

Interview with Charlene Haddock Seigfried

What did you know about Pragmatism when you started? Where did you start as a student?

I came to pragmatism by way of existentialism. During the late sixties, I took my first graduate class at the University of Southern California – an introduction to empiricism – which I didn’t like at all, and I also attended a lecture on existentialism, which intrigued me. But I was always interested in social and political issues and I was missing that in existentialism. My next course was at the University of San Francisco, where John McDermott was teaching a summer school course. McDermott had just finished his *Writings of William James*, and he taught from the manuscript, so I got this wonderful introduction to James and I thought “Wow! There’s a lot going on here!” When he had corrected my final paper, he came at the end of the class and threw it on my desk and said: “What’s wrong with you?! You have the best paper and you have never said a word in class!” I answered that the other students – all guys –, who were always speaking out, knew what they were talking about and I didn’t know anything about James and he said “They were just bullshitting; they didn’t know anything.” So that was my introduction to him and to American philosophy!

While in San Francisco, I had time to get acquainted with the counter-culture scene in Haight-Ashbury and visited a free clinic which was trying to deal with the influx of psychedelic drug overdoses. At the time, I was teaching high-school in Eureka, California, and some of my students were going down to Berkeley and getting involved in demonstrations. I asked McDermott where I could go to study both existentialism, which seemed so life-transforming, and American philosophy, and he said Yale, Northwestern, or Loyola University, where he had a friend. I was accepted at all three, but went to Loyola University in Chicago because they offered me a full-ride fellowship.

As it turned out, the only course taught on pragmatism was one on John Dewey and the professor would just assign texts and ask us what we thought about them. In my final paper I used Dewey’s *Art as Experience* to riff on Simon and Garfunkle’s music, driving all the way across Chicago to find an album of theirs (recollecting this later kept me from judging my student’s first efforts too harshly). So, basically I taught myself American Philosophy. I just read a lot, except that I had the benefit of approaching pragmatism through classes and discussions with Hans Seigfried, who introduced me to the mind-expanding German tradition of Kant, Marx, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. I liked Dewey a lot because of the way he grounded philosophy so thoroughly in everyday life, but my first love was James. I was already involved with feminist issues and actions and found his approach helpful and his style of writing liberating. I wrote my dissertation on James and the reality of relations and later wrote on Dewey and Jane Addams as my interests developed further.

Would you consider Dewey, James and Addams as a sort of basic scheme to your evolution to pragmatism?

From the beginning I liked their personal appeal, and because my undergraduate major was in literature, I loved good writers. My favorite graduate course was one on

Nietzsche taught by Hans, so I got a really good insight from the very beginning into European views of philosophy along with the pragmatist view. American philosophy was generally understood in a very insular way. All the well-known scholars I was reading emphasized its American roots, going back to the Puritans. This approach owed a lot to Emerson's call to look to nature for inspiration. More precisely, the argument in all the books I was reading was that pragmatism was a home-grown philosophy. But where did the pragmatists get their philosophical background from if not from European thinkers? They were knowledgeable about the latest developments in Western philosophy and had many correspondents and other contacts with European scholars. The emphasis on pragmatism's local roots is understandable, though, as part of the effort to emphasize that American scholars were doing something original and were not just a colonial backwater. It was also a way to rebut the growing hegemony of analytic philosophy and its denial of the historical context of its assumptions.

An early exception to this isolating trend was H. S. Thayer's critical history of pragmatism, *Meaning and Action*, which opened with three chapters on the European roots of American pragmatism. Yes, I thought, finally someone got it right! It was the first book that I'd read that confirmed my suspicions that you have to look at a broader context.

When I was writing about James, I went to the archive of his work at Harvard University. It was thought at the time that Nietzsche had not influenced him, but I recognized Nietzschean themes in James, so I wondered if he had ever read Nietzsche. I found out that he carried around one of Nietzsche's books while he was traveling in Germany, but I don't recall now which one. In one of the boxes of material that was not yet indexed I also found an article about Nietzsche that was annotated by James! They wouldn't let you type in the archives at the time, or write in ink, so I had to write my notes in pencil. I intended to write the first article on James and Nietzsche, but after I returned home, I could never find these notes. The relationship between James and Nietzsche was only written about by others many years later. So, you see how the ideas of philosophers depend on accident and chance, and not only on rational thought. James would have enjoyed that!

So for you pragmatism came out when the other possible ways were unsatisfactory?

For me pragmatism came out of the powerful idea that philosophy is more than abstract thinking – it is something that you became and did. As I said, this first struck me in existentialism and became deeper and more powerful in pragmatism. I've tried to connect life and action in all my writings, beginning with the twin revelations of feminism and the anti-war radicalization of the Vietnam War. I wanted more thoughtful practical arguments for why people should get engaged. I found these deep connections, beginning in James because of McDermott, and then when I was at Loyola and began reading Dewey. Later, it was a wonderful discovery to find that in her life, work, and writings, Addams brought all these interests together.

At that time, which was your perception of pragmatism?

I went to my first APA meeting in 1968 as a first-year graduate student. All the papers, as far as I could tell, were analytic versions of philosophy. I was ready to quit philosophy because I thought that if that's what philosophy was, it had nothing to do with what I was interested in. What had I gotten myself into? I didn't understand the technical terms being used, I didn't like the kind of arguments being given, I didn't care for the subject matter, and the negative tone of the commentaries and questions was distasteful. I thought it was awful. Then I found out about the SAAP meetings.

I was still a graduate student when I attended my first SAAP meeting along with Hans. He was surprised that so many papers were historical, dealing with obscure 18th and 19th century figures. I had a different view of the society, probably because – unlike the larger philosophical scene where women were scarce – the members were so welcoming and supportive. Their responses to papers were constructive and friendly, but scholarly and rigorous at the same time. They exhibited a social consciousness and worked at making young people feel they had a contribution to make. The meetings were a pleasant relief from the usual philosophical scene, and I'll always be grateful for that. Many thoughtful and carefully researched papers also contributed to my continuing education in pragmatism and provided a space to share ideas and hone my skills and knowledge of the field. My early papers were on James and got a very good reception. Having a knowledgeable audience made all the difference.

Do you think this reception was important for your research?

To see why this reception was so important, it's helpful to convey something of my experiences outside the society. I received my doctoral degree in 1973 and my son, Karl, was born shortly after. I taught part-time for five years at three different universities and was a post-doctoral fellow the last year. No one would hire me full-time because I was a woman and I was married. So for five years I was teaching like mad and I was trying to write, but I couldn't get hired in a tenure-track position. The first year, I was the only graduate student from Loyola at the Eastern Division APA meeting and I was looking for a job. I wasn't getting any interviews, though, and I thought: "That's odd!" In those days you put your name in folders of the colleges and universities with openings you were interested in and they would post the names of the candidates they wanted to interview. When I didn't appear on any of the lists, I asked one of the interviewers why, and he said, "Oh, I have this list of Loyola's best graduate students and your name isn't on it." I said "What?! I'm the only graduate student here from Loyola and the only one from there actively applying for a job, I have excellent grades, I'm the only one of the graduate students that has given a paper at an APA meeting, and the only one that has published, why is my name not on the list? When I returned to the university, I was furious, and I asked my chairman whether I was one of their best graduate students and he said, "Of course!" And then I said, "Why wasn't I on the list, then? Didn't you know I am looking for a job?" He said "Oh, well, since you had a baby, I didn't think you'd be interested in a job." He had

never consulted me about it but just assumed that, like all the other women he knew, I'd naturally want to stay home. Then he said, "But anyway, it's just a list," as if not being on it wouldn't have negative effects for me. Unfortunately, his position wasn't an anomaly. I heard variations of these beliefs from those who interviewed me for jobs over the years before I was hired in a tenure track position at Purdue University. (By that time, unlike the other candidates for an opening assistant professor position, I had already published my first book.) The interviewers always downplayed the importance of a professional career for a woman and told me I should be happy to have a part-time position. These were the early years before any affirmative action or non-discrimination policies were in place.

Since I thought that philosophy should involve social transformation, the name of the society struck me from the first: The Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy. They had a mission, and their mission was to rescue American philosophy from the overwhelming influence of analytic philosophers who thought history was bunk. So they were going to prove that philosophy was more than pure theory construction and that it didn't operate in a vacuum. So far, so good. But it often seemed as though the history was too backward-looking, mining minute details of American thinkers simply because they were there and not because they were thought worth reviving because of what they could contribute to pressing contemporary issues. Along with many excellent papers on what were called "classical American philosophers," there seemed to be an underlying assumption favoring an historicist rather than a contextually relevant approach.

Did you give a different twist to your historical work?

My second book on James was an attempt to resolve the many contradictions in his writings that I was encountering and that were often remarked on by other scholars. It bothered me that the most characteristic philosophic breakthroughs that James was known for were often taken back a few pages later! He talked about the fringe of relations and the selective interests through which we construct objects, for example, but then he would appeal to undeniable facts of experience. He was an original and persuasive thinker, so why was he doing this? It didn't make any sense. The usual way to resolve these discordances was to read selectively, emphasizing the positions that made the most sense to whomever was writing and ignoring or discarding the others. I wanted to take a more comprehensive approach and develop James's thought from beginning to end.

At the time, the categories pragmatists were using in their analyses were very rigid. Strict distinctions were made between the *Principles of Psychology*, which was considered a work in psychology, and his properly philosophical books, such as *The Will to Believe*, *Pragmatism*, and *The Meaning of Truth*. Even *The Varieties of Religious Experience* was an outlier. By beginning with James's earliest works, which predated even *Principles*, and reading straight through to his last works, including even his *Essays in Psychical Research*, a more consistent and creative James emerges, one that demolishes the strict distinctions that were distorting his thought. But the

contradictions didn't disappear. Only by reading James on two levels could I make sense of this puzzle. James was a transitional figure, with vestiges of old ways of thinking remaining to trip him up even as he was working his way out of them. So I tried to reconstruct what his intentions were – as disclosed in his writings – and set alongside of this reading another one. The second level entailed using the deconstructive force of his new insights and formulations to follow what was being created. While the first one lays out the twists and turns James was struggling with, first seeing and then losing sight of the breakthroughs he was making, the second one looks back at his original accomplishments from our own later understanding of them, as Dewey did, and demonstrate how they fit together.

By including *Principles* as part of his philosophical work, many otherwise obscure or contradictory aspects of James became clearer. As I read it, I said “Oh my god, *Principles* is a phenomenology!” It was not the exercise in natural science it was thought to be. But when I told others about my discovery, they said “It can't be, he never even uses the word phenomenology.” Then I said “Look at the text. Phenomenon, phenomena – the words are all over the place!” More substantively, the whole work is a demonstration of the role of intentionality, which James called ‘selective interest.’ In his later writings, where he often claims to begin a lecture or explanation randomly, you can then realize that he is being very deliberate, because he is presupposing the phenomenological findings and hermeneutical method already developed in *Principles*. And then the question was: should we continue to use old words to describe pragmatic theory, such as empiricism versus idealism and metaphysics versus reductionism, because of their traditional meanings, or should we put new wine in new bottles? I opted for new terms taken from the pragmatists' own words, such as ‘full fact’ instead of ‘object’ and ‘concreteness’ instead of ‘the given.’ This approach avoids the needless misunderstanding caused by trying to fit new theory into old categories and encourages reading what the pragmatists are saying in context, rather than assuming we already know what their words mean because of the way earlier philosophers have used them.

Do you think that your reading of James is your major contribution to the development of the history of this American philosophy?

We've been talking about my early years in which James played a prominent part. First of all, I did want to be the one who reset James, which was a challenge because Gerald Meyers had produced a much lauded, comprehensive book on James's philosophy a few years before. He also realized that James was better understood in the total context of all his writings and he took up many of the issues I was interested in. The bar was set very high. But his approach was very different from mine, since he was interested in interpreting James's philosophy of mind from an analytic perspective and I was interested in reworking James from within the pragmatist tradition. But, secondly, I continued to explore Dewey's philosophy and lately Jane Addams's. I've not been a public philosopher in the way both Dewey and Addams were, although I continue to speak out about contemporary injustices in my work and to lecture and

publish in other disciplines. This speaks to a widening interest in what pragmatism has to offer, but also means that many of my lectures and writings are not found in philosophy journals.

Which of my various interests is my major contribution, if any, is for posterity to say. It's as futile for me to speculate on it as it is for those who designate some beloved object as an heirloom, when something only becomes an heirloom over time insofar as descendants value it and continue to cherish it for reasons of their own.

After your reading of James did you find what you were looking for in the political side?

Oh no, James has disappointed me socially and politically, although he has some good things to say. I think there are some helpful ideas you can get from him. In fact, I wrote a chapter about James's feminism in my *Pragmatism and Feminism*. People think that because I was critical I thought he shouldn't be read, but I didn't mean to say or imply that. What I said was that you have to separate out what's useful for feminist insights and what's mistaken or is no longer useful. In fact, recognizing James's masculinist biases increases our ability to read critically the hidden biases of many other texts we study. Because Dewey and Addams are more socially progressive doesn't mean that James doesn't still have a lot to offer. The trouble with radicalism, in contrast to pragmatism, is connected to the problem of purity, namely, the presumption that we must reject all the work of anyone who held anything not in total agreement with whatever current beliefs are held to be true. And that's ridiculous, that's presentism, and it doesn't allow for the incremental nature of human understanding. Nor does it recognize pluralism, the belief that there are many different perspectives on what is happening and various ways to work toward a better future. Multiple perspectives don't make it easier to resolve problems for the better of all, but they make it more likely that the resolutions arrived at will be more inclusive and take into consideration more aspects of situations. Addams develops this idea both theoretically and practically.

Was feminism already there in your philosophical concerns in the seventies, or did it come out only later?

I came of age before feminism had much of a presence in academia, but this gave me the opportunity to be part of its development. When I started teaching, there were no feminist texts; they had to be created. Women's Studies departments were just being established in some colleges and universities (I was the graduate student representative for setting one up at Loyola). When applying for tenure, I could not put on my vita for promotion anything I had written on feminism, which wasn't considered philosophical. That meant that half my research wasn't counted. I was also at a disadvantage with my pragmatist publications because pragmatism wasn't taken seriously. So, did I have any real philosophy? Because it took me five years to land a tenure track position, and that gave me more time to build a publication record, I was

told that I would not be given the usual five years to develop a promotion document and would be brought up in two years. In later years it was illegal to shorten the time in this way. Even when I was going to apply for promotion to full professor, the chairman pulled me aside and said that a professor in analytic philosophy was also going to apply, but I had such a strong vita, it would lessen his chances. Would I mind waiting another year, so that he wouldn't have any competition? No thought was given to his waiting. When I was brought up a year later, the chairman of the university committee on promotions asked why my department had waited so long to propose me for promotion.

Would you describe yourself as a pragmatist or an American philosopher?

Earlier, I would have said I'm an American philosopher because in our curricular format, and also in the APA listing of areas of specializations, there was a history category they could slot me in. Pragmatism was considered a subset of American Philosophy, even in SAAP, because they wanted their focus to be much broader. The accepted areas of specialization included metaphysics, epistemology, social and political, ethics, logic, history of philosophy, and aesthetics. Since my area was pragmatist philosophy, which encompassed all the above, it was frustrating to have to choose only one, especially since I taught and published in most of these areas from a pragmatist perspective. The problem was the same with feminist philosophy, which is also a particular perspective, but analyzes a whole range of subject matter.

In my presidential address at SAAP in 1998, I argued that instead of pragmatism being a subset of American philosophy, American philosophy was a subset of pragmatism! My thesis in "Advancing American Philosophy" was that all the characteristics used to identify which versions of philosophy being done in America constituted 'American Philosophy,' were pragmatic ones, which were read back into earlier writers. I found this out by surveying prominent books on American philosophy and realizing that the core conceptions they attributed to the people and positions included were all derived from the late 19th and early 20th century pragmatism of Peirce, James, and Dewey. Can you imagine how popular my suggestion was?! Peter Hare, as editor of the *Transactions of the C. S. Peirce Society*, asked to publish my paper because he wanted to provide a forum for discussing what constituted the Americanness of American Philosophy. He said he would call for responses and give me a chance to answer them. But only one person bothered to engage the issue. Only some time later were some interesting books published that developed different criteria, such as Scott Pratt's *Native Pragmatism: Rethinking the Roots of American Philosophy*.

I also criticized the notion of "American exceptionalism" and said that explicitly labeling what we were doing as American philosophy rather than pragmatism would not encourage its continued international development. Why would anyone in France or China want to do American philosophy? But anyone can become interested in pragmatist philosophy and make their own contributions to it.

So, yes, I'm a pragmatist.

Nowadays it is difficult for people working in pragmatism to be acknowledged also because they refuse categorizations.

When I attended feminist meetings over forty years ago, I heard many criticisms of philosophy that ignored women's issues and belittled women and alternative theories were proposed, usually from European perspectives, such as Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. Invariably, during the question period, I would point out that "There's a philosophy that's already doing what you're calling for! It's American Philosophy!" They usually looked puzzled and said that American feminists didn't produce any theory. Then I went to SAAP meetings and would talk to various philosophers about feminist theory, and was told that feminism was negative and had nothing positive to offer. After many years of giving papers on pragmatism at SAAP and on feminism at feminist conferences, I decided it was time to give a pragmatist feminist paper at both the Society for Women in Philosophy and at SAAP.

It was 1990, and I challenged the absence of any version of pragmatist feminism in either society with a paper given at both that asked "Where are All the Pragmatic Feminists?" Although it was scheduled as one of the many simultaneous papers at SAAP, it was moved to the auditorium. I was looking forward to showing that American philosophy has a great contribution to make to feminist philosophy and vice versa. I was upbeat because I was saying, "look what great insights into theories and practices feminists have given us. We can understand each other because basically both sides believe that everyone experiences the world from their own perspectives and women's experiences are part of this pluralistic world." Afterwards, I asked, as usual, "Any questions?" Dead silence. Again, "Any questions?" Dead silence. So I thought, "What is going on here? They should be full of questions because they had not heard anything like this before." In trying to puzzle out why the paper had been received so coldly, I thought of the fact that the audience was mostly made up of men who had very little firsthand knowledge of feminist theory. They seemed to lump feminists in with other radical groups and assumed that feminism must be an enemy of pragmatism because it couldn't be inclusive. At the time, I was beginning to work on papers that would eventually lead to *Pragmatism and Feminism*, which wasn't published until 1996. I was still ignorant of whether there was a history of feminism in pragmatism. In the book I would test the hypothesis that either the original pragmatists had no women students, which was likely in those days, or if they did, at least some of those women would have written on their lives as women and developed a version of feminism. This conclusion was based on the fact that pragmatism focuses on lived experience.

Since I didn't know which side of the hypothesis was correct, I had to do my own research outside the usual philosophical sources. This meant going behind the scenes into archival material, class notes, records of disciplinary meetings, correspondence, etc. That's why my book was organized into two halves. The first half involved a recovery of women with some connection to pragmatist philosophy and finding out whether they did theorize about their experiences as women. So this first half was one of discovery. In the second half I began questioning the traditionally recognized pragmatists from a feminist perspective and developing a theory of feminist

pragmatism. I also discovered Jane Addams and began to realize how much she had to offer pragmatism.

Along with the initial disquieting reception of my earlier 1990 paper, I also received a more positive response from the women in SAAP, especially the younger women. We decided that we needed to support one another. Since there had been few feminist papers accepted on the SAAP conference over the years, we decided to sponsor them ourselves. We decided to have a lunch meeting each year where we could present and discuss feminist papers. These were popular and there were always men as well as women participating. Eventually, it was called the Jane Club. Over the following years, more younger men and women joined SAAP who were interested in feminism, anti-racism, and multi-culturalism. The program committee began accepting more feminist papers in the general program and women and men with progressive agendas have been voted onto into the various committees and have become officers of the society. The need for a separate meeting space has lessened as the society has transformed itself.

Is not there a missing link to John Dewey if we think of your original interest in social and political issues?

Not really, I don't have a specific book on Dewey, but I do have many articles and chapters on him. I also edited *Feminist Interpretations of John Dewey*. He truly reconstructed philosophy, and many of my articles, not only my social and political ones, have a Deweyan basis. Perhaps the difficulty in recognizing this is that I have enough articles for another book on feminism and another one on James, as well as one on Dewey, but I don't have the time to organize them. I'm more interested in my next paper. Anyway, Dewey has always been very powerful for me in terms of his social and political thought, and I've always used him when I wrote on contemporary topics. In fact, his influence is apparent whenever I publish on what's bothering me at the time, like when America first invaded Iraq and when Supreme Court justice Sonia Sotomayer's 'Wise Latina Woman' standard was ridiculed. I use Dewey because I still think he speaks to contemporary issues.

Don't forget my anti-metaphysical Dewey interpretation is still controversial. There are a couple reasons for this. One is that because pragmatism survived longer in Catholic schools than elsewhere, when it was revived there was a generation of Dewey scholars who read him through scholastic and Aristotelian lenses. This perspective was passed on to their students. Another reason is that American philosophers wanted to challenge the anti-metaphysical, positivist bias of analytic philosophy. Phenomenology and hermeneutics as a middle ground or alternative was not an option. Again, it's a question of reading Dewey back into traditional categories rather than paying attention to his development and breaks with the past. But Dewey's naturalism and instrumentalism replace metaphysics. As I point out in "Ghosts Walking Underground: Dewey's Vanishing Metaphysics," he's the one who compared metaphysics to ghosts.

When you started working in feminism did you feel that people with a pragmatist background were marginalized from feminists?

Even when I started, feminists like Phyllis Rooney, Jane Duran, Sandra Harding and a few others knew enough about pragmatism to bring it into their discussions, but other people didn't pick up on it much. When I reached out, there was interest and even follow-up, but no continuing dialogue. I did edit a special issue on "Feminism and Pragmatism" for the feminist journal, *Hypatia*, which included an article by Richard Rorty. I am also one of the eight contemporary "feminist perspectives" included in Mary Briody Mahowald's anthology, *Philosophy of Woman*, along with an excerpt from Jane Addams. Over the years, I've addressed issues other feminists were writing about, such as the ethics of care, feminist epistemology, and feminist philosophy of science. Although I offered a different perspective and called into question some of the premises that were being held, such as the strict separation between care and justice, these didn't make much impression until later when these same criticisms were made by others outside the pragmatist tradition. More recently, writings on Jane Addams's philosophy by me and other pragmatists have made the most impression, both within and outside of philosophy. Instead of being marginalized, it's been on the cutting-edge.

What about today? How do you see the future of pragmatism?

I'm very thrilled about its future. I never thought when I began working in pragmatism that there would be so much interest in it in so many countries. A lot of this is due to the tireless work of Larry Hickman in establishing so many Dewey Centers around the world. I've been surprised at how many students, both in the United States and abroad, have discovered pragmatism on their own and have found it so appealing that they've decided to major in it, even without anyone in their home universities being able to direct them.

I deliberately cribbed from Dewey in calling my second book *William James's Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy* because James was very aware that he meant to revolutionize philosophy. Someone once said to me: "You mean Charlene's radical reconstruction of philosophy?" and I said "No, no!" Of course it is my interpretation of James, but I wanted to understand his philosophy on his own terms as well as to bring out how imaginative and ground-breaking it was. But the problem in seeing James clearly has been that his writing is not so much an *inter-disciplinary* project as a *pre-disciplinary* one. He didn't have to confine his work within the narrow boundaries used to define philosophy today. Psychology, mysticism, religion, literature, art, science, truth and verification, but also argument by metaphor, subjectivity as part of objectivity, overcoming nihilism – he could go wherever his interests took him.

You cannot do that today because people in different disciplines don't talk to each other! The engines of change driving strong disciplinary boundaries were professionalization and specialization. We can't go back to pre-disciplinary ways of thinking; we can only go forward. By focusing on the problems besetting us today, it has become plain that they need to be approached from many sides, with many

different methodologies, interests, and values if we are to have any chance of lasting and worthwhile success and this has been the spur to inter-disciplinary studies. Pragmatism has embodied this approach from the beginning, which is one reason it continues to attract people.

Talking about ‘pragmatism outside the academia,’ do you see the possibility that philosophers involve themselves in extra academic activities today?

Well, that’s the whole point of thinking according to Dewey. We reflect whenever we encounter obstacles to our usual way of doing something or to making sense of it. And I’ve talked a lot about this to my graduate students, once they realize that pragmatism encourages active engagement in real world issues as the goal of philosophy. They then wonder, “What is the use of studying?” The answer is that they first need to develop the tools necessary to develop worth-while goals and to be effective. We have to question our own assumptions and beliefs and learn how social institutions and practices too often work for the benefit of a privileged few rather than fostering inclusion and fairness for those less privileged.

Even traditions like postmodernism privilege language and playing with language. But it also emphasizes questioning the assumptions that block us from working towards a fair and just world. Consequently, it has been influential across disciplines and people use it to develop political insights. It is not so easy, however, to go from sophisticated deconstructive analyses to practical policies of liberation. So, I am often surprised that pragmatism isn’t better known and used as a direct means to emancipatory projects like anti-racism, removing obstacles to pluralizing gender, peace initiatives, immigration struggles, etc.

Since pragmatism begins with actual problematic situations and ends in situations reconstructed more fairly and more inclusively, no great leap is needed to get from theory to practice. In fact, theory is developed out of practice, which in turn, feeds back into it. I think this is why students are attracted to pragmatism once they are introduced to it or find it on their own. Critical thinking, becoming emancipated from false assumptions, and learning an experiential and experimental method are means to social transformation. Direct engagement in learning to listen to, understand, and work together with others to solve common problems are both means and ends. Instead of directing one’s energies to theory construction with any possible practical application extraneous to its main focus, as a post-Darwinian experimental philosophy pragmatism is already in and of the world. Many of the pragmatist philosophers I know are already engaged in extra-academic activities or make them the focus of their teaching and research.