning.

Hildebrand: You can always doubt you are sharing the same problem with the person you are talking to; that is why detachment is so important. You need to take a distance from your position and to consider other reasons. It’s also important to consider the problem in a living context; if you want to share a problem with someone, it can be helpful to have a meal or take a beer with him, because in an abstract discussion it’s harder to admit different problems from the ones you are focused on.

Question: For Dewey the ground of pragmatic objectivity is primary experience, namely, the pre-reflective and pre-intellectual basis of our life. “We must, as philosophers, go back to the primitive situations of life that anteced and generate these reflective interpretations”. In Dewey’s interpretation experience is constituted by uniqueness and novelty; as such, it is ineffable and deeply connected with feelings. This description of experience refers to the internal life of each person, but there is also a second aspect of the problem, the one described by Peirce through the connection between experience and Secondness. In Peirce’s view experience is the “element of brute compulsion in fact”, the reaction against something we could never have imagined. For Peirce experience is pre-reflective as well, but involves something external and independent of the mind. Do you think this conception can be a good basis for pragmatic objectivity?

Pappas: I agree with Peirce: there is a component of Secondness in experience. One difference between Rorty’s neo-pragmatism and classical pragmatism is that, according to the latter, there is more in experience than conversation or relation between people. The communal aspect is important, but things have a grain: reality does not allow me to do whatever I want. For Rorty this is not so important, as he asserts we are in conversation also with things. But I think we really react against things and this is Secondness.

Furthermore, besides Secondness, in experience there is also Firstness: things have a Quality. Dewey defines inquiry as the transformation of an indeterminate situation into a determinate one, which amounts to the description of a quality. If we consider democracy, we will find that it requires certain qualities to be realized. Empathy, for instance, is essential for democracy. Dewey writes: “a person entirely lacking in sympathetic responses might have a keen calculating intellect, but he would have no spontaneous sense of the claims of others”. Without feeling the problems of others as equal to our problems there can be neither justice nor democracy, even if we are able to perform a perfect reasoning.


\[9\] MS 337s: 5, 6, 1904.

The condition for democratic and moral life is not so much to reach impartiality or get free from any personal feeling, but to have the “best” feelings, namely, to gain those standpoints that provide the agent a rich and broad landscape, upon which to deliberate and to act.

Hildebrand: When we ask if experience can represent a good ground for objectivity, we have to keep in mind that, according to both Dewey and Peirce, experience is not a dimension that belongs to an atomic subject, isolated from the world. We all have a shared self; of course we also have a private dimension, but most of our experience is shared. There is no private language: if you want to discuss about this room or about what happened today you have to use a public language; you’ll use definitions and different arguments that other people will share and understand, that’s why language represents a very important and basic form of connection.

Question: do you think there is any connection between pragmatic objectivity and Dewey’s conception of nature? As you have rightly pointed out, Dewey explicitly defends a “particularist” view of thinking. But he also endorses a naturalistic conception of thought, and he seems to believe that thought – as any other human activity – is conditioned by what kind of living beings we are. If this is true, it should be possible to single out at least some minimal criteria of objectivity from the notion of human nature. Therefore, don’t you think that the idea of human flourishing, which is nothing but the interpretation in moral terms of the idea of evolution, could provide a reliable ground of objectivity?

Pappas: Dewey’s notion of growth is strange. We could think there is an ultimate standard to human nature and that every man should reach it to complete himself; but a standard like this does not exist. While in his first writings Dewey pays more attention to the self, in the late ones he considers the situation: when you wake up in the morning you do not ask yourself: “How do I grow today?”. Rather, you are interested in the particular situation you are living. If we consider the human growing as a process of moralization of human nature, this is a too narrow conception. It is true, Dewey does talk about growing in connection with the problem of education, but education is always connected to particular situations and contexts: he is not referring to an abstract standard for humanity.

Hildebrand: as Dewey observes, there are certain experiences of self-completeness. In a particular situation we can have a more complete feeling of our self, but this does not mean that there is an ideal self to be reached. We also have to remind that flourishing is not only about a single human being, but regards humanity in a wider sense. For instance, in the past centuries we improved our culture, we learned to respect other people and animals, and so on.

Question: may you clarify Dewey’s notion of inquiry? Sometimes inquiry is described as a process which tends toward a final result in such a way that it looks like a myth. Is it correct to stress the importance of the process itself in Dewey’s conception? Maybe there is an agreement on this point with Hegel’s emphasis on the centrality of the process. Which is the role of rules and principles in inquiry?

Pappas: I think Dewey’s emphasis on the process can be considered Hegelian. According to Dewey we are always interacting with the situation, and there is no fixed element that
should not change. This is true also for rules and principles. For instance, we can find that
to be open-minded is in general a better position, but also this conclusion is hypothetical
and can be revised. Every experience admits of more stable elements and changing ele-
ments. If we are sitting at the table, the floor is the most stable element. But if suddenly
there is an earthquake, then the floor becomes precarious and I should look for a different
support. A principle in general is the most stable thing we have, but it can change in any
moment.

Hildebrand: A principle is something that directs your future activity, like a law in phys-
ics (gravitation, for instance). Being fallible, its nature is hypothetical and, as such, it can
always be revised. This is true also for rules in ethics; you cannot construct an ethics from
an absolute point of view, but only from a concrete situation.

Question: would you clarify the notion of feeling? Do you regard feeling to be immedi-
ate? Maybe there are feelings that seem to be immediate while they are the outcome of an
unconscious habit. For instance, some people suffer of a phobia and have a persistent fear
of dogs. If a person with such a phobia is talking to someone and suddenly a dog appears,
the situation will change and the person will have a feeling of fear. He will think his fear is
an immediate feeling, but actually it is a complex and mediated habit.

Hildebrand: We can make a distinction between an experience we had and an experi-
ence we know. Imagine you are in your room and unexpectedly there is a tapping at your
window. You do not know what it is but then you see a little bird making the noise. In this
second moment you still have the same experience, but it becomes mediated because you
made an inquiry and you recognized the source of the noise.

Pappas: According to Dewey immediate experiences are really important, but he does
not deny they can be conditioned by previous experiences. Just because there are always
conditions for an experience we cannot reduce the experience itself to its conditions. For
example, every experience is in language, but we cannot reduce the former to the latter.

Question: the ground of pragmatic objectivity is experience and the method that leads
to experience is called “denotative method”. “The experiential or denotative method tells
us that we must go behind the refinements and elaborations of reflective experience to the
gross and compulsory things of our doings, enjoyments and sufferings – to the things that
force us to labor, that satisfy needs, that surprise us with beauty, that compel obedience
under penalty.” 11 Would you clarify the nature and function of the denotative method? It
seems to me that in order to communicate we always need to share a common ground and
to believe we will eventually reach a comprehensive view of the problem we want to solve.
We would never start to inquire if we would not believe in the possibility to reach a com-
mon agreement in the future. It seems to me that the very possibility to reach a final com-
prehensive view is a condition of possibility for communication.

Hildebrand: Pragmatic objectivity is made of habits and virtues. As such, it is a tool for
conduct to be used in inquiry. If I suggest a particular conduct to solve a problem, it is be-
cause it has a “cash value”. If you ask me: “Why?”. I’ll answer you: “Try it!”. We can de-

11 LW 1: 375-376.
scribe the experience that springs by that conduct as precisely as possible, but experience overflows our description. You have to try to verify if a conduct satisfies you desire. The demonstration cannot be shown on a piece of paper, you have to try it. Human beings work like this: we cannot capture the experience. Does the concept of experience imply a comprehensive view? The point is that I do not know exactly what a comprehensive view should be. We should have a total and comprehensive picture of humanity to gain such a view, but I don’t have that! No one has finished living his life, so we all have a partial point of view.

Obviously we don’t have a comprehensive view yet, but do not we believe it can be reached?

Hildebrand: I don’t think we can be sure that this view will ever exist, because we are still working on it. It frequently happens to start a discussion and then to finish it without reaching a common solution.

Pappas: I think a comprehensive view is an abstraction. We can only talk about the present situation. Imagine I’m Muslim and you are Christian: we could quarrel violently but we could also have a beer and laugh together. The problem of a comprehensive view is that we are always an interaction of many different roles: you are a son, a student and a man in the same time, so that you are always considering a problem from a specific point of view.

A very interesting perspective stands out from this conversation. Objectivity is not the metaphysical end of inquiry, the “thing in itself”, but a dynamic concept: it is a way of conduct that leads to a good standpoint, the best one to observe this particular present situation.

One last question arises: this standpoint is “good” for a community of men who share the need of dialogue, openness and communication. But, as Hildebrand points out at the end of his paper, “such words will not satisfy those who don’t care about transparency, corroboration by shared experience and fallibility of results. They just aren’t even in the same game (…). How do you deal with such hold outs?”. How would pragmatic objectivity handle such a situation?
James Tartaglia*

Does Rorty’s Pragmatism Undermine Itself?

Abstract. Paul Boghossian and Hilary Putnam have presented arguments designed to show self-referential difficulties within Rorty’s pragmatism. I respond to these arguments by drawing out the details of the pragmatic account of justification implicit within Rorty’s writings, thereby revealing it to be a sophisticated form of relativism that does not undermine itself. In Section I and II, I motivate my strategy of attributing a positive position to Rorty in order to respond to detailed, analytical arguments such as those of Boghossian, and present an outline of this position, agreeing with Rorty’s critics that it can be justifiably classified as a form of relativism. Sections III to V concern the detail of Boghossian’s argument, in which I show that Boghossian’s contention that Rorty’s rejection of all absolute justification is inconsistent can be satisfactorily answered by explaining the differences between ‘epistemic systems’ in terms of the different purposes they serve. Then in Sections VI to VIII, I further develop Rorty’s account of justification in order to answer Putnam’s charge that Rorty tries to say ‘from a God’s-Eye View there is no God’s-Eye View’. I reject Rorty’s own ‘social-reformer’ response to this argument, but show that it can be satisfactorily answered by distinguishing two integrated components within Rorty’s pragmatism, one holistic and coherentist, and the other causal and social-evolutionary.

I

‘Relativism’. Richard Rorty once said, ‘is the view that every belief on a certain topic, or perhaps about any topic, is as good as every other’, immediately adding that ‘[n]o one holds this view’ (Rorty 1982: 166). Given this understanding of ‘relativism’, it is not surprising that Rorty refused the label throughout most of his career, despite the fact that philosophers generally recognise a variety of considerably more nuanced forms of relativism, some of which Rorty himself would seem to have been committed to (see Miller 2002).1 Rorty’s usual attitude to the term ‘relativism’, however, was that it was a term of abuse used by foundationalist philosophers committed to the view that beliefs are justified by the representational relations they bear to the world, against pragmatists and other anti-foundationalists who hold that beliefs are justified holistically by societal agreement (Rorty 1999: xvi-xvii). The reason that anyone who denies that beliefs can be grounded upon something more solid than ongoing conversation is charged with relativism, according to Rorty, is that foundationalists assume that if our beliefs cannot be so grounded, then they must all be treated as equally valid. This, however, he regarded as simple scare-mongering rooted in an overestimation of the cultural significance of philosophy, for we need not become relativistic about physical science and democracy, for example, simply because epistemological theory cannot demonstrate their objective superiority to witchcraft and dicta-

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2 Rorty always refused the label except, curiously, in one of the last lectures he delivered before his death (Rorty 2011), where he identifies himself as a relativist without explanation, but also without amending his position in any way; perhaps he had decided it was better to embrace the label and make it his own, rather than issue yet more jaded and ineffectual denials.
torship; this kind of higher level theorising is irrelevant to our commitment to ‘real theories’, which is acquired instead through consideration of their ‘concrete advantages and disadvantages’ (Rorty 1982: 168).

Other philosophers, however, regard relativism not as a straw man, but as a real and worrying social phenomenon that has been encouraged by arguments against epistemological foundationalism; it is the felt need to counteract this influence which motivates Paul Boghossian’s Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism. Boghossian thinks social constructivist theories of knowledge, of which his main example throughout the book is Rorty’s ‘epistemic relativism’, have exercised a pernicious influence on culture, by undermining the privilege traditionally accorded to scientific knowledge, and thereby disseminating the view that there are ‘many other, radically different yet equally valid ways of knowing the world’, such that we must accord ‘as much credibility to archeology as to Zuni creationism, as much credibility to evolution as to Christian creationism’ (Boghossian 2006: 4-5; see also Blackburn 2005: p. ix). In order to undermine Rorty’s ‘epistemic relativism’, Boghossian develops a version of the ‘oft-repeated traditional objection’, that ‘any relativistic thesis needs to commit to there being at least some absolute truths; yet what a global relativism asserts is that there are no absolute truths. Hence, a global relativism is bound to be incoherent’ (Boghossian 2006: 53).

Whether or not he realised it, by adopting this argumentative strategy Boghossian was, in a sense, agreeing with Rorty, who himself had said that relativism could be refuted by ‘some variant of the self-referential arguments Socrates used against Protagoras’ (Rorty 1982: 167). Remember, however, that Rorty denied that he or anyone else was a relativist: ‘such neat little dialectical strategies only work against lightly-sketched fictional characters’, he went on to say (ibid.). In this I am in almost full agreement with Rorty, since my defence of his pragmatism against Boghossian’s arguments, which will take up Sections III-V, will show that the ‘epistemic relativism’ Boghossian targets is indeed ‘lightly-sketched’, and fails to do justice to the full resources of Rorty’s position; I say ‘almost full agreement’ only because, as we shall see in Section II, there is no seriously disputing that Rorty’s position was a form of relativism. Rorty’s relativism, however, was not the unsophisticated kind that undermines itself, and this will become even clearer in Sections VI-VIII, when we turn to the best-known and most influential self-referential argument against Rorty’s pragmatism, first formulated by Hilary Putnam. Again, my tactic will be to show that when we are clear about the detail of Rorty’s position, we see that it has the resources to respond to this kind of objection.

There are two main aims to this paper, then. The first is to answer the persistent suspicion among philosophers that Rorty’s pragmatism undermines itself, which has reached its most sophisticated expression with Boghossian’s arguments, but which remains most closely associated with Putnam’s argument. The second is to make Rorty’s pragmatic account of justification more explicit than Rorty himself ever did. The connection between the two is that it is only in drawing out the details of Rorty’s account that its resources for responding to the arguments of Boghossian and Putnam come into focus.

Now this project may be of interest to those inclined to believe that Boghossian and Putnam pinpointed genuine self-referential problems with Rorty’s position, but to those less concerned by these arguments, and already sympathetic to Rorty’s pragmatism and overall metaphilosophical stance, it might seem entirely misguided to try to defend Rorty by engaging analytic philosophers like Boghossian on their own terms, and thereby burdening Rorty with an ‘account’ of justification to defend. For surely, the thought goes, Rorty wanted to undermine the kind of ‘logic-chopping’ epistemological debates engaged in by phi-
losophers like Boghossian, and bring philosophy back to socially useful questions; if his positive comments on matters like the nature of justification were rather piece-meal and fragmented, then, this was because he wanted to avoid being pigeon-holed within such debates.

This reaction, though understandable, reflects a certain ambiguity and to some extent confusion within Rorty’s own writings. For on the one hand, he continued to engage with and comment on contemporary analytic debates right up to the end of his career (see Rorty 2007, part III), but on the other, he was a critic of such debates, urging his colleagues to always connect up their thinking with matters of social practice. Rorty himself tried to reconcile these two stances with the idea that his interventions were justified so long as they promised social usefulness, even if this amounted to nothing more than the usefulness of closing off socially useless debates. However as I will argue in Sections VII and VIII, Rorty did not need to defend his pragmatism solely in terms of social usefulness, and in fact, was on stronger ground when he did not. As such, he had no reason to be shy about fully engaging with technical philosophical debates, and there is no reason for hesitancy about elaborating a detailed Rortian position in response to detailed objections such as those of Boghossian. Granted, if Rorty’s pragmatism were ever to win widespread societal ascent, the one long-term social effect of this might be to dampen-down interest in technical philosophical debates, as Rorty hoped. But appealing to this hoped-for effect was no way to win an argument.

II

Boghossian reads Rorty’s discussion of the controversy between Galileo and Bellarmine in Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (Rorty 1979: 327-333) as a defence of epistemic relativism, and uses the example as the basis for his own arguments. The controversy arose because Galileo had defended and developed Copernican astronomy, using the new type of telescope he invented to make observations of astronomical phenomena, such as the moons of Jupiter and the phases of Venus, that could not readily be accommodated within the Ptolemaic system. Galileo subsequently found himself accused of heresy, since certain passages in the Bible, such as the statement at Psalms 104:5 that the Earth ‘can never be moved’, were regarded as divine endorsements of Ptolemy. He went to Rome to defend himself, where the Ptolemaic orthodoxy was defended for the Vatican by Bellarmine, a Cardinal and Aristotelian philosopher, whose reaction to the affair was considerably more moderate than some of his colleagues, the most notorious of whom, Cremonini, is reputed to have refused to look through Galileo’s telescope on the grounds that the Bible is a better source of evidence in astronomy (De Santillana 1958: 28-9). Bellarmine, however, was prepared to officially endorse Copernican astronomy as a useful mathematical device for simplifying astronomical calculations, so long as Galileo made it clear that the Earth did not literally revolve around the Sun. Galileo took the opposite line: he held that certain passages in the Bible were poetical, and hence were not to be taken literally.

Rorty interprets this as a dispute over standards of evidence. Galileo and other new scientists were trying to limit the evidential scope of scripture; they wanted to keep religion and science separate, with those parts of scripture conflicting with science to be construed non-literal. Bellarmine and other churchmen, on the other hand, were trying to limit the evidential scope of the new science; they could see its power, but thought it would have to be construed non-literally whenever it conflicted with the word of God. The end result was that Galileo ‘won the argument’ (Rorty 1979: 331), thereby setting up a clear demarcation
between science and religion that curtailed the epistemic authority of religion. Rorty’s principal claim, however, is that Galileo did not win because Bellarmine was being ‘illogical or unscientific’ (ibid.: 328), since the evidential standards which lead us to regard Bellarmine’s scriptural considerations as irrelevant to astronomy were not then extant. As such, there was no fact of the matter to determine that Galileo’s position was justified and Bellarmine’s was not at the time of the controversy, since there existed no wider ‘epistemic system’, in Boghossian’s terminology, or ‘grid’, in Rorty’s, to render both positions commensurable and decide in favour of Galileo. The achievements of scientists like Galileo led to the development of a new ‘grid’ that counted Galileo’s position as rational and Bellarmine’s as irrational, but according to Rorty’s explicitly Kuhnian position, the paradigm shift from Scholasticism to modern science was not itself rational. Rorty later elaborated this view by arguing that such transitions are to be understood in terms of Darwinian evolution, since cultural evolution ‘takes over from biological evolution without a break’ (Rorty 1999: 75); it is in this sense, then, that Galileo ‘won the argument’, namely that his ideas were found fruitful within the changing cultural environment of seventeenth century Europe, whereas Bellarmine’s ideas adapted less well, were marginalized, and then were gradually forgotten.

This discussion illustrates what Boghossian calls Rorty’s ‘epistemic relativism’, because Rorty thinks the disagreement between Galileo and Bellarmine was not rationally resolvable: the arguments of each were justified relative to their own epistemic system, but not that of their interlocutor. Rorty consistently rejected this label for his position, but the reasons he gave were not compelling. One reason, which we have already encountered, was that he usually used ‘relativism’ to denote only simple and self-refuting relativism about truth; but we are of course free to use the term more broadly so as to include any view that relativises truth or justification to an audience. Another reason he gave for rejecting the label was that he denied holding an epistemological position: ‘Not having any epistemology, a fortiori [the pragmatist] does not have a relativistic one’ (Rorty 1991: 24). Again, however, this is simply a case of Rorty adopting an overly strict definition for polemical purposes; he is using ‘epistemology’ to mean ‘foundationalist epistemology’, so that he can subsequently disclaim epistemological commitment, and thereby reinforce his call for an end to systematic epistemological research, which he considered socially useless (c.f. Rorty 1979: 315). As I shall be trying to show throughout this paper, however, Rorty did have an anti-foundationalist epistemology which can profitably be pieced together from his various claims and counter-claims.

The only substantial reason Rorty ever gave for denying that he was a relativist was his ‘ethnocentrism’ (Rorty 1991: 23 & ff.), according to which we must endorse the epistemic norms of the contemporary liberal West, and reject the relativistic qualification that these are only our norms, with those of other societies counting as equally valid. This is because the latter, relativistic claim would be as much an attempt to ‘get outside our beliefs and our language’ (Rorty 1979: 178) as the absolutist’s claim that the norms of some societies are objectively superior to others; it was with regard to this point that Susan Haack once memorably described Rorty as a ‘tribalist’ rather than a relativist (Haack 1993: 92). Now ethnocentrism is certainly an integral part of Rorty’s position, for he never intimates equality between Galileo and Bellarmine’s astronomical beliefs, but rather endorses Galileo’s position on the grounds that we are his ‘heirs’ (ibid.: 330). Nevertheless, there is also quite evidently a strong element of relativism to this position, given that Rorty thinks that a specification of the audience for a view, namely the fact that we are Galileo’s ‘heirs’, is required to establish that the view is justified. He reveals this relativity when he invokes historical and coun-
terfactual considerations to remind us of the contingency of the standards of justification we apply. Thus even though Galileo was right, Rorty insists, the epistemic standards we use to determine this might have been different, and were not there to be appealed to at the time of the controversy, since these standards were not determined by an objective truth about rationality and the world, but rather by the contingent twists and turns of a historical conversation that could have gone differently. Thus he says, ethnocentrically, that as we find ourselves in the present day, Galileo’s arguments are justified not only to us, but to anyone who might consider them, but he adds the relativistic qualification that the arguments were not justified to audiences before Galileo ‘won the argument’, and strongly suggests that they would not have been justified at all had Bellarmine won instead. So long as it is borne in mind that Rorty’s position is both ethnocentric and relativistic, the latter element revealed most clearly by the commitment that Bellarmine’s argument is not ‘illogical or unscientific’ except by reference to our justificatory ‘grid’, then, Boghossian’s label ‘epistem ic relativism’ is perfectly acceptable.

Boghossian extracts the following formulation of Epistemic Relativism from Rorty’s discussion (Boghossian 2006: 73 & 84-5):

(A) There are no absolute facts about what belief a particular item of information justifies. (Epistemic non-absolutism)

(B) If a person, S’s, epistemic judgements are to have any prospect of being true, we must not construe his [or her] utterances of the form ‘E justifies belief B’ as expressing the claim

  *E justifies belief B*

but rather as expressing the claim:

  *According to the epistemic system C, that I, S, accept, information E justifies belief B.* (Epistemic relationism)

(C) There are many fundamentally different, genuinely alternative epistemic systems, but no fact by virtue of which one of these systems is more correct than any of the others. (Epistemic pluralism)

Boghossian argues firstly that Epistemic Relativism is incoherent, since accepting that Galileo and Bellarmine’s arguments were relatively justified (Epistemic relationism) implies an acceptance of absolute justification (contra Epistemic non-absolutism), secondly, that it is incoherent because an acceptance of Epistemic non-absolutism implies that there are facts which favour some epistemic systems over others (contra Epistemic pluralism), and thirdly, that Rorty has failed to find a genuine case to support Epistemic pluralism, since Galileo and Bellarmine’s dispute took place within the same epistemic system. It is to these arguments that we shall now turn.

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1 I will capitalise ‘Epistemic Relativism’ when discussing this formulation. Rorty would clearly accept (A) and (B), although he might dispute (C), since he sometimes seems as sceptical as Boghossian about there being genuine alternatives to the epistemic standards of the contemporary West (see Rorty 1991: 29-31 and Rorty 1999: 276-7). Nevertheless, he is committed to the view that there were once genuinely alternative epistemic systems, namely those of Galileo and Bellarmine, which is all the epistemic pluralism Boghossian needs.
Boghossian’s first argument (ibid.: 84-7) aims to show that relative justification presupposes absolute justification, and hence that Epistemic Relativism’s commitment to both (A) and (B) is incoherent. Boghossian premises the argument on a claim about the nature of epistemic systems, henceforth (ES). (ES) claims that an epistemic system consists of a set of epistemic principles which are themselves ‘just more general versions of particular epistemic judgements’ (ibid.: 85). So, for instance, Galileo’s judgement that its visually appearing to him that Jupiter has moons justifies him in believing that Jupiter has moons, is just a particular application of the general principle that a visual appearance of something provides good prima facie justification for believing it to be the case. According to (ES), then, epistemic systems are entirely made up of general epistemic principles of this kind.

The argument proceeds as follows. According to (B), an utterance of

‘Copernicanism is justified by Galileo’s observations’

is to be interpreted as expressing the claim:

According to the epistemic system C, that I, S, accept, Copernicanism is justified by Galileo’s observations.

Given (ES), however, S’s acceptance of C amounts to an acceptance of a set of epistemic principles such as the following:

For any observational proposition p, if it visually seems to S that p and circumstantial conditions D obtain, then S is prima facie justified in believing p.

Such principles do not state the conditions under which propositions are justified relative to an epistemic system, Boghossian argues, since they are the propositions that the epistemic systems themselves are composed of, and so they must state the conditions under which a proposition is absolutely justified. According to (A), then, all such principles must be false. The Epistemic Relativist is thus committed to the view that all epistemic systems are composed of ‘uniformly false propositions’ (ibid.: 86). According to (B), however, for Galileo’s observations to even provide a relative justification for Copernicanism, S must accept epistemic system C. Consequently Boghossian concludes that Epistemic Relativism is ‘incoherent’ (ibid.: 87): it requires us to reject all claims of absolute justification, and yet in order for our beliefs to be even relatively justified, we must accept the claims to absolute justification constitutive of our own epistemic system.

Boghossian’s argument tries to show that all justification is absolute justification, since the Epistemic Relativist’s apparent alternative of justification relative to an epistemic system can be shown, through analysis, to be just another type of absolute justification. What the argument overlooks, however, is the possibility of another, novel conception of justification, one which is suggested at various points during Rorty’s discussion, and which clearly cannot be reduced to absolute justification. According to this conception, beliefs acquire their justification from their usefulness in achieving some purpose or set of purposes, and it is the possibility of these purposes varying from community to community that gives substance to the idea of justification being relative to differing epistemic systems. This explicitly pragmatic conception develops Rorty’s core view that justification is historical and so-
cial, rather than an a-historical relation between how beliefs represent the world and the world itself, by explaining differences in standards of justification between societies as a product of the differing needs and interests of those societies.

The Epistemic Relativist can use a pragmatic conception of justification to rebut Boghossian’s argument by qualifying (ES): they can accept the claim that epistemic systems consist of epistemic principles which are more general versions of particular judgements about justification, but must insist that these epistemic principles only state what we are justified in believing relative to certain purposes. This avoids Boghossian’s central charge that accepting an epistemic system implies accepting statements of absolute justification, by claiming instead that to accept an epistemic system is to accept a set of general principles which state what it is useful to believe for certain purposes. So, to introduce a concrete suggestion, the Epistemic Relativist can say that Galileo’s observations justify his belief about the moons of Jupiter relative to his epistemic system, and that accepting that system means accepting a set of relativised epistemic principles, such as that for the purposes of being able to predict and control the environment, a visual appearance of something provides good *prima facie* justification for believing it to be the case. What justifies adherence to the principle in the long term, then, is the success in prediction and control that such adherence provides.

This kind of position is hinted at a number of times in Rorty’s discussion, where he argues that before Galileo ‘won the argument’, there was no way to determine that Bellarmine’s concerns about ‘the impact of science on theology, the future of life on earth, and the like’ were ‘extraneous’ to the issue at hand (Rorty 1979: 327), and hence no way to determine that ‘getting the heavens right is a “scientific” value, and preserving the church, and the general cultural structure of Europe, is an “unscientific” value’ (ibid.: 329). What lies behind Galileo and Bellarmine’s different standards of evidence, Rorty seems to be saying, is the different uses these standards subserve. From Bellarmine’s perspective, the advantages of Copernicanism in predicting planetary motions had to be weighed against the disadvantages of a forced abandonment of doctrine in reducing the authority of the church. That the latter outweighed the former for Bellarmine, whereas the opposite was the case with Galileo, is explained by the ‘shift in cultural climate’ (ibid.: 332) taking place in the seventeenth century. This ties in perfectly with Rorty’s Darwinian conception of cultural evolution, which portrays Galileo’s ideas and the new epistemic principles underlying them as successful adaptations to the changing political and socio-economic environment of Europe. It suggests a changing pattern of behaviour, from a prior situation in which beliefs were counted as justified primarily in accordance with their usefulness in maintaining faith, a faith which helped people endure the material conditions of their lives, towards a new situation in which beliefs were counted as justified primarily in accordance with their usefulness in predicting and controlling the environment, an ability which promised to make people ‘the lords and masters of nature’ (Descartes 1985: 142-3), and thus able to change and improve the material conditions of their lives.

If the differences between epistemic systems can be explained by their different purposes, rather than the different claims to absolute justification they make, then Boghossian’s attempt to demonstrate incoherence in the Epistemic Relativist’s commitment to both (A)

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1The significance of this qualification will become clearer in Section VI, when we see that in addition to the social-evolutionary component of Rorty’s account appealed to here, there is also a holistic, coherentist one.

2Some of Rorty’s later discussions lend support to this interpretation, as for instance when he says that, ‘science and religion are both respectable paths for acquiring respectable beliefs, albeit beliefs which are good for quite different purposes’ (Rorty 1999: 36; see also Rorty 1982: 192-5).
and (B) is undermined. This is because once (ES) is qualified, the acceptance of an epistemic system required by (B) does not necessitate the acceptance of any epistemic absolutes to conflict with (A); in accepting different epistemic systems, Galileo and Bellarmine would simply be accepting different sets of epistemic principles which serve distinct purposes. These principles are ultimately to be understood as claims about the usefulness of beliefs in pursuit of the general aims of the system, and accepting claims about the usefulness of different beliefs for different purposes is perfectly compatible with rejecting all claims to absolute justification.

IV

Boghossian’s second argument (op. cit.: 89-91) aims to show that Epistemic Relativism’s commitment to both (A) and (C) is incoherent. According to (C), all epistemic systems are ‘on a par as far as their correctness is concerned’ (ibid.: 90), such that for any two alternative epistemic systems, there can be no fact in virtue of which one system is more correct than the other. Given (ES), on Boghossian’s interpretation, this amounts to the claim that there can be no facts that favor the general judgements about absolute justification constitutive of one epistemic system, the epistemic principles of that system, over those of an alternative system. Since alternative epistemic systems would contradict each other about what is absolutely justified, however, Boghossian thinks that the rejection of all claims to absolute justification required by (A) will inevitably favor some systems over others, contrary to (C).

To see this, suppose that C1 and C2 are alternative epistemic systems that contradict each other. So, for instance, according to C1,

For any observational proposition p, if it visually seems to S that p and circumstantial conditions D obtain, then S is prima facie justified in believing p.

but according to C2,

It is not the case that for any observational proposition p, if it visually seems to S that p and circumstantial conditions D obtain, then S is prima facie justified in believing p.

Since the Epistemic Relativist’s commitment to (A) requires them to reject all claims to absolute justification, they must reject the epistemic principle endorsed by C1, and thereby side with C2. But this conflicts with the Epistemic Relativist’s commitment to (C), according to which there can be no fact in virtue of which one system is more correct than the other, thus showing once again, according to Boghossian, that Epistemic Relativism is incoherent.

This argument is also undermined by a pragmatic conception of justification, because if epistemic principles are general principles which state what we are justified in believing in order to achieve certain purposes, rather than what is absolutely justified, then the Epistemic Relativist’s endorsement of (A) does not imply that all epistemic principles are false. Consequently, the Epistemic Relativist is not committed to claiming that the principle endorsed by C1 is false, and can avoid the compromise to (C) which would result from conceding that one epistemic system is more correct than another. The Epistemic Relativist still needs to make sense of the idea that a subject can endorse one epistemic system and reject another, but this can be done without claiming that the principles of the rejected system are
false. Instead, the principles of a system may be rejected, i.e. not adhered to, simply because they serve purposes that the subject does not prioritize. Thus if we interpret the observational principle of C1 as saying that observation justifies belief for the purposes of prediction and control, then C2 need not contradict this: someone who accepted C2 could grant that observation justifies belief for the purposes of prediction and control, but nevertheless choose not to act upon epistemic principles determined by these purposes.

Once justification is relativised to purposes, then, the competing claims of alternative epistemic systems can no longer be represented as neat contradictory pairs according to which the rejection of a principle belonging to one system automatically counts in favour of the other. So, for example, if Bellarmine accepts the principle that Biblically based beliefs are justified, and so useful for his purposes, but Galileo rejects this principle, it does not follow that Galileo thereby endorses the claim that it is not the case that Biblically based beliefs are useful for Bellarmine’s purposes. Rather, Galileo’s rejection commits him only to the claim that it is not the case that Biblically based beliefs are useful for Galileo’s purposes. Since alternative epistemic systems serve alternative purposes, then, there is nothing incoherent in the idea of endorsing one system but rejecting another, while nevertheless claiming that they are all equally correct.

V

Boghossian’s third argument (ibid.: 103-5) aims to show that the controversy between Galileo and Bellarmine was not a clash between alternative epistemic systems, but rather a more mundane dispute within the same epistemic system. This gets to the heart of Boghossian’s misgivings with Epistemic Relativism, since the leading thought underpinning his discussion from the outset is that we have a solitary stock of ordinary and fundamental epistemic principles, rooted in observation, induction, and deduction, to which we can imagine no genuine alternatives, and which we must regard as absolutely justified on pain of incoherence.

It is crucial for Boghossian to rule out any real life examples of alternative epistemic systems, because he thinks the case for Epistemic Relativism depends upon the possibility of encountering an alternative system that renders the epistemic principles of our own system doubtful. Only such an encounter would overcome the ‘blind entitlement’ we have to our own epistemic system (Boghossian 2003; Boghossian 2006: 96-103), thereby obliging us to try to justify that system. Once our blind entitlement is overcome, the Epistemic Relativist can argue that any attempt to justify our own system over the alternative would inevitably be ‘norm-circular’ (Boghossian 2006: 79), since we have to employ our own standards of justification, despite the fact that these are exactly the standards which would be put into doubt by an encounter with the alternative system. Thus Boghossian wants to cut off the Epistemic Relativist’s argument at the source by showing that we do not know of any alternative systems; he does not rule them out in principle, but does imply that all attempts to find or even imagine one have failed (ibid.: 103 & 109).

Unlike the previous two arguments, then, this third argument is specifically addressed to the issue of how best to interpret the actual historical dispute between Bellarmine and Galileo. It claims that the Epistemic Relativist cannot be right to interpret Bellarmine as employing a different epistemic system to Galileo, because outside of astronomy they employ

5As an ethnocentrist, Rorty could only claim that Bellarmine and Galileo’s epistemic systems were equally correct before Galileo ‘won the argument’.
exactly the same epistemic principles; Bellarmine ‘doesn’t divine what the Bible itself contains but rather reads it using his eyes’ (ibid.: 103). Since Bellarmine relies on observation to find out what the Bible says, induction to predict it will say the same today as yesterday, and deduction to work out its implications for Copernicanism, Boghossian thinks it would be uncharitable to interpret Bellarmine’s refusal to accept the evidence of Galileo’s telescope as evidence that he adhered to an alternative epistemic system, for such a system would be incoherent. Rather, Bellarmine must be employing our own epistemic system, but believe that the Bible trumps observation because it is the word of God. Thus there is no clash of epistemic systems, only ‘a dispute, within a common epistemic system, about the origins and nature of the Bible’ (ibid.: 105).

The first problem with this argument concerns Boghossian’s claim that the dispute between Bellarmine and Galileo was the product of an underlying disagreement about whether or not the Bible is ‘the revealed word of the Creator’ (ibid.: 105), since Boghossian makes no attempt to substantiate this claim against the standard view, attested to by Galileo himself, that the dispute primarily concerned Biblical interpretation. According to this view, Galileo was defending an Augustinian approach to Biblical interpretation according to which the Bible always spoke the truth, although its meaning was not always manifest. Thus Galileo thought that God had found it ‘necessary to attribute motion to the sun and rest to the earth, in order not to confound the shallow understanding of the common people and make them obstinate and perverse about believing in the principal articles of faith’ (Galileo 1967: xxiv). In other words, God did not always have the luxury of being candid, and so given that ‘the holy Bible and the phenomena of nature proceed alike from the divine Word’, a premise which he shared with Bellarmine, Galileo argued that ‘nothing physical which sense-experience sets before our eyes, or which necessary demonstrations prove to us, ought to be called in question ... upon the testimony of biblical passages which may have some different meaning beneath their words’ (Galileo, quoted in Seeger 1966: 271).

Putting aside the dubious claim that Bellarmine and Galileo’s dispute concerned the ‘origins and nature of the Bible’, Boghossian might nevertheless be right that the dispute took place within a shared epistemic system. The problem with this, however, is that Galileo and Bellarmine seem to have agreed all the relevant facts. Bellarmine agreed that Copernicanism gave a better mathematical explanation of the observational data than the Ptolemaic system, but still insisted that it was only ‘a manner of speaking’, which although ‘enough for a mathematician’ should not be interpreted as the literal truth (Bellarmine, quoted in De Santillana 1958: 99). Likewise, Galileo agreed that Ptolemy was supported by ‘the bare meaning of the words’ of certain Biblical passages, but still insisted that the words might have a hidden meaning (Galileo, quoted in Seeger 1966: 271). What they seem to have disagreed about was not the facts, but the epistemic significance of the facts: Galileo thought observation and mathematical argument should determine how we interpret the Bible, and Bellarmine thought the manifest meaning of the Bible should determine how we interpret observations. This supports Rorty’s interpretation of the controversy as a clash of epistemic systems.

This still leaves Boghossian’s claim that if Bellarmine did have an alternative epistemic system, then it was incoherent, since he used observation to find out about the Bible but refused to use it in astronomy. The problem with this, however, is that it attributes a strawman position to the Epistemic Relativist, for there was never any suggestion in Rorty’s discussion that Bellarmine rejected observation outright, and even the Cremonini story is more

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Boghossian falsely assumes that it is Bellarmine who is supposed to have refused to look through the telescope (op. cit.: 60 & 103-5); this discrepancy has no bearing on the argument.
plausibly interpreted as illustrating only Cremonini’s disregard for observational evidence in certain, specific circumstances. What Bellarmine was rejecting was not observation per se, but rather Galileo’s interpretation of particular observations that had been made using novel technology. These observations required considerable interpretation to lend support to Copernicanism (see Seeger 1966: 247-259), and the general view at the time was that observation favored Ptolemy; as Galileo himself conceded, it seemed that ‘in the Copernican doctrine the senses must be denied’ (Galileo 1967: 253).

Boghossian’s mistake is to assume that alternative epistemic systems must reject observation, induction or deduction outright, but the Epistemic Relativist need only claim that observation, induction or deduction could have different epistemic significances within alternative systems. Since Rorty makes a convincing case that this kind of difference is exactly what was driving the Galileo and Bellarmine controversy, and Boghossian fails to undermine this case, then Rorty’s suggestion of a real life example to motivate Epistemic Relativism stands undefeated.

VI

Boghossian’s argument is the most sophisticated and detailed attempt to date to prove something that many analytic philosophers have long suspected, namely that Rorty’s epistemic relativist position on justification is incoherent. However, the argument fails, and so until some further argument is presented, we may conclude that Rorty’s conception of justification is coherent; for all we have seen so far, it does seem to be, at the very least, a possible position on the nature of justification. The question we must now ask, then, is whether we have good reasons to think it is true, or to adopt a more anodyne and potentially less contentious formulation in the context of Rorty’s pragmatism, whether we have good reasons to adopt it.

Now on the face of it, Rorty has a substantive case for his position, which is most fully developed in his critique of representationalism in Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature. The heart of this case is that the combination of Sellars’ arguments against the ‘Myth of the Given’ and Quine’s arguments against analyticity, undermine any representationalist model of the relation between language and the world. Thus Sellars showed that representationalism confuses causation with justification when it locates the justification for our beliefs in the causal impact of the environment, while Quine showed that experience bears evidentially on our claims only as a collective whole, making it impossible to isolate the support the world provides for an individual belief. The combined effect of these arguments, according to Rorty, is to show that our beliefs are not justified through a quasi-mechanical transaction between mind and world that might be studied a priori by epistemologists, in order to determine the conditions of successful representation. Rather beliefs are justified by the outcome of large-scale social interactions that cannot in principle be predicted in advance; as such, there was never any prospect of philosophers devising a theory of knowledge capable of objectively adjudicating disputes such as those between Galileo and Bellarmine. Europe could only wait to see which side would win through, and thereafter would come to be retrospectively seen as better justified.

Assuming the story is not apocryphal, a more charitable interpretation would be that Cremonini saw no need to look through the telescope because he knew beforehand that whatever he saw would have to be interpreted in accordance with the Ptolemaic system; he did not doubt Galileo’s testimony, only his methodology of prioritising mathematical economy over Biblical authority.
Rorty’s alternative to representationalism is an exclusively causal model of the relation between language and the world, such that the world can ‘cause us to hold beliefs’ and can ‘decide the competition between alternative sentences’, but only ‘once we have programmed ourselves with a language’ (Rorty 1989: 5-6). This ‘programming’ is a ‘cultural evolution’ (Rorty 1999: 38), akin to Darwinian natural selection, such that changes in vocabulary are understood as adaptations to the causal pressures exerted by the world in pursuit of changing social purposes, with language bearing ‘no more of a representational relation to an intrinsic nature of things than does the anteater’s snout or the bowerbird’s skill at weaving’ (Rorty 1998: 48). Thus when Galileo looked through his telescope, there was a ‘brute physical resistance - the pressure of light waves on Galileo’s eyeball’, but there were ‘as many facts … brought into the world as there are languages for describing that causal transaction’ (Rorty 1991a: 81). For Rorty, then, causal pressures can be variously described by alternative vocabularies (‘programs’, ‘epistemic systems’), with different vocabularies providing the causal pressures with different significances suited to different social purposes, but with no vocabulary being more or less intrinsically justified than any other, given that justification exists only within a vocabulary.

Rorty’s main case for a pragmatic conception of justification, then, seems to be based on his case against representationalism and the need to provide an alternative. Thus he argues that beliefs cannot be absolutely justified in virtue of accurately representing the world, both because of Sellars’ and Quine’s arguments, but also because of the verificationalist reasoning, which is almost a mantra in Rorty, that ‘there is no way to get outside our beliefs and our language’ (Rorty 1979: 178) to assess the adequacy of our descriptions to the world. Once we accept the ‘ubiquity of language’ (Rorty 1982: xx), then, we need a conception of justification which is exclusively ‘intravocabulary’, as Robert Brandom puts it, to replace the representational model of justification as an ‘extravocabulary’ relation language bears to the world (Brandom 2000). This is provided by Rorty’s pragmatic account of justification, which we are now in a position to understand as comprising of two integrated components, one holistic and coherentist, and the other causal and social-evolutionary. According to the first, beliefs are justified by their coherence with other beliefs in accordance with the principles of an epistemic system; as Rorty puts it, they must ‘weave together with our other beliefs into a justificatory web’ (Rorty 1999: 37). This first component ensures justificatory relations are kept thoroughly ‘intravocabulary’. According to the second, the holistic ‘justificatory webs’ of an epistemic system are culturally selected for their ability to harness causal pressures in socially useful ways. Thus ‘extravocabulary’ relations are also catered for by Rorty’s account, but these are the exclusively causal relations that hold between language-users and the world ‘once we have programmed ourselves with a language’.

This is a subtle and original account of justification, albeit one which Rorty himself never presented as such, preferring to claim that there is ‘nothing to be said about justification in general’ (ibid.: 38), in line with his nominalist and historicist conviction that fruitful discourse about topics like justification must always concern particular practices of justification within historically-embedded discourses. Nevertheless, Rorty actually had lots to say about ‘justification in general’, and once his various statements are pieced together, they clearly do add up an account, despite his disclaimers. The account, to repeat, is that beliefs are not justified individually by the world, but holistically by societal agreements, founded

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8 Fred Dretske once remarked, in response to a typical example of one of these disclaimers, that, ‘this sounds to my ear like a theory of knowledge. Not a very well articulated theory to be sure, but a theory nonetheless’ (Dretske 1982: 97). The more you look at Rorty, though, the more articulation you can uncover.
on coherence, which harness causal pressures to serve the social purposes selected for by cultural evolution.

The difficulties for this account begin when we note that if justification is determined by societal agreement, and ultimately social usefulness, then for Rorty’s position to be consistent, it must be justified in the same way. Thus his argument cannot be that Quine and Sellars demonstrated objective truths about justification, namely that representationalism is untenable because it neglects both the holistic nature of justification, and the distinctness of causation and justification. Neither can it be that, as a matter of fact, it is impossible for us to ‘step outside our skins’ (Rorty 1982: xix) by comparing our descriptions to the language-independent world. If Rorty were arguing this way, then he would be arguing, absurdly, that representationalism fails to accurately represent the facts about justification, and hence is an unjustified position. Rather, Rorty can only consistently argue that Quine and Sellars’ arguments, as well as his own ‘ubiquity of language’ thesis and consequent intravocabulary conception of justification, are justified by societal agreement. The problem with this, however, as critics have not been shy to point out, is that Rorty’s position is manifestly controversial, and so cannot plausibly claim to have societal agreement on its side.

This difficulty was provided with a focus by Hilary Putnam’s charge that Rorty attempts to say ‘from a God’s-Eye View there is no God’s-Eye View’ (Putnam 1990: 25). Putnam’s point is far-reaching: if Rorty is saying that representationalism is objectively false because it presupposes an impossible stance, a ‘God’s-Eye View’ from which language is compared to a language-independent world, then surely this very claim presupposes the same impossible stance. For it seems to be holding that representationalism fails to accurately represent human justificatory practices, which is something that could only be asserted, by Rorty’s own reasoning, from a ‘God’s-Eye View’. But if, on the other hand, Rorty is consistent in holding that justification is determined exclusively by societal agreement, then his claim could only be justified if there were societal agreement that society, rather than the world, justifies our claims. There is, however, no such agreement; as Simon Blackburn drolly observes, ‘Michael Faraday … seemed to have designed instruments only for registering such things as electrostatic charge and never ones designed to detect the approval of his peers’ (Blackburn 2005: 160). Blackburn’s point, of course, is that there is widespread societal agreement that it is the world, rather than the opinions of society, which justifies many of our beliefs. So unless Rorty is inconsistently speaking from the ‘God’s-Eye View’ he urges us to abandon, and saying that representationalism is objectively false, it seems he must concede that societal agreement is against him, and hence that according to his own account of justification, his account is not justified. Thus the case in support of Rorty’s position is either inconsistent or undermines itself.

VII

Rorty made the following response to Putnam’s objection:

[My strategy for escaping the self-referential difficulties into which the Relativist] keeps getting himself is to move everything over from epistemology and metaphysics to cultural politics, from claims to knowledge and appeals to self-evidence to suggestions about what we should try. (Rorty 1998: 57)

Rather than saying from a ‘God’s-Eye View’ that there is no vocabulary-independent world to which our vocabularies answer, then, Rorty’s suggestion is that he is simply mak-
ing a pragmatic, experimental suggestion for reform to our linguistic practices. He is willing to grant the point that there is no societal agreement in favor of his account, and hence that according to that account, it is not presently justified. However, he thinks this obstacle is easily dispensed with by distinguishing between ‘what is presently found convenient to say and what might be still more convenient to say’ (ibid.: 57). Thus although society presently finds it convenient to say that the world, rather than society, determines matters of justification, Rorty, as a ‘pragmatic social reformer’, is suggesting that it would be even more convenient to adopt his account. Why? One reason is typical Rortian metaphilosophy: he thinks this will achieve the convenience of ‘avoiding fruitless disagreements on dead-end issues’ (ibid.: 57), by which he means it would undermine the representationalist problematic of traditional, epistemology-based philosophy. However Rorty also has bigger targets in his sights, since he thinks that abandoning representationalism will help to promote a liberal, democratic and open society, by removing ‘a few more excuses for fanaticism and intolerance’ (ibid.: 83). Representationalism creates such excuses, Rorty thinks, because a claim to represent the objective truth short-circuits conversation and overrides the need for compromise; that is why he thinks an account of justification which undermines such strategies promises greater linguistic convenience.

It seems to me that this response was a miscalculation on Rorty’s behalf, for the following reasons. Suppose we take him at his word, interpreting him as a ‘pragmatic social reformer’ who is proposing an amendment to our notion of justification because of the prospect of future social benefits; if society experiments with Rorty’s idea, he thinks, it will be better off, and so societal agreement will come to over to his position, thereby justifying it in the future. This immediately raises the question, however, of the status of the various arguments Rorty canvases against representationalism, such as those of Quine and Sellars, and his trademark claim that we cannot ‘step outside our skins’ (Rorty 1982: xix). For these are not arguments about social usefulness, and thus if Rorty was persuaded of his position only by the prospect of social benefits, it starts to look, as it does to Susan Haack, that he was a ‘cynic’ who defended these arguments as ‘a ploy to persuade others less enlightened than himself by playing the game by their rules’ (Haack 1993: 193). And cynical or not, a clear consequence of adopting the ‘social reformer’ stance is that these well-known arguments are undermined: if only arguments about social usefulness can be appealed to without getting into ‘self-referential difficulties’, then since these arguments are not about social usefulness, they cannot support his position.

The problems for Rorty’s ‘social reformer’ response do not stop here, however, for once Rorty’s standard battery of anti-representationalist arguments is undermined, we no longer have any reason to believe that social usefulness, rather than representational accuracy, is germane to questions of justification. Thus somebody might be prepared, for the sake of argument, to take Rorty’s word for it that pragmatism about justification offers social benefits. Nevertheless, this person might also maintain, perfectly consistently, that although we would be better off if we became pragmatists about justification, we would be in error, since justification is determined by representational accuracy. In short, it is only on Rorty’s account, not the representationalist’s, that social usefulness determines justification, and so it is simple question-begging to appeal to social usefulness to justify his account over that of the representationalist. Rorty needs his stock of anti-representationalist arguments to avoid such question-begging, but his ‘social reformer’ response undermines them.

Given that Rorty characterized his ‘social reformer’ response as the same as ‘Dewey’s pragmatic justification of pragmatism’ (Rorty 1998: 58), he was presumably well aware of, but thoroughly unperturbed by, this logical flaw to his argument. Perhaps he reasoned that
if his pragmatism was adopted and found socially useful, then nobody would care about representational facts anymore, even if they did exist; they could be forgotten, as perhaps mortality might be forgotten in a society that found itself benefiting from a false belief in immortality. Perhaps Rorty was not trying to argue against representationalism, then, but simply expressing his preference for pragmatism, and inviting others to join him by advertising the benefits. This would be a very modest strategy, but for it to have any persuasive force at all, Rorty needed to make it plausible that his account would indeed be socially useful. This, as far as I can see, he singularly failed to do. Rather, he simply stated the benefits he envisaged, which are, basically, an end to epistemological debates and increased toleration. But as regards epistemological debates, Rorty’s account has caused massive controversy and spawned countless indignant responses, such as Boghossian’s book. On the face of it, then, it has fuelled the ancient debate between relativists and realists, rather than dampen it down in any way; it seems like just another contribution from the relativist side. And as regards toleration, many philosophers, such as Boghossian and Blackburn, think Rorty’s account promotes a socially deleterious, rather than beneficial, toleration of superstition and pseudo-science. Moreover it is not even clear that it does promote toleration once supplemented with ethnocentrism9.

VIII

Rorty’s ‘social reformer’ tactic, then, seems considerably more trouble than it was worth as a response to Putnam. But I shall end by suggesting that Rorty did not need it, and indeed, to argue for his pragmatism directly on the basis of envisaged social benefits was to sell his position short. For as we saw in Section VI, the link it makes to social usefulness is subtle: beliefs are justified holistically by societal agreements, founded on coherence, which harness causal pressures to serve the social purposes selected for by cultural evolution. The idea, then, is that beliefs which cohere with each other gain societal agreement, and are thereby justified. But although large-scale, holistic webs of belief harness causal pressures in socially useful ways, such that it is correct to say that justification in Rorty’s pragmatism is ultimately rooted in usefulness for a purpose, it is nevertheless not the case that usefulness directly justifies individual beliefs. Rather coherence does. As such, Rorty can base his justification for pragmatism on coherence rather than usefulness. This makes it legitimate for him to draw on Quine and Sellars’ arguments, and also allows him to concede that his position is currently controversial and not widely regarded as justified, without thereby speaking from a ‘God’s-Eye View’.

To see this, consider the Galileo and Bellarmine case again. To echo Blackburn’s comment quoted above, Galileo used his telescope to detect the phases of Venus, not the approval of his peers, and the arguments he used to justify his position referred to astronomical data, rather than social benefits. However none of this precludes the possibility that an adequate philosophical account of what justified Galileo’s position must make reference to societal agreement and social benefits; these are not the kind of considerations it would be appropriate for Galileo to adduce, or that he needed to know anything about, but they might nevertheless provide the best explanation of what it means to say that this views were justified. The considerations it would be appropriate for Galileo to adduce in order to justify his views, on the other hand, are considerations of coherence: that the observations he had

9See Festenstein 1997, pp. 109-144, for a detailed and informative discussion of the theoretical and social implications of Rorty’s conception of ethnocentrism.
made of the phases of Venus were not what would be expected on the Ptolemaic model, but exactly what would be expected on the Copernican model, and thus that the new data he had collected cohered better with Copernicanism.

To argue for his pragmatic account of justification, then, it seems Rorty has no more need to appeal to social usefulness than Galileo did. Rather, all he needs argue is that his account of justification coheres better with certain a priori considerations, such as the Sellars and Quine arguments, than representationalism does. If Rorty is right about this, and the arguments hold up, then this coherence may produce societal agreement, and ultimately social usefulness. If he is wrong, and the arguments fail, or simply fail to cohere with Rorty’s pragmatist conclusions, then the failure of Rorty’s account to cohere with the rest of our beliefs may be indicative of its failure to accurately represent the facts about justification. But either way, basing his argument on coherence does not involve Rorty in any ‘self-referential difficulties’: he does not need to presuppose his pragmatic account of justification to argue that it coheres better with the rest of our commitments than alternative accounts, and he does not need to appeal to a ‘God’s-Eye View’ to argue that representation-ism presumes a stance from which to compare our representations to the world, and that the possibility of such a stance fails to cohere with other things we know about the world.

At the beginning of this paper, we recalled Rorty saying that relativism could be refuted by ‘some variant of the self-referential arguments Socrates used against Protagoras’, but denying that his own position amounted to relativism. While the latter claim should be taken with a pinch of salt, as we have seen, we have nevertheless also found good reasons, in considering both Boghossian’s and Putnam’s self-referential arguments, to conclude that the sophisticated kind of relativism about justification which Rorty defended does not undermine itself, and is both coherent and argumentatively well-supported. It also has a distinct advantage over absolutist conceptions of justification, namely that justification, unlike truth, is naturally thought of as a social phenomenon rather than as an absolute notion; as Putnam puts it, ‘truth is supposed to be a property of a statement that cannot be lost, whereas justification can be lost’ (Putnam 1981: 55). This is why we are liable to be unperturbed by the claim that Bellarmine’s view was once justified, even though it is not now, whereas only the most radical of postmodernists would countenance the parallel claim that Bellarmine’s view was also once true.

However, even though Rorty’s view does have this important intuition on its side, it has others against it. For an example of this, remember that it was not only justification, but also truth, that Rorty wanted to keep exclusively intravocabulary, since he held that ‘the only point in contrasting the true with the merely justified is to contrast a possible future with the actual present’ (Rorty 1999: 39). Thus we might, in Rorty’s ‘cautionary’ sense of true, say that in 1616, Bellarmine’s view was justified but possibly not true; we later discovered that it was actually not true because Galileo ‘won the argument’. However if Galileo’s view was only justified after he ‘won the argument’, as Rorty insists, then given that the winning was contingent, it follows that Galileo’s view might never have been justified. But since truth cannot be asserted apart from justification, on Rorty’s view, It seems to follow that a future in which Galileo’s view was never justified is one in which it was never true; its being true would have forever remained an unactualized ‘cautionary’ possibility. Now granted, in the actual world Galileo did win the argument, and so from our ethnocentric perspective, we can assert absolutely that the Earth has been orbiting the Sun throughout human history. But nevertheless, since Rorty holds that ‘the only criterion we have for applying the word “true” is justification, and justification is always relative to an audience’ (Rorty 1998: 4), it
is hard to see how he can avoid the consequence that since Galileo’s view might never have been justified, it also might never have been true, which, when we are talking about the Earth orbiting the Sun, is evidently a highly counterintuitive counterfactual. Barring some nimble manoeuvre, then, or a radical scepticism about counterfactuals (and Rorty did express such inclinations; see Putnam 2000: 85), it seems clear that Rorty’s account was bound to conflict with common sense. That, however, was how he seemed to like it; as Richard Bernstein once said, Rorty favored ‘ever new forms of dissensus, not epistemological consensus’ (Bernstein 1991: 62). Rorty’s pragmatism was perhaps never likely to achieve its stated aim of dampening-down interest in epistemological debates, then, but properly understood, the novel and provocative account of justification it provides retains plenty of potential to enrich them.

References


Bookreview
Mitchell Aboulafia’s new book pursues previous inquiries carried forth by the author on the notion of Cosmopolitanism. Whereas so far Aboulafia had mostly developed this notion with reference to Mead, in this book he weaves together the different strands of a Euro-American philosophical conception of cosmopolitanism, taken to be the core of a moral, social, and political vision centered around the modern ideas of autonomy and of individual and collective self-realization.

Aboulafia’s attempt is valuable for many reasons, not lastly because he avoids the standard reading of cosmopolitanism as a merely political virtue, and locates it at the cross-road of individual and collective processes of identity-making. He suggests we understand cosmopolitanism as being at the same time a private and a public virtue, a capacity for self-transcendence that does not require self-negation. Developing a deeply Meadian intuition, Aboulafia conceives of cosmopolitanism as the outcome of a process of personal growth in which the ego formation is conceived as a process of ego enlargement, where self-determination is not conceived merely in terms of separation of the self from the other, but in terms of circles of progressive enclosure with the world and self-enlargement. As Hannah Arendt would have said, it is by enlarging its mentality that the self realizes its best aspirations. Although Aboulafia tends to emphasize the moral, psychological, and sociological dimensions of transcendence and cosmopolitanism, these virtues have also deep and important political implications, which in this book tends to remain in the background.

Aboulafia philosophical thesis is clear and steadfast: we should avoid opposing self-determination and self-transcendence, and come rather to see self-transcendence as a step of self-realization. This is one of the major implications of G. H. Mead’s philosophy, an implication that is particularly momentous in a political culture that continues to oppose the private to the public, values to norms, the ethical to the moral. Aboulafia’s book, although not directly dealing with these issues, urges us implicitly to dismiss these too hastily accepted dogmas of contemporary political theory, inviting us to rethink our identity across these theoretical borders.

Consistently with these broad theoretical premises, Aboulafia sides with Charles Taylor’s anti-essentialist expressivism and against Gottfried von Herder’s essentialist expressivism. This is no surprise, especially if seen against the pragmatist and existentialist background that Aboulafia claims for his undertaking. Indeed, both these traditions have explicitly rejected all forms of essentialism, and advocated a reconstructive and creative conception of the self as an essentially social yet not completely socialized artifact. Put in different terms –more faithful to Aboulafia’s pragmatist than existentialist roots– the book tries to articulate a vision of social life in which social determination and individual creativity are two strongly interdependent faces of the same phenomenon.

With the exception of excerpts from chapters 3, 4, and 5, the book consists of new materials. The book is composed of eight chapters divided into three parts, the first focusing on

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the individual dimension of transcendence, the second on the collective dimension of cosmopolitanism, whereas the third tackles some contemporary debates in the light of the theoretical perspective advanced in parts one and two. In what follows I will shortly discuss a selection of these chapters.

The book’s first chapter is the most explicit in bringing pragmatism and existentialism in conversation. One may be puzzled by Aboulafia’s decision to leave to Richard Rorty the pride of place of “representative” of the pragmatist army in his undertaking, as well as of the fruitfulness of the extended comparison between Richard Rorty and Jean-Paul Sartre. However, if we read the chapter as an opening intended to suggest an area of resonance between the two traditions, Aboulafia’s strategy appears convincing. Indeed, Rorty plays here the role of a facilitator in introducing one of the two key themes of the book, and in staging a bridge between pragmatism and existentialism as philosophical traditions committed to anti-essentialism, that is to say to a conception of individuals and cultures as being defined by their capacity to self-transcendence. This point should be kept in mind if we are to avoid overprizing the role played by Rorty in Aboulafia’s account. Indeed, since chapter two Aboulafia set to a more ambitious task as he tries to bring closer Sartre and Dewey’s perspectives, the huge difference between their philosophical projects notwithstanding.

Aboulafia is aware of the daringness of his proposal, and draws on selected materials from both authors to show some possible lines of convergence uniting the two otherwise deeply diverging philosophical projects. The thesis that, according to Aboulafia, best express the affinities between pragmatism and existentialism—and more precisely between Dewey and Sartre—is that of the practical nature of freedom, that is to say the idea that freedom can be attained only in the dimension of practical life and its contextual undertakings. One may doubt whether the rather pragmatized existentialism that Aboulafia has to offer would satisfy the existentialist readerships. Certainly the strategy proves fruitful when seen in the reverse direction, as our understanding of Dewey cannot but benefit from a reading that adequately emphasizes the importance of non-instrumental, perfectionist, and even tragic dimensions of ethical experience.

Chapters 4 and 5 constitute the core of the book. In chapter 4 Aboulafia develops the main philosophical implications of Mead’s kind of cosmopolitanism. Aboulafia starts with a challenging philosophical thesis; namely, that cosmopolitanism should be read not merely as part of a theory of ethical life but also as the solution envisaged by Mead to define our moral obligations. Indeed, Aboulafia believes that Mead’s theory of the generalized other is intended to explain self-realization as well as autonomy: what is produced by the dialectical interplay of self and other is a social personality that encompasses values as well as norms, expressive preferences as well as duties. This “enlarged mentality” is not the result of a passive absorption by the individual of existing social norms and values, but is the product of a ceaseless constructive appropriation of diverse normative standpoints.

Seen in this Meadian perspective, cosmopolitanism is at the same time an ethical and a political ideal: it provides us with a normative standard for devising ethical progress and with a normative standard for assessing political practice. Mead opposes cosmopolitanism to selfishness as two images of the self: the first confines the self to a restricted identity, in which only a limited number of small generalized others is involved, whereas the second is characterized by the capacity to encompass in one’s own identity the largest number of generalized others. Here Aboulafia marks a point that is central to his project: the true cosmopolitan is not an avatar of the liberal ironist that looks at the world from the vantage point of a universal and abstract view from nowhere. Rather, the cosmopolitan is the person that has included in his own rich identity a multiplicity of other collective identities. In this
way, the universal point of view of humanity does not replace the plurality of other collective identities in the cosmopolitan mind, but is rather added to them. Therefore, the enlargement is not attained through a process of abstraction and generalization, but rather through a process of progressive inclusion, through acquaintance with an ever larger number of generalized others.

That Mead is following a path orthogonal to that followed by mainstream contemporary philosophy can be seen in the fact that he is unwilling to uncouple self-realization from autonomy, morality from ethnicity. As Aboulafia explains at p. 76, “to adequately respond to others, we must also possess a sense of obligation”. This fact explains why for Mead cosmopolitanism can be at the same time a moral virtue and a political standard, why it can ground our ethical standing as well as our moral obligations toward others. Although Aboulafia does not fully develop the implications of Mead’s theory of the generalized other for a theory of justice, he deploys the basis for such a project by showing how sympathy and the mechanism of the generalized other work together in the genesis of moral duties, how ethical habits are necessary in order to instantiate socially shared moral orders. As Aboulafia perceptively shows, according to Mead the capacity to identify with a plurality of generalized others, to imagine their forms of life, to sympathize with them is a precondition of our capacity to devise universal duties: we need to feel our bond with others before we understand what we owe them. This is at least one of the possible ways to link values to duties, self-realization to autonomy.

In the following chapter Aboulafia extends his argument through the examination of W.E.B. Du Bois writings on the negro condition. Aboulafia shows how Du Bois’ arguments provide a critique of racism that is in line with the Meadian understanding of cosmopolitanism. The chapter usefully traces Du Bois’s cosmopolitan conception of the social self to his formative years as a student of William James, reminding us in passing the role played by James’s conception of the social self for the whole pragmatist tradition. As Aboulafia aptly remarks, the experience of racism shows us the dark side of the social constitution of the self. Indeed, the idea that “impartiality is nurtured through individuals taking multiple perspectives, must come to terms with the reality that seeing oneself through the eyes of others can in fact be a damaging experience” (p. 99). Hence, as a consequence, the paradoxically privileged position that is open to the victims of oppression, as “those who have a double-consciousness are in a unique position to achieve the impartiality of the spectator because of a heightened awareness of otherness and multiplicity” (ibid.).

The third section of the book is quite different from the former two, as it is meant to test the theory of self-transcendence and cosmopolitanism previously articulated through three different strategies. The first is mainly negative and consists in showing that Neil Gross’s attempt at interpreting Rorty’s thought and career fails precisely for an excessive commitment to determinism that Aboulafia explains in terms of an inadequate consideration of the role of transcendence in the formation of identity. Aboulafia approaches Gross’s biography of Richard Rorty from the standpoint of Mead’s social psychology, and in particular of Mead’s notion of the generalized other, that Gross utilizes as part of his explanation of “the making” of Richard Rorty as a philosopher. If the aim of Gross’s theory was merely to state that intellectuals as well as all other human beings produce self-concepts in order to obtain self-consistency, one would be pressed to ask for the relevance of the topic for Aboulafia’s book. The answer to this question has to be found in Aboulafia’s persuasion that self-transcendence is a necessary constituent of human identity, and that its neglect exposes to failures in understanding human agency. In the case of Gross’s account of Rorty, Aboulafia
wants to show that short of an adequate understanding of this dimension, Gross is inevitably forced to explain the intellectual production of Rorty in reductionist terms.

What Aboulafia questions therefore is not the specific interpretation of Richard Rorty offered by Neil Gross, but rather the analytical pattern through which Gross explains Rorty’s intellectual achievements in terms of social determinants rather than in terms of a more individual-centered process of self-transformation through social interaction. As Aboulafia shows, an explanatory model more sensitive to Mead’s social psychology would have helped Gross to avoid the same errors he imputed to Bourdieu’s sociology of intellectuals.

Aboulafia leaves to his last chapter, titled “What if Hegel’s master and slave were women?”, the task to bring his book to a close under the auspices of Hegel, whose influence on the pragmatists and the existentialists explains the family resemblances between these two traditions. It is notably Hegel’s phenomenology of Spirit that, according to Aboulafia, provides the theoretical reference for most of contemporary attempts at conceptualizing transcendence as a distinctive feature of the human self both in Europe and in the United States. Although it is not the aim of the chapter to discuss in details the direct influence of Hegel’s thought in contemporary theories of transcendence, we are constantly reminded that a correct appraisal of the identities and differences that unite and divide the various strand of the Euro-American philosophy demands a previous clarification of the different ways of inheriting from Hegel and more generally from German Idealism. But Aboulafia goes a step further, joining those thinkers that, like Joseph Margolis, have recently insisted that the pragmatists have conceived of this inheritance in the terms of what C. S. Peirce once termed a Darwinization of Hegel matched with a Hegelianization of Darwin. This is particularly true of John Dewey and George H. Mead. In this chapter Aboulafia shows how Mead’s social psychology completes and supersedes Hegel’s philosophy of consciousness, socializing and naturalizing the Master-Slave dialectics. And it is from the Meadian vantage point that Aboulafia, via a discussion of Miller’s Toward a New Psychology of Women, tries to bring the question of gender within the bounds of his account of self-transcendence and cosmopolitanism, in a way not dissimilar from how W. E. B. Du Bois had achieved to bring the color line at the heart of western universalism.

To conclude, Aboulafia’s book provides an insightful exploration of a central theme of contemporary philosophy, showing the distinctive pragmatist contribution to its unfolding, while illustrating at the same time the rich network of direct and indirect connections and resonances that weave together the American and the European philosophies of the Twentieth Century. Although the book suffers from a certain fragmentariness which in the end makes difficult for the reader to grasp the exact views of Aboulafia about self-transcendence and cosmopolitanism, it is certainly welcomed for his successful attempts at showing the lasting philosophical importance of G. H. Mead and at bringing a step further our awareness that American and European philosophy are different branches stemming from the same common tree.
Sarin Marchetti*


I.

This new volume of the first critical edition of Bergson’s *Oeuvres* [2007-], directed by Frédéric Worms for the prestigious series *Quadrije/Grand Textes* of the *Presses Universitaires de France*, will be of particular interest for James’ scholars. Stéphane Madelrieux, who assembled together and edited the materials included in the volume, offers us the whole body of Bergson’s writings on James, and much more. In fact, besides the most famous introduction that *lemagicien Parisien* wrote in 1911 for the Flammarion edition of *Pragmatism*, the volume comprises also other occasional pieces by Bergson, a selection of his letters to James, Abauzit and to some others fellow interlocutors, a few extracts from James’ work that are often discussed in such commentaries and exchanges as well as some additional fragments focusing on Bergson’s engagement with *Le Génie américain* in the context of the early reception of his philosophy in France. All the writings are introduced, commented and annotated by Madelrieux, so that the reader is constantly accompanied throughout the dense and variegated pages of the book. In fact, despite the volume appears as an harmonious whole, the editor managed to arrange together a number of texts thought for rather disparate—and sometimes hardly comparable—audiences and circumstances. The task, far from being easy, is exquisitely accomplished.

II.

Some preliminary information on the book under consideration, given the complexity of its structure, is thus in need. The volume gathers together some materials already published by Bergson himself in his collection of writings *La Pensée e le Mouvant* [1934]—which has been re-issued in the mentioned critical edition together with his earlier collection of essays *L’Énergie spirituelle* [1919]—, plus other scattered pieces recently edited in a brand new volume titled *Écrits philosophiques*. And yet, as Worms writes in his *avant-propos*, given the importance and unity of some particular texts in Bergson’s *Oeuvres*, PUF considered and finally decided to publish such materials as separated additional volumes. This happened not only to what became *Sur le pragmatisme de William James*, but also to other individual texts we now have in an exclusive edition¹.

Madelrieux, in his *Présentation*, explains in detail the motives for such editorial choice and presents the quadripartite structure he gave to the volume, edited in accordance with the standards of the critical edition observed for the other volumes as well. The first part, titled *Vérité et Réalité. Sur le Pragmatisme de William James*, reproduces Bergson’s renowned introduction to the first French translation of James’ mature philosophical manifesto; the

¹For an up-to-date list of publications, as well as for more details on the whole project of the critical edition of his works, please do visit the website of the Bergson project at the following address: [http://www.puf.com/wiki/Espace_Bergson/La_première_édition_critique_de_Bergson](http://www.puf.com/wiki/Espace_Bergson/La_première_édition_critique_de_Bergson).
second part reprises all those occasional but not at all peripheral texts Bergson wrote (and, when not published himself, authorized for publication) on James; while the third consists in a selection of his letters to James, with the addition of a few letters to Abauzit regarding his (rather problematic) translation of *Varieties of Religious Experiences*. A fourth part, corresponding to the *Dossier critique* that closes the volume, besides containing some detailed notes to the previous texts, the index of the volume and a critical bibliography of the themes and figures discussed, includes another sequence of texts on and by James focused on his relationship with Bergson. Each of the four parts is singularly rich, and the editor greatly helps the reader with an introduction to both the first and the third, offering an even more detailed synopsis of each one of the texts appearing in the second and the fourth. Besides providing precious particulars on the vast materials presented, such series of introductions and notes trace a theoretical thread that is extremely interesting in itself. In the next few sections I shall try to assess such a thread and intertwine it with some considerations with which I myself have wrestled in my reading of James and Bergson. Far from being the only possible way to evaluate the volume, such a strategy allows me to blend together the historical documents reproduced with one contemporary speculative perspective through which we mightread them, so to estimate the aging of the former and the solidity of the latter.⁵

### III.

Adopting a mereological system of calculation, we may say that the figures of interest in the volume under examination are (at least) three: Bergson, James and their philosophical encounter(s). Each of them, with its dynamic character and ambiguous contours, partly overlaps with the others so that it is at times hard to trace down the multiple lines of contaminations and resistance between them. Madelrieux offers a key to make some order in this complexity. In the *Présentation*, spanning just six pages but of a rather impressive theoretical density, he argues for a line of investigation running through the writings gathered in the volume: namely, Bergson’s interest for pragmatism as *one aspect* of a wider philosophical program that he finds in James’ writings and that he himself sought to build into (and accomplish with) his work (p. xvii). This provocative proposal rules out (or, less dramatically, calls in question) from the very beginning two opposite but kindred interpretative tendencies: either that of claiming that Bergson and James, besides being after the same ‘beast Intellectualism’—James’ courtesy—, conducted their hunting with the very same philosophical strategies and weapons (it is significant to notice how some moments of their correspondence might convey precisely such an image); or that of claiming for the radical incompatibility of their assumptions, programs and even scopes (the last section of the forth part of the volume, titled *Divergences et distorsions*, collects two extracts by Kallen and Worms arguing for a version of this incompatibility account). Accordingly with this possible narrative the intellectual relationship between the two thinkers would be more nuanced and multi-faced than either a wholehearted convergence or an unbridgeable divergence, regarding the latter assessment, I would like to mention two other works by the editor of the volume, one authored and one directed, in which lines of this reading are developed: S. Madelrieux, *L’attitude empiriste*, Paris: PUF 2008 (esp. chapters 2 and 8); id. (ed.), *Bergson et James. Cent ans après*, Paris: PUF, 2011 (esp. the Introduction by Madelrieux to his French translation of James’ text *Bradley ou Bergson?*, and his essay *De l’âme à l’inconscient. Méthaphysique et psychologie chez James et Bergson*).

⁵Whenever not otherwise specified, all quotations are from the volume under review.
which had been variously advanced as the two main competing accounts in the past century of scholarship.

The alternative reading envisioned by Madelrieux complicates in an interesting way such two opposite strains of the received view of the James-Bergson affaire. In the first place it throws some light on more than one passage of the their correspondence as well as of the letters Bergson wrote to Ribot, Pitkin, Kallen and Delattre, where he addresses from different angles the origins and motives of his interest for some precise aspects of James’ groundbreaking investigations. In fact, as the editor argues, in those texts Bergson claims more than once that his engagement with James sprang for a felt intellectual affinity with the way the American thinker depicted our mental life, and the variety of experiences animating it, in practical terms. In order to characterize such an engagement it thus results crucial to investigate the significance of Bergson’s pronouncement about an harmonie préétablie (p. 33, 75, 78) with his American frère de pensée, together with his recurring remarks about the ‘two different sources’ of their thinking (p. 19-20, 27, 32-3, 36, 72-3, 77, 151). In fact, especially in the exchanges with both his French and American interlocutors reproduced in the second part of the volume, we can appreciate a distinctive reaction by Bergson to versions of both (what we have labeled as) the convergence and the divergence accounts of his relationship with James: to those authors reducing his positions to the ones of James Bergson replies by showing the two different sources and starting points (psychological for James while exquisitely epistemological for him) of their respective philosophies, while to those readers stressing their differences Bergson responds by declaring his proximity to James’ views on the nature of concepts and to the companion critique of traditional metaphysics. Such movements, rather than sheer inconsistency, reveal the complexity and multifariousness of Bergson’s stance toward James. Furthermore, the relationship between the two had hardly been impermeable to their personal exchanges and encounters, and thus it is not unreasonable to think that Bergson’s understanding and evaluation of James’ philosophy –but the same could be said for James regarding Bergson’s as well– evolved (if not changed) over time, so that those accounts taking in consideration only one occasion or stage of it cannot but result partial. Far from being a static record of assonances and divergences, the exchange between James and Bergson had been a vital confrontation not without turning points. In his précis to the texts appearing in the second part of the volume, Madelrieux registers such variations, while in his Introduction to the third part he stresses their significance for the understanding of some moments of their correspondence.

The harmonie préétablie with James of which Bergson writes to Horace Kallen and to James himself could thus be characterized as a convergence in views that however takes the form of an accord dans la difference (p. 55). Bergson remarks how, notwithstanding his conversations with James were not free from disagreements and divergences, still their intellectual paths should be described as proceeding toward a shared goal, endorsing thus James’ enthusiastic claim according to which the two were ‘fighting the same fight’. Far from being one of unqualified support, their alliance resembles at times a virtuous circle of reciprocal critical inspiration ̵or, if you prefer an evolutionistic image, a symbiotic circle of mutual cooperation. In this context it results particularly significant what Bergson writes to Ribot in 1905 in order to characterize his engagement (at that point in time) with James, and in particular the professed similarities between some of their positions. He writes

[se reportant aux textes, on verrait sans peine que la description du stream of thought et la théorie de la “durée réelle” n’ont pas al même signification et ne peuvent se rattacher à la même origine. La première a une origine et une signification nettement psychologiques.]

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La seconde consiste essentiellement en une critique de l’idée de *temps homogène*, telle qu’on la trouve chez les philosophes et les mathématiciens (p. 19-20).

Being their meanings and points of departures different, the claimed *harmonie* of views is hence difficult to characterize, and yet still more valuable to investigate. It is Bergson himself to provide us a clue to proceed in such an inquiry. In fact, he concludes the letter to Ribot by voicing his own take on the relationship between the “philosophie française” as expressed in both his *Essai sur les données immédiates* and his *Matière et Mémoire* and the “psychologie américaine” as depicted in James’ *Principles of Psychology*. He writes:

> [O]n pouvait partir de cette psychologie et l’élargir en philosophie : c’est si je ne me trompe, la marche qu’a suivie W. James. J’ai fait le chemin inverse. Approfondissant certains concepts philosophiques aux contours bien définis, je les ai vus se fondre en quelque chose de fuyant et de flou, qui s’est trouvé être du psychologique (p. 20).

This concise but telling characterization of the kind of relationship running between their respective intellectual projects sets the tone for what happened to become an intense collaboration in which the two sides progressively explored the conceptual regions surveyed by the fellow traveler. In fact, especially as their acquaintance and companionship intensified, the two authors sharpened their mutual readings, so that their felt reciprocal philosophical affinity soon grew into a structured commentary and use of the other’s ideas. Their mounting friendship, far from impeding critical confrontation, represented an occasion for an even more serious study of each other’s positions, so that as a matter of fact their exchanges were rarely free from painstaking examinations of their respective philosophical writings. James dedicated two texts to the analysis and valorization of Bergson’s views, while Bergson, especially after James’ death, had more than once the occasion to come back to his writings and ruminate about their significance. Bergson, in fact, not only welcomed James’ pragmatism in its various articulations, but also spent significant energies in showing how its main tenets and consequences were functional to support some conclusions he himself was seeking to establish through his own work. It would thus be misleading to read Bergson’s endorsement of James’ project as a mere tribute paid to a close friend: what would be missed would in fact be the very possibility to understand his incursions into (and examinations of) such a project as lines of its possible development.

*IV.*

Madelrieux individuates in one of such incursions a key to read the material edited in the volume, inviting at the same time to reflect on the direction that some of the works of the two individual thinkers took as a result of their encounters. From the privileged viewpoint of a profound knowledge of the whole progress of their exchanges, in the *Présentation* he digs even deeper than Bergson in tracing the seeds of his interest and engagement with James, outlining an articulated narrative of such occasions. He writes:

> Deux ouvrages de James, antérieurs au *Pragmatisme*, ont contribué plus que les autres à déterminer la lecture que Bergson en a eue. Le premier est le grand traité de psychologie que James fait paraître en 1890, *The Principles of Psychology*. Il n’est pas étonnant que Bergson rende hommage aux “vues éblouissantes” que James a données de la vie intérieure, puisque la description du courant de conscience coïncide sur bien des points avec celle de la durée vraie qu’il avait présentée dans *Les Données immédiates*... Il est néan-
moins surprenant que jamais il ne rende hommage à un autre versant des Principles : non pas la psychologie introspective des données immédiates de la conscience, mais la psychologie naturaliste des fonctions mentales. Car c’est là qu’on trouverait sans doute l’origine de ce qu’il faut bien appeler un pragmatisme bergsonien, qui n’apparaîtra pleinement que quelques années plus tard avec Matière et mémoire [1896], dans la thèse centrale selon laquelle les fonctions mentales sont essentiellement tournées vers l’action, permettant une meilleure adaptation de l’individu à son environnement. Quoi qu’il en soit de ce silence, le livre de James devait convaincre Bergson que ce psychologue né avait, comme lui-même d’ailleurs, une aptitude unique à circuler parmi les âmes, comme aussi à aller et venir à l’intérieur d’elle-même. Ce don de la vision directe de l’esprit par l’esprit, que Bergson appela intuition, il devait en trouver la confirmation chez James dans un livre ultérieur, The Varieties of Religious Experience [1902]. Ce qui intéresse Bergson dans ce livre...[c’est] plutôt la valeur philosophique des expériences mystiques, [que permettre] de tirer des conclusions sur l’existence probable d’une source surnaturelle de ces états de conscience...C’est dire également l’importance qu’il allait donner aux expériences mystiques dans sa présentation du pragmatisme, pour faire valoir l’existence d’un autre type de vérité que les vérités utilitaires –pragmatiques– de l’intelligence (p. xvii-xviii).

In this longish but seminal quotation Madelrieux makes the case for a precise strategy of enusage de James by Bergson that represents at the very same time an organic defense and valorization of his project. According to this narrative, Bergson drew an interesting path throughout James’ works by connecting together several of its central aspects: namely, a naturalistic psychology of mental functions, a pragmatic approach to (both mental and worldly) reality, and a philosophical rehabilitation of mystical experiences. Being these the three axes along which James articulated his researches (psychology, philosophy and religion), according to Bergson their interplay reveals the overall trajectory and lasting significance of his pragmatic reconstruction in philosophy: namely, a re-evaluation of those provinces of experience that are often voided as spurious and thus removed from the philosophical attention (religious and mystical experiences being prominent among them). James’ assertion according to which ‘it is the re-instatement of the vague [and inarticulate] to its proper place in our mental life which I am so anxious to press on the attention’ acquired for Bergson a metaphysical as well as a moral significance, whose commitment took nothing less than the realization of his own philosophical system. In order to evaluate the soundness of Bergson’s reading of James’ pronouncement and his understanding of its underlying import, as well as the reconstruction of the two offered by Madelrieux, it would be pivotal to investigate at some more depth their main tenets and rationale.

According to this line of inquiry, the cornerstone of James’ larger philosophical project would be his pragmatic conception of truth, that Bergson defends in the Préface to Pragmatism by offering a reading of it that stands in sharp opposition to the negative and often-ludicrous accounts gave by his fellow French commentators. Freeing James’ characteriza-

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4 W. James, The Principles of Psychology [1890], Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983, vol. 1, p. 246. The locus classicus of such program is ch. 9 on The Stream of Consciousness, from which the quotation is borrowed, even if the theme pervades the whole two volumes of the Principles as well as the later writings of James—which in fact can be (and have been) read as explorations of this theme in others philosophical domains. For an articulated treatment of the Jamesian pronouncement, see W. J. Gavin, William James and the Reinstatement of the Vague, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992.

5 Madelrieux includes in the Dossier critique of the volume an extract of a text by Françoise Mentré (p. 139-142) that is representative of the widespread negative reception that pragmatism received in France. For more references to the context of James’ early reception in France, see the Bibliographie spéciale that closes the volume (p. 164-7).
tion of truth from its misconceptions, a task which James himself found demanding when (and if) not appalling, represents in fact the first and foremost step to take in order to set the path of investigation of his work on the right track, and thus re-orientate the overall understanding of his pragmatism. As Madelrieux observes, not only Bergson fiercely rejects the accuses of skepticism and subjective relativism addressed to pragmatism by debunking the alleged jamesian ‘scandalous identification’ of truth with what is merely useful to believe, but also suggests how it is precisely a pragmatic approach to reality that allow us to treat properly those most important moral and spiritual aspects of our lives usually claimed by the detractors of pragmatism as lying beyond any consideration of utility, and thus unaccountable by it. Surprisingly enough the utilitaristic aspect of James’ account of truth, according to which truths helps us coping with reality, becomes the key to analyze such most intimate aspects of our lives, since it would widen and enrich the whole range of our encounters with reality in which they find expression. Once characterized as an approach that not only welcomes but also exalts such personal and spiritual aspects of our lives, pragmatism would thus shrug off from its shoulders the label of a philosophy ‘at the service of profit’ and begin to appear as a genuine thinking that synthesize the best teachings of humanism and spiritualism. Usually resisted as somewhat superficial in its vulgar positivism, in Bergson’s hands pragmatism becomes ‘a doctrine porteuse d’une grande élévation morale’ (p. xxvi, 13).

V.

Far from being a vindication of some narrow theoretical technicality, according to Bergson James’ pragmatic conception of truth unfolds an entire philosophical attitude (p. xxi–xxix). Bergson was in fact one of the first to appreciate the wider significance of James’ conception of truth, reading in his pragmatism much more than a skeptical variety of anti-philosophy. Such an overturning is of deep significance and has many articulations, and Bergson in his Préface explores with remarkable skillfulness one central line of such philosophical move that is of particular interest. By investigating James’ conception of truth and reality, Bergson unravels what according to him are the real philosophical stakes of pragmatism: namely, a version of pluralism with deep leanings toward mysticism. Despite having the form of a generous homage to his cher James, this ambitious reconstruction was far from dispassionate. Bergson in fact stressed those very aspects of James’ pragmatic account of truth that were functional to the defense of his own philosophical project of uniting empiricism and spiritualism. James’ treatment of truth and reality would in fact provide both a refined conceptual tool to investigate such a possibility and a framework that makes hospitable his own philosophical intuitions about the nature of the mind and the world. Bergson’s reading of James would thus be intrinsically intertwined with his use of James, since by advocating pragmatism he would be at the same time backing his own positions. This recurring dynamics may explain the somewhat surprising dialectic of his Préface to Pragmatism, where such an intertwinement takes one its clearer forms.

*A task to which he dedicated five intense years of his life, and whose most evident precipitate is the volume of essays The Meaning of Truth [1909]. As we can tell from the resigned tone of the last few lines of his Preface, hardly often such efforts had been rewarding for James, and likely enough the reading of Bergson’s introductory essay would have mitigated his felt frustration for the ‘inability almost pathetic’ exhibited by some of his contenders ‘to understand the thesis which they seek to refute’ (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975, p. 10).
As Madelrieux notices, the introduction to Pragmatism has in fact a paradoxical character, since instead of presenting the contents of the book Bergson condenses a program for the reading of the entire James’ oeuvre. However, the motives for such a choice are quite straightforward and promptly declared at the very outset of the essay: according to Bergson the misunderstandings of James’ characterization of truth would be due to its having being read in isolation from the whole cluster of concepts presented in his other writings, generating in this way a distortions of its various dictates which lead to the condemnations of its main tenets (p. xxvi-xxvii, 93-4). Only by placing such characterization in a larger background it could be appreciated the richness of James’ account of truth and thus acknowledged its strategic role for the attainment of what Madelrieux calls the ‘spiritual realism’ James –and Bergson after him– were so eager to establish (p. xxxii, 116). Written in 1911, Sur le pragmatisme de William James. Vérité et réalité waives together a great variety of themes taken from different moments of James’ work (particularly his late writings on radical empiricism) and thus canvasses a suggestive overall picture of his pragmatism as an imitated by the interplay between a critique of the image of truth as copying and a companion refutation of a monistic conception of reality. Bergson opens his Préface by contending that it would in fact be erroneous –and hence deceptive– to analyze James’ conception of truth in isolation from his companion characterization of reality, and presents the anti-intellectualistic motif of pragmatism as a consequence of the critique of the concept of experience as either a brute given or a hypostatization of a clear-cut abstract order. What would be missed in such accounts would be the active character of our experiencing and thus the open-ended nature of our practices of truth. Bergson writes

[D]e tout temps on a dit qu’il y a des vérités qui relèvent du sentiment autant que de la raison ; et de tout temps aussi on a dit qu’à côté des vérités que nous trouvons faites il en est d’autres que nous aidons à se faire, qui dépendent en partie de notre volonté. Mais il faut remarquer que, chez James, cette idée prend une force et une signification nouvelles. Elle s’épanouit, grâce à la conception de la réalité qui est propre à ce philosophie, en une théorie générale de la vérité. (p. 6)

Madelrieux registers in Bergson’s text a tripartite characterization of James’ pragmatic approach to both truth and reality as standing in opposition to those deterministic pictures of our life with experience. By disentangling in James’ writings three theses (metaphysical, psychological and epistemological) on the nature of truth and reality Bergson would have shown how pragmatism is mostly apt to account for the indeterminate character of those experiences with which we perpetually engage in our ordinary praxes of worldmaking. Bergson, with James, would in fact be resisting those philosophies which, by pretending to keep thinking pure from life, alienate our expressive possibilities and discipline our most genuine encounters with the world after the needs and dictates of a reason depicted as having no regard for the very pluralistic character of reality (p. 1-6). The will of which James, according to Bergson, speaks is not the purely instrumental will of the human being above reality, but rather it is the energetic will of the human being within reality; it is a will that augments the boundaries of reality by engaging with its wide-ranging contours and not a will that forces its limits by imposing its own alien dictates over it.

It is in this context that Bergson reads in James’ pragmatism a relentless attack to a well-established set of dualisms (rationality-sensibility, reason-will, intelligence-instinct)
deeply rooted in the history of western philosophy\(^7\). Such dualisms would be superseded by the approach of the radical empiricist who is ready to admit the dynamic character of our experiencing and thus welcome those fringe aspects of reality exceeding our current and most celebrated scientific explanations –explanations which both thinkers aimed at enlarging rather than delegitimating. In order to illustrate the wider significance of pragmatism as a kind of pluralism Bergson intertwines James’ radical empiricism with the analysis of religious experiences canvassed in his 1901-2 Gifford Lectures TheVarieties of Religious Experience [1902], which he reads as a defense of the philosophical credentials of religious and mystical experiences. Leaving aside the thorny issue of the relationship between pragmatism and radical empiricism, thorny for James’ scholar but even thornier for Bergson himself due to his rather ambivalent attitude for some aspects of radical empiricism, what is worth noticing is the distinctive legacy Bergson envisions in James’ account of truth. According to this view the truths that religious and mystical experiences convey to those who entertain them are no less grounded than the truths about physical bodies and their laws of gravitation that scientists ascertain through their experiments. As Bergson writes

\[L\]es sentiments puissants qui agitent l’âme à certain moments privilégiés sont des forces aussi réelles que celles dont s’occupe le physicien ; l’homme ne les crée pas plus qu’il ne crée de la chaleur ou de la lumière…Les âmes que remplit l’enthousiasme religieux sont véritablement soulevées et transportées : comment ne nous feraient-elles pas prendre sur le vif, ainsi que dans une expérience scientifique, la force qui transporte et qui soulève ? Là est sans doute l’origine, là est l’idée inspiratrice du “pragmatisme” de William James. Celles des vérités qu’il nous importe le plus de connaître sont, pour lui, des vérités qui ont été senties et vécues avant d’être pensées (p. 5-6).

Bergson reads in this affirmation the center of James’ philosophical vision, and in the second part of his introductory essay (p. 6-13) he presents the details of James’ pragmatic conception of truth underpinning it. Bergson’s emphasis on the pivotal role of truth for the understanding of James’ pragmatism is more than well grounded. In fact it is James himself stating in 1907 (the year Pragmatism went in print) that “the theory of truth is the key to all rest of our positions”\(^8\), and in particular those regarding the understanding of the statue, meaning and scope of moral and religious convictions which, because of their widespread pervasiveness in human affairs and the interest they exerted on him, James so often took as examples to illustrate the very gist of his pragmatism\(^9\). Bergson takes at face value such statement and thus depicts an original account of James’ conception of truth that vindicates its dictates. Madelrieux, in turn, reads in this move the seeds of the marriage of pragmatism

\(^7\) It is nonetheless noteworthy to stress how, as Madelrieux himself notices (xxxvi-xxviii), Bergson in his Préface uses at times a dualistic terminology that is however patently absent in Pragmatism (as well as in James’ other writings), therefore forcing him in the very dualistic dialectic he was resisting by means of his radical empiricism. However, a similar criticism could be raised to Madelrieux’s reconstruction as well, since in more than one passage he indulges in the very same dualistic terminology and dialectic, thereby acting as Bergson’s accomplice —although officially disguised as his commentator (p. xxxi, 111-2, 114-6).


\(^9\) The best exposition of this strategy can be found in the essay “The Pragmatic Method”, published in The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Method in 1904, this text is a distillated of James’ groundbreaking 1898 Philosophical Union of the University of California Address Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results, and in my opinion it should be read as a prolegomena to both Varieties and Pragmatism, due to the clarity with which it depics the way in which religious matters should be approached from the point of view of a pragmatist’s conception of truth as leading.

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(truth) with pluralism (reality-experience). In fact, following such a reconstruction, according to Bergson the conclusions about the pluralistic character of experience and reality at which James would arrive are nothing but a corollary of his pragmatic conception of truth, that in its turn cannot be understood independently from such conclusions.

According to Madelrieux, what makes this a virtuous, rather than a vicious, circle would be Bergson’s characterization of the two axes of pragmatism and pluralism as connected with (and through) the third one of psychologism that Bergson, in his exchanges with Chevalier (p. 47-49, 150-2), calls spiritualism. According to such third axe, whose pith is explored by James in his Principles of Psychology, being our mental constitution built as to form a stream of consciousness in which we subjects of experience are connected in a dynamic and practical way with its very objects, the truths which we predicate would be a function of our very attitude to reality. This anti-spectatorial picture of the mind would represents the backup for the pragmatist picture of truth animating Pragmatism, and reflects the two kinds of truths that Bergson reads in the text: respectively, artificial and spiritual truths (p. 12). Both kinds of truths are grounded in reality, but while the former express our coping with reality with the purpose of achieving some artificial goals, the latter convey our penetration of reality with the purpose of achieving some goals that would exalt its inner and most intimate aspects. Madelrieux suggests to read such a depiction in the light of Bergson’s indication of an analogous and related distinction, this time regarding the kind of access we have to our inner, as defended by James in the Principles. Bergson in fact individuates two different aspects or characterizations of psychological introspection (and of psychological inquiry tout court) pervading James’ earlier and later writings: a scientific-like observation of the adaptation of one’s faculties to the challenges of the environment, and a practical introspection which discloses our openness and engagement with the most spiritual aspects of ourselves and reality. It would be the presence of this latter practical introspection to secure the second type of truths, and thus rescue pragmatism from the charges of brute positivism.

VI.

It is worth pausing on this delicate passage, since from its validity it will depend the soundness of both Bergson’s understanding of the wider significance of James’ conception of truth and Madelrieux’s account of it. I shall briefly advance two orders of considerations, one regarding Bergson’s reading of James while the other regarding Madelrieux’s evaluation of it, pointing to their respective strengths and weaknesses. Beginning with the latters, while agreeing with Madelrieux’s overall articulated reconstruction of Bergson’s interpretation of James’ larger philosophical project, still I think that especially in the second part of his Préface (p. 6-13) Bergson gives us a cutting presentation of some central ideas exposed in Pragmatism, as maybe no other commentator ever did, that do not find a proper presentation in Madelrieux’s reconstruction. Bergson’s account of James’ conception of truth relies on a quantity of assumptions about the meaning and scope of pragmatism that are hardly undisputable, and still the Frenchman had some valuable insights about some of its most neglected aspects. Bergson was in fact among the firsts to appreciate James’ realism, of which he both gave an interesting characterization and pictured as the key to interpret his entire work; still, I disagree with the peculiar use Bergson made of James’ pragmatic conception of truth for the backing of his own (conceptually independent) philosophical project of a metaphysical pluralism, which Madelrieux accurately registers and endorses.
Regarding the strength of Bergson’s reading of Pragmatism, its most interesting and precious insights lie in the characterization of James as a realist about truth (p. 75, 81, 93). Against the tide of criticisms raised against the alleged antirealism embedded in James’ pragmatic refutation of truth as copying, Bergson stresses (and Madelrieux promptly acknowledges) a realistic motif running through the pages of the Préface (and, by Madelrieux, of the entire volume), which would commit James to a version of realism that is however critical of the correspondentist picture of agreement between true judgments and the reality they should account advanced by both scientific and metaphysical realism. As Bergson writes, for James truth is an invention, since the kind of agreement with reality it conveys is a practical one in which truths denote future-oriented leadings into reality that are worth while taking. According to James we in fact invent truths in order to engage with reality and thus, being so, such truths should necessarily be rooted in reality. Quoting Bergson’s paraphrase of James, ‘reality flows; we flow with it; and we call it true any affirmation which, in guiding us through moving reality, gives us a grip upon it and places us under more favorable conditions for acting’. This point, tirelessly stressed by James till his last breath, is used by Bergson to re-evaluate the wider significance of pragmatism for the issues of the philosophical feasibility of such non-scientific truths (and the realities they disclose) as religious ones. However, at this point Bergson makes a step James wouldn’t have taken, since he creates a distinction within reality where James found none. According to James, in fact, all our truths are inventions and thus work in this way, and the distinctions we might be interested in making between different emphasis and nuances among different truth-judgments (and thus experiences) are themselves the outcome of our interests, and not derived from the properties of the very ‘parcel of reality’ as it might be seen from a view from nowhere. The active character of our stance toward reality governing our practices of truth causes all our encounters with the world being practical and inventive, and its various articulations mark no metaphysical, but only practical, possibilities within experience.

James’ pragmatism could thus be labeled as a practical realism, its principle being, again with the words of Bergson, that ‘the true does not copy something which has been or which is: it announces what will be, or rather it prepares our action upon what is going to be. Philosophy has a natural tendency to have truth look backward: for James it looks ahead’. This principle is of the utmost practical importance, since ‘our grammar would have been different, the articulation of our thought would have been other than what they are, had humanity in the course of its evolution preferred to adopt hypothesis of other kinds’. Such quotations invite us to beware of the by-now customary charges of relativism, and rethink pragmatism as a version of realism alternative to both the copy-theory and metaphysical realism. This lesson, a variant of which was championed by Aristotle – or at least by some of his twentieth century readers –, should be handled with care, at risk of charging James with more than he himself envisioned for it and thus turning pragmatism into yet another metaphysical option that instead he was so keen to resist. Bergson, because of exigencies internal to his own philosophical system, turned James into a religious mystic by reading a metaphysical dichotomy where in his writings there was (only) a pragmatic distinction.

How (and why) Bergson does that is well depicted by Madelrieux, who accounts with great detail the seeds of such reading that he finds both appropriate and promising. Bergson reads in the Principles the conceptual seeds of a spiritualism claiming for a direct form of access to those spiritual realities animating experience through both a ‘practical introspection’ and a ‘telepathic sympathy’ that would put us in contact respectively with both ours
fellow spirits and superiors ones. Accordingly to this reading, by picturing our mental functions as disclosing a Conscience supérieure governing the possibility of both the individuation of and the communication between souls James would have established a strong case for the possibility of a panspsychist account of reality. This way of uniting spiritualism and psychological descriptions, that Bergson articulated and developed in his own writings, seems to be suggested by James himself in some of his eclectic studies on the so-called ‘Exceptional Mental States’\textsuperscript{10}, surfacing in many of his later writings as well. However, we might read the investigations of those mental states other than ordinary as simply unusual stances one might take on experience so to envision disregarded and distinctive possibilities of action, where for ordinary ones James would have classified those states of mind generating experiences that would raise no question about their justification of evidences (like those science uses to offer us). For James in fact spiritual energies or mystical experiences are valuable to postulate not because they allow us securing a more authentic contact with reality, but rather because they disclose and make us available genuine practical possibilities. That being so, their pragmatic value is of no categorical difference than those of what we usually call ordinary ones, and it can always be the case that what was considered at one stage a spiritual and exceptional truth might suddenly enter the vocabulary of the ordinary – and maybe even of the sciences –, or the other way around (as the history of ideas suggests).

Bergson’s characterization of James as a pluralistic mystic thus stands in tension with a more viable image of his pragmatism as a wide naturalism: as James writes both in Pragmatism and in Varieties at greater length (lectures II and XX), religious experiences, instead of revealing another dimension of being, would be nothing but a living practical affair whose truths calls for a kind of engagement that is distinctive and compelling for those whose life is enlightened by them. James is neither arguing for the existence of two (or more) realities and hence of a (some) dichotomy(ies) within experience, nor trying to order them axiologically; rather, he is voicing a felt discomfort about the philosophical shrinkage of some provinces of experience at the expense of others. However, by opening the world indefinitely, and characterizing truth as standing for the various dynamic stances we might take toward reality, James was resisting precisely the temptation to advance any closed list of truths to which human beings ought to respond at pains of being lacking subjects of experience. A pragmatist progress would rather encourage us to explore ourselves those possibilities of experiencing that would fit at best our practical necessities without sublimating them into any higher region of being, thus violating the pragmatic maxim itself according to which the difference that makes a difference, instead of being univocal and theoretical, is always perspectival to, and practical for, those who are sensitive to it.

VII.

An alternative (although intertwined) path to the one sketched in the previous pages along which investigating Bergson’s engagement with James, and thus assess the contents of the volume, is the theme of the relationship between biography and philosophy. Such a theme, pervasive as it is in both James and Bergson, finds an interesting articulation in their fashioning a philosophical friendship lasting eight years and a number of intense encounters, both live and written. Although I can merely point toward it, since its exhaustive examination would take as much space as the one already employed to sketch the one line ac-

\textsuperscript{10} See E. Taylor, William James on Exceptional Mental States: The 1896 Lowell Lectures, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984. For a detailed discussion of this aspect of James’ work, see S. Madelrieux, L’attitude empiriste, cit., ch. 8-9).
tually chosen to pursue, such a path represents a very promising one due to the richness of its possible articulations. Its developments would have interested the commentary of those texts included in the volume where the theme of philosophical friendship surfaces in one of its multiple forms. The two major lines along which to articulate such an alternative investigation would be the philosophical characterization of the possibility to communicate intimate experiences –where such a communication is presented by Bergson as itself an experience of a spiritual kind–, and the description of such possibility as a practical challenge in which what is at stake is the capacity to establish a community of virtues between peers. Madelrieux explores aspects of such inquiries and presents some passages of their correspondence as illustrations of the intertwinement between a philosophical theorization of such concepts and their actual realization in a flesh-and-blood philosophical friendship (p. xix, 37-43, 53-58).

As it has surfaced in section 3 of the present essay review, the two philosophers engaged in an intense reciprocal scrutiny and exploration whose dynamics embodies—and at the same time puts on test—their respective philosophical conceptions about the unavoidable active and practical character of our encounters with the world and hence with the other fellow souls inhabiting it. Hardly any description could convey a better image of such a relationship, philosophical and intimate, than the words Bergson wrote to his student Chevalier, who in his turn canvassed a compelling portrait of his mentor’s engagement with James in an essay written in occasion of the tricentennial of the foundation of Harvard University. Bergson writes

[V]ous montrez comment deux esprit partis de points différents, ayant suivi des chemins différents, doivent se rencontrer s’ils marchent l’un et l’autre dans la direction de la vérité (p. 45).

What is remarkable to stress is the very notion of heading dans ladirection de la vérité: if, as James wrote (and Bergson subscribed), truth is ‘one species of good, and not, as is usually supposed, a category distinct from good and co-ordinate with it’11, than such deux esprit were proceeding a path that was worth while taking and exploring. A path at which us, their heirs and scholars, should look with extreme attention in our own philosophical as well as non-philosophical journeys.

VIII.

The volume reviewed represents a precious tool for scholars of nineteenth and twentieth-century philosophy. The quality of its contents and the feature of their arrangement will be in fact of exceptional value for those interested in understanding such a seminal passage of the history of philosophy (and culture). Sur le pragmatisme de William James is a newbook by Bergson, and as such us his contemporary readers should be grateful to the editor for his attentive and resourceful work. Forcing the temporal categories even further, had James the possibility of reading it he would have appreciated the thrilling intellectual activity generated by his encounter with Bergson, and, likely enough, he would have been as much fascinated as challenged by such a variety of possible interpretations of his own work.

References


Madelrieux S. (2008), *L’attitude empiriste*, Paris, PUF.


Until Process and Reality – An Essay in Cosmology (1929) by Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) was translated into Portuguese, four other works\(^1\) had been previously translated, proving Portuguese people had a persistent interest in the thought of a philosopher who is probably the last and most important speculative thinker of the 20th century. Yet, Processo e Realidade – Ensaiio de Cosmologia hopefully stands as a turning point in Whiteheadian reception in Portugal; on the hand, it was published by the Centre for Philosophy of the University of Lisbon, and on the other, the translator, Maria Teresa Teixeira, got her PhD with a dissertation on Whitehead\(^2\). A scholarly context of this kind meets the challenge of the endeavour, since Process and Reality is indeed from various angles a unique work.

This work has often and rightly been singled out for its extraordinary speculative nature, which went strongly against the mainstream when it came out, at a time when speculative proposals received the scathing criticism. But what is even more significant for the task of translation is the fact that not only were there two original editions in 1929, one in the USA (Macmillan) and the other in England (Cambridge), but once confronted and collated, there are over three hundred points of divergence. Together, with the problems posited by the chapter structure and the general architectural frame of the work, not to mention Whitehead’s idiosyncratic terminology, it is understandable how these circumstances can partly account for the adverse reception in the philosophical world ranging from misinterpretation to harsh criticism. Finally, in 1978, David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne re-edited Process and Reality; by means of a re-arrangement of the original text, supplemented by twenty-two pages of corrections and notes to the two 1929 editions, they provided the scientific community with a trustworthy research tool, which was used as source text for the present translation\(^3\). As a result, fifty years after the first editions, readers and scholars were able to proceed with their task of reading the work imbued with the feeling that the text is free of slips and errors and faithful to Whitehead’s thought. This situation allowed for the reliable building up of different approaches to this work. The Portuguese translation, Processo e Realidade, naturally includes the analytical index of the 1978 edition, adding the

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\(^2\) The title of the dissertation is Ser, Devir e Perecer A Criatividade na Filosofia de Whitehead.

page number of the first 1929 editions to the page number of the 1978 edition, thus making the reader straightforwardly aware of the complexity of the tasks involved in the re-edition of the work and also in the translation, as well as raising the reader’s alertness to the successive variations, developments and uses of concepts along the work.

Moreover, it draws immediate attention to what is unanimously considered (and often taken as the major reason for criticism) the hardest obstacle when it comes to reading, understanding and interpreting Whitehead — his language. As Maria Teresa Teixeira points out in her introduction, “for Whitehead, language is an inexhaustible source from which new meanings flow; it does not really matter whether the new meanings are forced meanings. What is important is to discover those words that can help us pursue our ‘adventures of ideas’, in a new way”4. In truth, neologisms (e.g., “superject”, “categorical”) and the creation of further meanings to ordinary words (contrast may be used to mean harmony) are combined with an obscure style that leaves behind the traditional concise and clear style of the English language, marked as it is by long sentences and jolted paragraphs where punctuation emulates the creativeness depicted in terminology. In her introduction, Maria Teresa Teixeira gives a detailed account of the language features particular to this text, providing a good number of examples, thus leaving the actual text free of translation notes. Almost needless to say, such an option is based on a solid knowledge not only of Process and Reality, but also of the bulk of the philosopher’s production, since the notion of process chosen for the title is used along the whole text side by side with the “philosophy of the organism”, the expression used to denote the quintessence of Whiteheadian thought, which incidentally was pondered as subtitle to Process and Reality.

The general tone of the introduction intends to show how the conceptual world of Whitehead evolves in this particular text, and not one of exploring interpretive issues, thus giving freedom to the reader to follow his or her ‘adventure of ideas’. Beginning with ‘pure feeling’, it is with pleasure that one reads this translation; the language is fluent and incorporates in a natural way by reproduction or adaptation the neologisms and language work of the author. Although, the translator’s choices as in any other translation may risk subsequent discussion. In fact, in translating, especially in the case of Whitehead, if one sticks to the practice of literality, the truth is that this practice may often contribute to invest a new sense to meanings that are otherwise already well rooted, especially, as it is the case, when the core of interpretative voices is itself far from being stable, and even less in agreement with what concerns the richness but also the ambiguity of Whitehead’s thought, and also of his language. In her introduction, the translator gives a detailed account of several instances that depart from the principle of literality, examples that can be divided into two large groups: one group includes coupled terms that would lose the contrast of meaning they hold in English if translated by cognate terms in Portuguese (aversion/adversion is thus rendered as aversão/inclinação); and another group that consists of non-stipulated words in English, that is, words created from anew by Whitehead, whose reduplication is not feasible within the specificities of a Romance language.

We salute the present translation Processo e Realidade as a decisive landmark not only in Whitehead’s studies, but also in the practice of translation of philosophical texts. Furthermore, taking into account the research context of this translation, it will hopefully congregate efforts to re-launch Whiteheadian studies in the Portuguese speaking world, and to open his thought to a more widespread interest on the part of the reading public.
