

XVI-2 | 2024

Pragmatism and Anthropology



Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/ejpap/4434>

DOI: 10.4000/12yw4

ISSN: 2036-4091

Publisher

Associazione Pragma

Electronic reference

European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy, XVI-2 | 2024, "Pragmatism and Anthropology" [Online], Online since 19 December 2024, connection on 06 January 2025. URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/ejpap/4434>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/12yw4>

This text was automatically generated on January 6, 2025.



The text only may be used under licence CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. All other elements (illustrations, imported files) are "All rights reserved", unless otherwise stated.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Symposia

Pragmatism and Anthropology

Introduction: Pragmatism and Anthropology

Sofia Alexandratos, Italo Testa and Tullio Viola

A Plea for a Pragmatist Anthropology

Roberta Dreon

Form or Practice?

On the Reconciliation of Aristotelian and Pragmatist Accounts in Anthropology
Daniel Martin Feige

The Scope of Mind in Nature

Charles W. Morris' Early Theory of Symbolism and Critical Reading of G. H. Mead
Etienne Raduly

The Entanglement of Ethics and Anthropology

Dewey's Interactionist Account of Self-Realization
Armando Manchisi

Dewey's Anthropology of Interests – and Values

Matteo Santarelli

W.E.B. Du Bois as a Critical Anthropologist of Race

Shannon Sullivan

Placing Culture in Nature

Notes from the Mid-twentieth Century American Anthropological Debate
Antonio M. Nunziante

John Dewey, Evolutionary Anthropology, and Comparative Jurisprudence

Trevor Pearce

William James's Inquiry into Modes of Existence

Christian Frigerio

On Anna Boncompagni's Wittgenstein on Forms of Life

Gesturing Towards The Contingent

Lars Hertzberg

Whether and How the Wittgensteinian Notion of Form of Life Should Matter to Us

Luigi Perissinotto

Forms of Life: What Use Should We Make of Them?

Elena Valeri

The Human Form of Life

The Problem of the Unity of Animality and the Cultural
Meredith Williams

Wittgenstein on Forms of Life - Replies to Critics

Anna Boncompagni

Essays
Pragmatism and Post-Truth

Scepticism, Relativism, and Fallibilism
John Fennell

Potentiality and Actuality in Peirce and Dewey

Jim Garrison

“Subject-matter”: The Graphic Evidence of an Operative Field

Gioia Laura Iannilli

Multilingual
Anthropologie philosophique et critique culturelle

Louis Quéré

Simposio su Rosa Maria Calcaterra, Il progetto comune dei pragmatisti
Introduzione al simposio

Guido Baggio and Maria Regina Brioschi

Il pragmatismo: una filosofia in circolo

Michela Bella

Anti-fondazionalismo e “metafisica naturalizzata”

Giovanni Maddalena

Alcune domande riguardo il progetto comune dei pragmatisti

Marco Stango

Risposte

Rosa Maria Calcaterra

Book Reviews and Critical Notices
Review of Núria Sara MIRAS BORONAT & Michela BELLA (eds), Women in Pragmatism: Past, Present and Future

Springer, Cham, 2022
Federica Castelli

Review of Daniel R. HUEBNER, Reintroducing Mead

London, Routledge, 2022

Francis Douville Vigeant

Review of Alexis DIANDA, The Varieties of Experience: William James after the Linguistic Turn

Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2023

Sarin Marchetti

Symposia

Symposia

Sofia Alexandratos, Italo Testa and Tullio Viola (dir.)

Pragmatism and Anthropology

Introduction: Pragmatism and Anthropology

Sofia Alexandratos, Italo Testa and Tullio Viola

- 1 Early American pragmatism was an attempt to question the philosophical conceptions of the human being inherited from modern European philosophy. This revision of the philosophical canon was deeply tied to the social, cultural, technological, and political changes that shook the structures of modern societies in the 19th century, disclosing unforeseen potentialities, unregulated powers, as well as social feelings of alienation, anonymity, and repressed social power (Bernstein 1971, 2010; Misak 2013; Calcaterra & Marchetti 2015).
- 2 Against this historical background, pragmatism operated on a double frontline. On the one hand, it stood against traditional intellectual products of the Enlightenment, such as Natural law and Kantianism, which conceived of human beings as universally and ahistorically endowed with specific capacities, attitudes, and needs. From a pragmatist viewpoint, these conceptions are incapable of accounting for the dynamism, pluralism, and historical embeddedness of human societies. On the other hand, positions that advocated for the radical relativity of human and social life were seen as depriving philosophical and social thinking of any benchmark for normatively evaluating and regulating social transformations (Addams 1902/2002; James 1909/1977; Dewey 1920/1982; Follett 1924/2013). At the root of American pragmatism, then, was the urge to neither ignore nor blindly accept social transformations, but to embrace them intelligently and critically deal with them. An analysis of human nature, an anthropology capable of accounting both for its constitutive conditions and intrinsic dynamism, for its unity and difference, as well as for its physiological and pathological developments, was at the heart of its philosophical project.
- 3 Such a critical, yet constructive attempt was wide and diversified in its scope and philosophical implications. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify a common anthropological core lying under the theoretical projects developed by early American pragmatists, a common core that has recently allowed theorists to refer to a “pragmatist anthropology” (Goldman 2012; Dreon 2022). Here we would like to identify three main features of a pragmatist anthropology: the first is the study of human

beings not as an entity independent from, and unrelated to, nature, but as an intrinsic part of it. The second is a willingness to consider anthropological reflections not as an end in itself, but as a critical tool to improve human experience. Thirdly, pragmatists were eager to let philosophical reflections on human nature be informed by a dialogue with other sciences.

- 4 This special issue is dedicated to pragmatist anthropology, and to its past, present, and future relevance. Our goal is to analyze the three distinctive features of pragmatist anthropology with a reconstructive lens. But we are also interested in the relevance that a pragmatist anthropology can have to present and future times. The ecological crisis, resting on the exploitation of nature; the stiffening reproduction of sexist, classist, and racist practices and structures; the urgent need for a scientific community based on a reciprocal criticism and enrichment among disciplines – these are some of the recent problems which expose the need for a renewed anthropological reflection in contemporary societies, and in particular for a pragmatist anthropology. Needless to say, this doesn't mean dogmatically adhering to past theories and authors, nor erasing the historical distance between contemporary and nineteenth-century thinkers. Rather, it involves understanding past theories and authors historically, while making them relevant to new challenges, and enriching them with new voices and communities. The present special issue intends to be just a first step in this process. Accordingly, it is organized into three thematic sections, each of which addresses one of three main features of a pragmatist anthropology mentioned above.

1. Plural Natures

- 5 The first group of papers is dedicated to reflections on nature and human nature developed within American pragmatism and to the analysis of their theoretical implications for key concepts such as experience, mind, and practice. In the contributions by Roberta Dreon, Etienne Raduly, and Daniel Feige, the first key feature of a pragmatist anthropology clearly emerges: (re)thinking the human is possible only in light of a broader consideration of nature, to be conducted hand in hand with past metaphysics and scientific findings. Indeed, pragmatist anthropological reflections – from James' to Mead's, Dewey's, Addams' and Du Bois' – were framed within a broader redefinition of traditional metaphysics that was deeply influenced by Darwin's evolutionism and Spencer's evolutionary philosophy (Fischer 2019; Pearce 2020). Darwin's conception of the ontogenetic and phylogenetic development of species in light of ongoing adaptive and selective interactions with the external environment allowed American pragmatists to reconsider human beings as one component of nature among others. Such a reconsideration was accompanied by the effort to investigate the continuity and discontinuity between human beings and other natural entities, with the development of a plural and processual conception of nature and a theory of society and culture as "second natures" (Testa 2017; Viola 2020).
- 6 In this respect, pragmatist anthropology shares some common premises with the German tradition of philosophical anthropology. Classical representatives of that tradition, such as Scheler, Gehlen, and Plessner, attempted to investigate the specific natural endowments of human beings in light of a naturalistic analysis and biological findings (Scheler 1928/2018; Plessner 1928/2017; Gehlen 1962/2016; Honneth & Joas 1980). Nonetheless, the uniqueness of the pragmatist approach lies in its abandoning

the theory of an ontological gap between human beings and other natural organisms, with its dangerous anthropocentric arguments for human exceptionalism and ontological superiority (Dreon 2022). Rather, as the essays of this section point out, pragmatists were more interested in placing human beings and their specific form of life in its continuity, emergence, interconnectedness, and reciprocal transformation with the rest of nature. The identification of different but interconnected dimensions of nature (inorganic, organic, and human) discloses fundamental perspectives for our present, such as the acknowledgment of the affective dimension of human experience and normativity (Dreon); the practical rootedness and renegotiation of self-consciousness, reason and freedom (Feige); and the extension of symbols and mind to nature (Raduly).

2. Critical Natures

- 7 The second group of papers focuses on the critical aim of a pragmatist anthropology. In the pragmatist tradition, philosophy was far from being a merely theoretical, armchair intellectual exercise: it was conceived rather as a practical and experimental enterprise, a tool for the enhancement and reconstruction of life, and given the social aspect of human life, it was a means for social transformation. The anthropological reconsideration of human beings, human societies and cultures as parts of nature led American pragmatists to further grasp the practical, normative, and transformative import of thinking in general, and philosophical and scientific thinking in particular. If natural life, across its plural dimensions, is interdependence, transformation, and change with the external environment, then thinking, and especially philosophical thinking about human nature, not only takes part in life as transformation but acquires the task of intelligently analyzing social experiences and critically orienting change with an eye to improving associated life (Särkelä 2017). Nature, society, and critique are thus constitutive and interconnected elements of a pragmatist anthropology. This has allowed contemporary studies to acknowledge American pragmatism as part of the broader family of critical theory, along with the Marxian and the Frankfurt School traditions (Frega 2014; Testa 2017; Renault 2018; Särkelä 2020; Viola 2020; Alexandratos 2021; Gregoratto et al. 2023). It has been shown that pragmatist anthropologies such as Dewey's, Follett's, Addams', and Du Bois' provide critical perspectives on the categories that we live with every day in contemporary societies, such as those of self-realization, values, gender, race, ecology, and class (Seigfried 1996; Sullivan 2001; Pappas 2008; Gregoratto 2018; Boronat 2022; Hensoldt 2022).
- 8 The essays by Armando Manchisi, Matteo Santarelli, and Shannon Sullivan go in this direction while showing that recovering a pragmatist concept of nature and human nature does not entail either outlining rigid and absolute accounts of human self-realization and social interests or naturalizing systems of social oppressions such as racist relationships. On the contrary, recovering a pragmatist concept of nature means shedding a critical light on stiffening social processes, structures, and conditions in light of a relational and creative understanding of the human-environment relationship and a critical observation of experience. A pragmatist anthropology lends itself to disclosing new accounts of human self-realization, where the concept of individuality goes hand in hand with that of creativity and sociality (Manchisi), new conceptions of human interests alternative to individualistic, economic, and value-free

ones (Santarelli), as well as fundamental elements for a critical anthropology of race and whiteness (Sullivan).

3. Interdisciplinary Exchanges

- 9 Finally, the anthropological ideas of the early pragmatists either influenced or were in a fruitful exchange with the approaches and theories of nascent cultural and social anthropology, in line with the interdisciplinary commitment intrinsic to their philosophical tradition. Cultural and social anthropologists such as Franz Boas, Bronisław Malinowski, Gene Weltfish, Alexander Lessler, Leslie White, Margaret Mead, and Ruth Benedict share several theoretical assumptions with pragmatist anthropology, such as the primacy of experience on theory and the centrality of the categories of communication, freedom, and education (Torres Colón & Hobbs 2015). These scholars also informed the empirically rich, holistic and pluralist understanding of culture which characterizes pragmatist anthropology (Zask 2003; Brereton 2009; Goldman 2012; Dreon 2022).
- 10 The exchange between philosophy and anthropology continues to this day. A pragmatistically oriented anthropology is committed to disclosing a pluralist perspective on nature while tracing an ontological continuity in the pervasiveness of habits and meanings in nature: this may reveal major points of convergence with recent attempts by contemporary anthropology to question the modern anthropocentric and Eurocentric cosmology (Descola 2005; Viveiros de Castro 2012; Kohn 2013).
- 11 The contributions by Antonio Nunziante, Trevor Pearce and Christian Frigerio shed light on the interdisciplinary exchanges between pragmatism, anthropology and other social sciences. Nunziante and Pearce explore these exchanges by focusing on the history of late nineteenth-century and mid-twentieth-century thought, while Frigerio draws a connection between William James and more recent works by Latour, Viveiros de Castro, and other scholars involved in the “ontological turn” of contemporary anthropology.
- 12 As research on the specific contours of a pragmatist anthropology is relatively new, this special issue intends to focus on the uniqueness of early American pragmatists’ anthropological reflections, with attention to their theoretical, political, and social-critical implications. In parallel, it aims to investigate the intersections of pragmatist anthropology with the cultural anthropology of the time, its points of continuity or discontinuity with other traditions of philosophical anthropology, as well as its possible exchanges with, and contributions to, contemporary anthropology’s elaboration of a pluralistic conception of nature. Exploring the relationship between pragmatism and anthropology, in both a narrow and a broad sense of these two terms, and considering the past, the present, and the future of this relation is relevant from two main perspectives. First, it contributes to investigating the shared and personal contributions of early American pragmatists such as Peirce, James, Dewey, Follett, Addams, Du Bois and Mead to the development of a pragmatist anthropology, as well as its suitability to address contemporary social challenges. Second, it offers an opportunity to examine the exchanges that a pragmatist philosophical anthropology could have not only with other traditions of philosophical anthropology, but with anthropology itself, thus fostering inter- or trans-disciplinary discussions.

This research was supported by University of Parma through the action Bando di Ateneo 2021 per la ricerca co-funded by MUR-Italian Ministry of Universities and Research - D.M. 737/2021 - PNR - PNRR - NextGenerationEU,” and by the project PNRR-M4C2- I1.1 - MUR Call for proposals n. 1409 del 14-09-2022 - Bando PRIN 2022 PNRR - ERC sector SH5- Project title: Transforming Habits [TRANSHAB]. Agency, Cognition, and Social Change - Project Code P2022K7B7E- CUP Code D53D23019710001- Funded by the European Union - NextGenerationEU.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Addams Jane, (1902/2002), *Democracy and Social Ethics*, Champaign, University of Illinois Press.
- Alexandratos Francesca Sofia, (2021), “The Structure of Human Action as a Criterion for Social Analysis. The Living Bond Between Honneth and Joas’ Project of Social Action and Human Nature and John Dewey’s Naturalistic Humanism,” *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, 13(2). Online: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejpap.2553>.
- Bernstein Richard, (1971), *Praxis and Action*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Bernstein Richard, (2010), *The Pragmatic Turn*, Malden, Polity Press.
- Boronat Núria, (2022), “Towards a Pragmatist and Feminist Theory of Oppression: Thoughts on Gender, Race, and Class,” in Núria Boronat & Michela Bella (eds), *Women in Pragmatism: Past, Present, and Future*, Cham, Springer, 27-39.
- Brereton Dereck, (2009), “Why Sociological Anthropology Needs John Dewey’s Evolutionary Model of Experience,” *Anthropological Theory*, 9(1), 5-32.
- Calcaterra Rosa & Giancarlo Marchetti (eds), (2015), *Il pragmatismo. Dalle origini agli sviluppi contemporanei*, Roma, Carocci.
- Descola Philippe, (2005), *Par-delà nature et culture*, Paris, Gallimard.
- Dewey John, (1920/1982), Reconstruction in Philosophy, in *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924*, vol. 12, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press.
- Dreon Roberta, (2022), *Human Landscapes: Contributions to a Pragmatist Anthropology*, New York, State University of New York Press.
- Fischer Marilyn, (2019), *Jane Addams’ Evolutionary Theorizing*, Chicago, The Chicago University Press.
- Follett Mary Parker, (1924/2013), *Creative Experience*, Mansfield, Martino Publishing.
- Frega Roberto, (2014), “Between Pragmatism and Critical Theory: Social Philosophy Today,” *Human Studies*, 37(1), 57-82.
- Gehlen Arnold, (1962/2016), *Der Mensch. Seine Natur und seine Stellung in der Welt*, Frankfurt am Main, Klostermann.
- Goldman Loren, (2012), “Dewey’s Pragmatism from an Anthropological Point of View,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 48(1), 1-30.

- Gregoratto Federica, (2018), "Critica del dominio di genere e di classe. Verso una lettura intersezionalista di J. Dewey e J. Addams," *La Società degli individui*, 63, 20-34.
- Gregoratto Federica, Renault Emmanuel, Särkelä Arvi, Testa Italo & Heikki Ikäheimo, (2022), "Critical Naturalism: A Manifesto," *Krisis*, 42(1), 108-24.
- Hensoldt Agnieszka, (2022), "Looking for Feminist Pragmatist Roots of Degrowth Ideas: Jane Addams, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Caroline Bartlett Crane," in Núria Boronat & Michela Bella (eds), *Women in Pragmatism: Past, Present, and Future*, Cham, Springer, 237-49.
- Honneth Axel & Hans Joas, (1980), *Soziales Handeln und Menschliche Natur*, Frankfurt am Main, Campus Verlag.
- James William, (1909/1977), *A Pluralistic Universe*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.
- Kohn Eduardo, (2013), *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human*, Berkeley, University of California Press.
- Misak Cheryl, (2013), *The American Pragmatists*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Pappas Gregory Fernando, (2008), *John Dewey's Ethics: Democracy as Experience*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press.
- Pearce Trevor, (2020), *Pragmatism's Evolution: Organism and Environment in American Philosophy*, Chicago, The Chicago University Press.
- Plessner Helmuth, (1928/2017), *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*, Berlin, De Gruyter.
- Renault Emmanuel, (2018), *Marx and Critical Theory*, Brill, Leiden.
- Särkelä Arvi, (2017), "Immanent Critique as Self-transformative Practice: Hegel, Dewey, and Contemporary Critical Theory," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 31(2), 218-30.
- Särkelä Arvi, (2020), "American Pragmatism and Frankfurt School Critical Theory: A Family Drama," in Michael Festl (ed.), *Pragmatism and Social Philosophy*, New York, Routledge, 145-62.
- Scheler Max, (1928/2018), *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*, Hamburg, Meiner Verlag.
- Seigfried Charlene Haddock, (1996), *Pragmatism and Feminism: Reweaving the Social Fabric*, Chicago, The Chicago University Press.
- Sullivan Shannon, (2001), *Living Across and Through Skins: Transactional Bodies, Pragmatism, and Feminism*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press.
- Testa Italo, (2017), "Dewey, Second Nature, Social Criticism, and the Hegelian Heritage," *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, 9(1). Online: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejpap.990>.
- Torres Colón Gabriel Alejandro & Charles Hobbs, (2015), "The Intertwining of Culture and Nature: Franz Boas, John Dewey, and Deweyan Strands of American Anthropology," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 76(1), 139-62.
- Viola Tullio, (2020), "Il primato dell'esperienza: la critica della cultura nel pragmatismo," *La società degli individui*, 67(1), 22-35.
- Viveiros de Castro Eduardo, (2012), *Cosmological Perspectivism in Amazonia and Elsewhere*, Manchester, HAU.
- Zask Joëlle, (2003), *Art et Démocratie. Les peuples de l'art*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France.

AUTHORS

SOFIA ALEXANDRATOS

University of Minho

sofia.alexandratos[at]elach.uminho.pt

ITALO TESTA

University of Parma

italo.testa[at]unipr.it

TULLIO VIOLA

Maastricht University

t.viola[at]maastrichtuniversity.nl

A Plea for a Pragmatist Anthropology

Roberta Dreon

1. Why a New Philosophical Anthropology?

- 1 Is there really a need today for a new philosophical anthropology inspired by the Pragmatists' legacy? I mean a philosophical anthropology that involves, firstly, a strongly emphasized form of cultural-naturalism – in other words, a bio-cultural view of humanity, or a picture of what it means to be human that implies a “natural continuism with difference” (Bernstein 2020: 53). Secondly, an ecological conception of human nature as constituted through and through by human organisms' interactions with a natural and naturally social environment (Dreon 2022). Thirdly, an anthropological stance committed to a definitive renunciation of any form of transcendental claim and to an explicit acceptance of contingency and historicity as constitutive features of what we call “human nature” (Margolis 2009). Fourthly, a kind of philosophical inquiry that focuses on the intricate fabric of human qualitative experience, largely pre-personal and pre-reflective, already selectively oriented by vital needs, habits, and interests, and kneaded into gestural and enlanguaged practices (Dreon 2022) – that is, not primarily (or not only) concerned with problems of personhood, responsibility (Quante 2018), and the game of giving and asking for reasons (Brandom 1998). Finally, a philosophical stance that attaches great importance to the differences in our lives depending on the kinds of beliefs or habits of thought and action we are ready to embrace.¹
- 2 Some circumstances seem to argue against the expediency of such a claim, which may seem outdated when compared to some important issues. Consider just two major concerns.
- 3 A first serious objection to a naturalistic anthropology is the risks of natural determinism, whose consequences for moral and political behavior can be devastating. John Dupré's long-standing research on biological reductionism has explored the various conundrums involved in both the theoretical stance and its dangerous use to

justify (at least) problematic practices. For instance, he has focused on the connections between views of human nature as biologically determined and healthcare policies regarding the diagnosis and drug treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (Dupré 2001: 3, 14).

- 4 Of course, this issue is very complicated and cannot be tackled in this article. My point, however, is to consider what might be an alternative. Assuming that biological determinism is a politically and ethically compromised position, must we embrace radical constructivism and renounce any form of naturalism? Can we honestly abstract from our being animals and living organisms and from the fact that cognition and action are primarily functions of life? For example, can we abstract from the fact that bodily conditions profoundly influence our actions, particularly when we are aging, ill, or pregnant, i.e. when we are more vulnerable, both physically and psychologically, and more dependent on the help, aggressiveness, or negligence of others? Or from the fact that human mammals at birth are unable to survive without the help of someone to take care of them? In other words, not only human embodiment, but also human interdependence is primarily connected to our organic conditions and cannot be disregarded when considering ethical and political issues (Sullivan 2013). The Pragmatists were particularly sensitive to these sorts of implications, and probably, insofar as they took a naturalistic stance from the outset, felt compelled to fight against forms of determinism – consider, in particular, William James’ strong criticism of Spencer’s environmental determinism (James 1878, and James 1879). In what follows (section 2), I will try to explain that the conception of human nature as historical and radically contingent, yet subject to irreversible processes, which we can draw from the Pragmatists, represents an antidote to natural determinism.
- 5 A second important claim concerns the charge of anthropocentrism that could be leveled against pragmatist anthropology. Dewey’s naturalism has been criticized and defined as “half-hearted naturalism” (Santayana 1925) and “anthropocentric naturalism” (Cohen 1940) insofar as it did not take physical cosmology as the center of its inquiry, but social anthropology and a doctrine of human experience. Consequently, it has been accused of neglecting questions about the cosmos beyond the human sphere. More specifically, Morris Cohen claimed that Dewey’s principle of continuity could not explain novelties in the “unbroken chain” from combinations of atoms to the human sense of beauty (*ibid.*: 201). One possible response to this criticism, I argue, is to adopt a circular rather than linear conception of continuity that explains novelties in terms of new, emergent ways of organizing pre-existent resources, as well as their feedback or loop effects on previous, pre-existent materials and processes. This kind of approach is helpful, I believe, in removing any residue of human exceptionalism from philosophical anthropology, while still acknowledging the need to explain differences among animals. I will deal with this issue in section 3, but again, this is not an exclusively theoretical problem: it is an increasingly urgent one, determined by the scale and consequences of human action on the planet. Given the now evident role of the human impact on the environment – most notably pollution and global warming – it might seem that the only ethically and aesthetically sustainable alternative is a more humble approach to the non-human environment as that which is beyond our control (Thompson & Piso 2019), and a disinterested attitude toward nature rather than a view of it as a means to practical ends (Brady 1998). In short, the Pragmatists’ instrumentalism, insofar as it is allegedly grounded in a form of anthropocentrism, might appear to endorse practices related to the exploitation of natural resources.

Again, this is not the place to clarify misunderstandings of instrumentalism in Classic Pragmatism and to engage in the discussion of means-ends relations within Dewey's thought (cf. Hickman 1990). Rather, my more limited point in this paper concerns the kind of anthropocentrism at issue. As emphasized by Ben Milius (Milius 2018), "anthropocentrism" in environmental philosophy is a polysemous word, ranging from perceptual anthropocentrism to normative anthropocentrism. On the one hand, it involves the recognition of the perceptually limited point of view from which philosophical and scientific inquiry begins, on the other hand, it implies an ideological claim about the alleged superiority of humans over other living and non-living beings. A philosophical anthropology inspired by the Pragmatists corresponds to the first meaning of the term, insofar as it involves the acknowledgment of humans' perspectivism and situatedness as the point of departure for any inquiry and the denial of a transcendental standpoint from which to view experience. More decisively, I would add, this explicit recognition constitutes the premise for the assumption of individual and social responsibility in its concreteness. On the contrary, the Pragmatists' emphasis on human beings as organisms in continuity with other living beings and their explicit plea for contingentism make the ideology of man as the ultimate end of evolution quite alien to them.

- 6 In what follows, I will present a pragmatist picture of human nature as historical and contingent, made through and through by its constitutive interactions with a natural and naturally social environment, and thus involving both a historicist and an ecological claim. Humans evolved out of already pre-existing organic resources and environmental energies, although they gave birth to new qualities and organizations. This view abandons the idea that human nature was complete and fully equipped before the advent of cultural development. It also abandons the traditional primacy of cognition over other modes of experience (section 2). In the third section, I will clarify cultural naturalism as the theoretical framework of a pragmatist anthropology, which in my view includes two pivotal claims. The first is the idea that continuity is not linear but circular: it implies a kind of feedback action or disruptive effect of what comes later on previous forms of organic-environmental interaction. The second claim concerns the anti-transcendental stance, emphasizing that the transformation of animal environments into a highly social, habitualized, enculturated, and enlanguaged environment is entirely contingent, though irreversible, and makes a crucial difference in the continuum of animal life (section 3).
- 7 Finally, I will try to show that a philosophical anthropology which draws on the Pragmatists' legacy can provide a significant contribution to focusing on the complex qualitative background that underlies normativity, responsibility, and personhood. This means paying attention to human experience in its broad, multifaceted, and sometimes vague forms, conceiving of experience itself as consisting of the interactions between organisms and the environment to which they belong, rather than as equivalent to cognition and the product of a cognitive subject. Radicalizing the Pragmatists, I propose to consider human sensibility as a function of life rather than of cognition, in continuity with organic sensibility. At the same time, I suggest approaching this qualitative background in the context of the peculiarly enculturated and enlanguaged human world, and consequently as something that is far from being pre- or non-linguistic, foreign to concepts, etc. Hence, I propose to view human experience as enlanguaged, insofar as all human beings begin to feel and perceive things, events, and other individuals by being embedded in a world of broadly linguistic

interactions and practices. Complementarily, humans primarily experiment with language as a mode of communication and behavior, and as an integral part of their experience, even before they are able to speak and analytically understand the words of their companions (Lorimer 1929). Finally, I suggest building on John Dewey's ecological/transactional conception of habit as a core conceptual tool for approaching fundamental topics such as personhood, responsibility, and normativity in a definitely post-transcendental vein (section 4).

2. Human Nature: Ecology, History, and Culture

- 8 From the Pragmatists we can derive a view of human life as continuous with other forms of organic life and as constituted by its interactions with its environment, much like other forms of life. One of John Dewey's groundbreaking ideas was to abandon the reference to human beings as subjects and to subject-object relations as the standard model in matters of epistemology, ontology, morality, and every other philosophical area. His explicit preference for "life," "organisms" and "organism-environment" interactions (Pearce 2013) makes a big difference in the many philosophical fields of inquiry he touched on and involved a broadly biological and ecological claim about human nature as revolving around the very idea of organic life as radically embedded in an environment, and dependent on environmental resources for its subsistence at all levels – from nourishment and protection to companionship and value sharing. From this point of view, cognition itself appears as a function of life and a mode of experience that emerged in certain living beings thanks to the development of distal perception, bodily movement, and language, rather than as the primary meaning and function of experience (Dewey 1981; Lorimer 1929).
- 9 Nevertheless, this ecological and continuistic view of human nature is not blind to the big and small differences characterizing human behaviors and environments, and it is compelled to interpret them without invoking any kind of human exceptionalism, and renouncing any appeal to extra-experiential principles or conditions (Margolis 2002). In short, one key point is to consider the human environment as entering into the shaping of human life itself in a peculiar way compared to other animals' environments. From this point of view, the human environment appears to be naturally social in a highly refined way, provided that every single human life depends on the lives of others from the most basic levels (both ontogenetically and phylogenetically). In fact, humans are peculiarly immature mammals at birth insofar as their neurological development is not complete before birth, but takes place within an already social, broadly habitualized, and enculturated environment to which they must attune their gestures and coordinate their actions in order to survive and possibly thrive (James 1890/1981, Ch. IV; Dewey 1988; Mead 2011). While human actions, practices, gestures (Maddalena 2015), or utterances (Margolis 2017), have transformed and continue to shape a natural environment into a cultural environment from within, this enculturated niche to which living beings belong interacts with and influences further human interactions, practices, etc. – although this mutual reshaping occurs at different scales and levels. It is this complex circuit of the constitution of human life through its environment and the transformation of the environment itself into a naturally social, enculturated, and enlanguaged environment (Dreon 2022) that can explain the "continuity with difference" (Bernstein 2020) or the "relative discontinuity" (Sinha

2009, and Sinha 2015) of human life within a naturalistic continuum, without resorting to principles transcending experience.

- 10 Moreover, this kind of approach gets rid of the idea of human nature as fixed and predetermined before exposure to culture, according to a picture of the latter as a superstructure of nature to which it is only added later. As already suggested, the Pragmatists' experience with infant psychology and neurophysiology allowed them to recognize that the development of significant behavior in very young humans precedes their physiological and neurological maturation. They envisaged that, from a phylogenetic point of view, cultural evolution is grafted onto a natural development that is still in progress, so that cultural development has a disruptive impact and loop effects on the physiology of organic life, as recently acknowledged by anthropologists, neuroscientists, and cognitive scientists (Geertz, Mithen, Tomasello). Moreover, through their anti-deterministic and anti-substantialist reading of Darwin (Dewey 2007), they worked out a conception of nature itself as open, radically contingent, and subject to change. Human nature appears to be historical (Margolis 2009), subject to reconfiguration through its embedment in a changing environment and its exposure to shared practices, techniques, artifacts, silent gestures, and verbal communication. To put it in a formula, being human is the product of a natural history: human nature is not interpreted as an allegedly innate, fixed, and preconstituted endowment that is only later exposed to cultural events, a social world, nurture, and empirical occurrences. Furthermore, human nature is not behind or below the course of events that happen to us: it is constituted by the rich complexity of organic and environmental circumstances – including material constraints, cultural conditions, and social factors – that are subject to relative fixation, stratification, change, and loop effects. Finally, the Pragmatists' radical contingentist stance provides an idea of the characteristically human forms of life as fortuitously emerging from other organic forms through language, intelligent behaviors, and cultural practices and institutions – thus excluding any appeal to a teleological principle that would guide evolution from without. Moreover, evolution itself is not assumed to be a progression from inferior to superior levels of life, excluding any alleged human exceptionalism.

3. Cultural Naturalism as a Theoretical Framework and What it Means

- 11 As recently underlined by Mark Johnson and Jay Schulkin, pragmatist naturalistic philosophy involves a naturalistic perspective on humans as “complex, highly evolved biological and social animals, engaging their environment” (Johnson & Schulkin 2023: 3). More specifically, I suggest that the kind of philosophical anthropology that can be drawn from the Pragmatists' insights into the human condition is conceptually framed by what Dewey defined as “cultural naturalism” in his mature work on logic (Dewey 1991), or, using Richard Bernstein's expression, as “pragmatic naturalism” (Bernstein 2020).
- 12 In a nutshell, cultural naturalism is a nonreductive form of naturalism that holds culture to be continuous with nature, insofar as it is rooted in both the organic and environmental conditions of human life, and yet irreducible to the mere association of pre-existing resources. Importantly, it involves a refusal “to admit non-natural or supernatural resources in the descriptive or explanatory discourse of any truth-bearing

kind” (Margolis 2002). Dewey stated that “[t]here is no breach of continuity between operations of inquiry and biological operations and physical operations,” clarifying that “[c]ontinuity,’ on the other side, means that rational operations grow out of organic activities, without being identical with that from which they emerge” (Dewey 1991: 26). Given these premises, how can novelty be explained? How can human reflective intelligence, conscious behavior, and personhood be accounted for? Of course, this is a very complex question that clearly exceeds the scope of this specific paper. I can only suggest that, in a pragmatist sense, the answer lies in a mix of features. Firstly, cultural naturalism implies a form of emergentism, namely the idea that accidental variation produces new ways of organizing already existent resources and energies, new forms of organization that exhibit unexpected, emergent properties – similar, for instance, to the case of tastiness, namely the property of salt to make food tastier, that is the emergence of a property that is completely different from the properties of the components of salt, chlorine and sodium, which can be dangerous to human health (cf. Dreon 2022; Baggio & Parravicini 2019). Exaptation is another factor that helps explain the development of new, unexpected uses out of existing organic and environmental resources. The Pragmatists had already developed a similar idea through the contribution of Chauncey Wrights, although the concept was coined only later by Gould and Vrba (in Gould & Vrba 1982; cf. Parravicini & Pievani 2018). More importantly, cultural naturalism involves the loop-effect and retroaction of new forms of human-environment interaction on the environment itself, as well as on pre-existing organic-environment interactions (Dreon 2022). To the extent that human behavior is not simply the result of individual dispositions, intentions, and choices, but depends on the environmental features that constitute it – for instance, the way one moves depends on the length of one’s legs as well as on the surface of the ground – behavior will be different because it involves the interaction with an environment that has been modified and reshaped by previous actions and behaviors. Consequently, I would argue that continuity in a Deweyan sense should be understood not as a linear process, but as a circular one: peculiarly human organic circumstances are not the efficient causes of our social and cultural development, or vice-versa. Rather, organic factors and sociocultural features of the human environment should be understood as mutually conditioning and mutually reinforcing. More precisely, subsequent organizations of organic and/or environmental energies can transform previous forms of organic-environmental interactions and give rise to random and unexpected, but irreversible, results that make a difference compared to previous states. The point I want to emphasize is that cultural naturalism does not involve a linear, cumulative, and progressive form of continuity as it appears, for instance, in Husserl’s claim about the emergence of an objective and mathematized world out of the *Lebenswelt* (Husserl 1989), or in Merleau-Ponty’s idea of abstraction as derived from bodily *greifen* and *zeigen* (Merleau-Ponty 2000), or even in Johnson and Lakoff’s conception of linguistic metaphors as grounded in bodily perceptions (Johnson & Lakoff 1980) – namely according to a one-directional development from nature to culture or from body to language. Instead, I believe that cultural naturalism involves a form of circular continuity that implies mutual causality, feedback actions, loop effects, and the disruption of pre-existing organizations. According to the Pragmatists, this was the case with human symbolic intelligence, which emerged from previous forms of organic intelligence, transformed by the impact of language, nominalization, and its ability to distance itself from present objects and situations (Lorimer 1929) and to enable socially

coordinated activity (Dewey 1981, and Mead 1934/2015). This is also the case of human sensibility, which, while grounded in organic exposure to the environment and selective attitudes toward it, is dynamically reshaped by the development of language and communication within the human niche, as will be said in section 5.

- 13 An anti-transcendental stance is another important feature of the theoretical framework that undergirds a pragmatist anthropology, emphasizing that the transformation of animal environments into a highly social, habitualized, enculturated, and enlanguaged environment is entirely contingent, albeit irreversible, and makes a crucial difference in the continuum of animal life. “Pragmatic naturalism” (Bernstein 2020) resists the fascination of transcendental options and espouses radical contingentism: Dewey and the pragmatists urge us to reject the view of (relative) invariances, constancies, and commonalities as quasi-a-priori enabling conditions for empirical actions and events, as well as the view of empirical events as mere instantiations of general traits. In Dewey’s naturalism there is, in principle, no separate space of reasons: continuity means that there is no break, but rather mutual conditioning between water and riverbeds, to use one of Wittgenstein’s famous metaphors, although this happens at different time scales and at different levels of complexity.²

4. Human Experience in the Raw

- 14 The Classical Pragmatists, especially William James and John Dewey, were strongly committed to reclaiming a complex view of human experience, centered on the variety of interactions in life within an environment that contributes to dynamic change and transformation from within, rather than on an idea of the human mind as consisting primarily in cognition and decision-making. This is not to deny that rationality, autonomy, and responsibility (Quante 2018), as well as personal identity (Margolis 2017), are crucial factors in defining the characteristically human way of being. The point I wish to emphasize is that the pragmatist tradition provides us with some important insights and concepts that are particularly helpful for considering the qualitative background of experience, which is continuously reshaped by appropriating the results of more reflective practices. This “vague” (James 1890/1981), “mongrel” (Margolis 2017), or “esthetic” (Dewey 1981) reservoir represents the ground on which cognition and normativity are based. From this point of view, rationality appears to be a thicker phenomenon than asking and giving for reasons, the space of norms is not in principle considered to be sharply separated from habitual behaviors, customary modes of conduct, and institutionalized practices, and decision-making does not seem to be the result of a transparent evaluation and a pure act of volition. A philosophical anthropology drawn from the work of James, Dewey, Lorimer, and Mead, I argue, can enable us to focus on the intricate fabric of human qualitative experience, largely pre-personal and pre-reflective, already selectively oriented by vital needs, habits, and interests, and kneaded into gestural and enlanguaged practices (Dreon 2022).
- 15 A primary philosophical demand from the point of view of a pragmatist anthropology is a reframing of sensibility, by considering it primarily as a function of life rather than of cognition. In recent decades, affective neurosciences (Damasio 1994 and 1999, to mention just one prominent name) and post-cognitive affective trends in contemporary philosophy (Colombetti 2014) have made enormous contributions to

expanding the idea of the mind beyond the traditional view of it as primarily an epistemic device. Nevertheless, the result remains a composite picture that, at best, combines an embodied and enacted view of sensory perception (Noe 2006) with emotions and moods as a further layer that constantly accompany human beings and orient them in the world (Colombetti 2014). Rather, I contend that a coherent development of some pragmatist insights invites us to consider perception as primarily affective (Mead 2011, see also Merleau-Ponty 2002), characterized from the outset by an “esthetic quality” (Dewey 1981), which implies that the situation in which living beings find themselves is always felt as adverse, comforting, sweet or bitter, or even as boring. In other words, perception is not merely a recording of a state of things out there, but involves an affectively based proto-evaluation of the situation in which life is embedded. The distinction between sense-perception as a basic cognitive channel (be it disembodied or embodied and enacted) and affective valence as an allegedly additive, or so to say, suprasegmental feature is the result of ex-post discriminations and should not be taken as the ultimate structure of human experience. In a nutshell, affective valence is not a value that supervenes on the merely descriptive recording of a state of affairs, because organic life cannot be indifferent to the environmental conditions in which and through which it occurs and develops, but is always more or less favorably or dangerously affected by what happens around it.

- 16 Extending some insights of the Classical Pragmatists, I would argue that an approach to sensibility requires a basic shift from a conception of sensibility tailored to its possible foundational role in a representative view of cognition to sensibility as a structural dimension of animal life in general and human life in particular. Seen in this way, sensibility involves, on the one hand, a form of exposure, vulnerability, or passivity of the organism whose very life, survival, and possibility of flourishing depend on the environment entering into its constitution in a variety of ways – from nourishment, oxygen, and heat to protection and companionship. Complementarily, sensibility involves a form of orientation, selectivity and discrimination, that is a more active disposition rooted in a wide range of traits and habits.
- 17 However, this is not enough when we consider human sensibility more specifically, namely the sort of continuity with differences introduced in the previous sections. Indeed, human sensibility is embedded in a deeply social and cultural-linguistic niche from the very beginning: human infants begin to perceive their intimates and the world around them while entangled in a web of linguistic practices, exchanges, and interactions that are already there, pre-exist their perceptions, and demand that they be attuned in one way or another. This transformation of organic sensibility occurs because of the cultural-linguistic niche in which humans are fortuitously but irreversibly embedded, which produces feedback actions or loop effects on pre-verbal animal sensibility. In other words, although human sensibility is continuous with that of other mammals, it is reshaped by its characteristically enculturated and enlanguaged environment (Margolis 2009; Dreon 2022).
- 18 This last point is closely related to a second crucial feature of the kind of pragmatist anthropology I am defending: the need to recover a view of human language as something more complex than a mere “telegraph of thought” (Schopenhauer 2010), and to overcome the alleged divide between supposedly silent experience and language that has conditioned the debate between Classical Pragmatists and Neopragmatists (cf. Hildebrand 2014), as well as other influential philosophical traditions – phenomenology

in primis (Husserl 1973). In contrast, I argue that the Classical Pragmatists envisaged language as a mode of behavior that plays a crucial role in the shaping of the peculiarly human form of life. They abandoned the idea of language as merely the outer fabric of thought, understood as an essentially mental event. Moreover, Dewey, Mead, and a less-known figure, Franck Lorimer, developed an idea of human experience as continuous with other nonhuman forms of experience and, at the same time, as profoundly reorganized by the emergence of verbal communication. They saw verbal communication as emerging from pre-existing forms of gestural communication as well as from organic intelligence. However, the emergence of language caused a profound reorganization of previous forms of animal sensibility, cognition, and sociality, giving rise to peculiarly cultural-natural living beings such as humans. Furthermore, these thinkers maintained a view of language as having different functions and roles in human experience: they assumed that language is a very rich, multilayered, and multifunctional phenomenon that supports social bonds on mainly qualitative-affective grounds, makes things and events common, mutually coordinates social behavior on different scales, and operates both analytically and holistically. They also considered the aesthetic dimension of language to be fundamental rather than an irrelevant addition to its logical form: language is not only a powerful means of postponing current experience, of scaffolding reflection and inference, but it also enters human experience as immediate enjoyment or suffering in relation to circumstances that are either favorable or adverse to human life. Consequently, I suggest that the Pragmatists' work supports the claim that language and sensibility are not two separate and hierarchically ordered levels of cognition, but are closely intertwined in human experience, giving rise to a kind of circular continuity and mutual conditioning, as stated in the previous section.

- 19 Therefore, building on the Pragmatists, I propose to think of human experience as *enlanguaged*. This means that human experience is contingently but irreversibly embedded, from the moment of each person's birth, in contexts made up of linguistic practices, as well as more or less meaningful relations that contribute to continuously redefining what is happening. Complementarily, assuming a view of human experience as *enlanguaged* means that that human beings do not primarily encounter language in an isolated or pure form – whatever that might mean: the mere logical structure of language, a transparent device for making unambiguous references, a series of distinct and clear definitions, the product of an innate grammar, and so on. Conversely, we encounter language primarily as a part of our behavior and our environment: it is deeply interwoven with other communicative components of our behavior, which could roughly be characterized as multimodal and are continuous with more strictly linguistic aspects. In short, language is part of the thick fabric of our experience, as well as of the human world (Dreon 2022).
- 20 In addition, the Classical Pragmatists provide us with an outstanding conceptual tool for thinking about human action, namely habit. John Dewey and his colleagues worked out a positive conception of habits as active means of doing things, producing a collaboration of arms, legs, and bodies with environmental materials and resources. They are conceived not as hindrances to reflection and volition, as is the Kantian tradition, but as an indispensable part of life and behavior that enables us to be productive, intelligent, and free (see Carlisle 2014). They are considered pervasive in human behavior, ranging from habits of discrimination and selection in thought to manual habits in practical contexts. The key point is that there is no place for human

behavior that is free of habits. One can eliminate a habit of action or thought, but this does not give rise to a form of action or thought that is completely independent of habits. Neither will nor cognition are habit-free, but are structured by habits. Moreover, Dewey worked out a holistic conception of habit (Egbert & Barandiaran 2014; see also Barandiaran & Di Paolo 2014), namely a view according to which habits are not the result of the mere repetition of stimulus-response associations, but involve an organism in its entirety (body, mind, nervous system, perception and action) and imply a selective bias toward certain aspects of the environment to the detriment of others.

- 21 A conception of habits inspired by Dewey's thought is central to a pragmatist anthropology, I suggest, because it recovers an unsimplified conception of human action and avoids opposite forms of determinism, either environmental or individual (cf. Caruana & Testa 2020). By arguing that habits are functions of both the organism and the environment, Dewey emphasized their transactional (Quére 2016) or ecological structure (Dreon 2022). Against methodological individualism, his basic assumption is that human behavior is not the endowment of a subject operating in a vacuum, but a function of the environmental context in which organic life is constituted, transforms, and dies. Transactions between an organism and its environment have a reciprocal effect, changing and shaping each other, albeit at different levels. In a nutshell, habits can be characterized as a more or less flexible channeling of both organic energies and environmental resources (Dreon 2022).
- 22 Moreover, building on Dewey, it is possible to focus on the primary social, or pre-personal character of habits: they are ways of doing things and ways in which things are done that already exist before each individual makes their own choices (Dreon 2022). Hence, they are mostly acquired through a kind of entrainment and attunement with an already habitualized social context, where habitual practices already exist and implicitly require individuals to measure and coordinate their behavior according to them. It is usually only later, when a particular habit of action, thought, or feeling enters into a crisis because it is no longer working, that it becomes explicit and can consciously be appropriated and re-instituted, changed, or refused. This approach to the acquisition of habits as occurring mostly at a pre-personal level and eventually being consciously accepted, revised, or rejected offers an important clue for rethinking responsibility and normativity within a cultural naturalistic framework. From this point of view, responsibility is no longer considered to be based on acts of apparently pure will following the moral maxim, nor on deliberations based on allegedly purely rational judgment and extra-empirical values. Rather, responsibility is associated with the reflective appropriation of pre-existing customs and institutionalized habits, involving a form of conscious behavior that arises from a crisis in a pre-existing "customary morality" that is already present when one assumes one's own responsibility (Dewey 1985: 162). Complementarily, normativity is seen as continuous with the experiential web of practices, habits, and rules that spread and replicate themselves, giving rise to institutions that in turn tend to crystallize into more or less rigid bodies of norms (Dewey 1988: 76). From this perspective, there is no ontological or logical gap between habits and customs, on one hand, and norms, on the other, provided that the relations between them are complex, mutually conditioning, and subject to change – both positive, through improvement, and negative, through stiffening and regression. A Deweyan perspective on habits also provides an interesting approach to individual identity as something emerging from the specific set of habits that characterize one's personal narrative, involving the peculiar appropriation and

individualized style of habitual actions and dispositions, as well as relative stability, though inevitably changing along with the different seasons of life.

5. Some (Provisional) Conclusions

- 23 In this paper, I have tried to show that Classical Pragmatism offers a valuable set of insights, conceptual tools, and arguments for developing a philosophical anthropology that could be openly naturalistic, without being reductive and deterministic, capable of renouncing any form of human exceptionalism while considering that continuity does not mean neglecting crucial differences, and assuming the human world in its complexity while renouncing to explain it from without. This is possible, I have argued, because from the Pragmatists we can develop an ecological idea of human nature, namely a view of human life as constituted through and through by its interactions with a natural and naturally social environment (Dewey 1989). The Pragmatists also offer important ways of thinking about human nature as contingent, subject to change, and historical (Dewey 1981; Margolis 2009), a hybrid system of mutually conditioning natural and cultural features (Margolis 2009). The very concept of cultural naturalism is at the heart of the philosophical project, insofar as it involves a form of circular continuity that explains novelty through the transformation of pre-existing resources into new organizations and their feedback effects on pre-existing conditions.
- 24 Among some of the major topics for a pragmatist anthropology, I have emphasized the need to reformulate the conception of human sensibility from the point of view of life rather than of cognition, taking into account the transformation of organic sensibility through its embedment in an enculturated and enlanguaged world. A second major topic to be explored is the idea of human experience as enlanguaged, that is a picture of human life as exposed from the very first moment to an environment fortuitously but irreversibly interwoven with linguistic practices, significant sounds, and gestures that are already present as infants learn to perceive their surrounding world. Complementarily, a pragmatist anthropology is compelled to consider human language itself in the raw, namely as an integral part of experience, and as a multifaceted phenomenon, involving affective or aesthetic, bodily, and behavioral dimensions and functions. I have even argued that the pragmatist concept of habit is central to a philosophical anthropology that finally sees humans as particular living beings acting in a shared world rather than as pure consciousness in a vacuum, and that paves the way for post-transcendental views of normativity and responsibility.
- 25 Of course, these topics are far from exhausting the range of significant topics for a philosophical anthropology inspired by the Pragmatists and focused more specifically on qualitative, pre-reflective experience. Other urgent lines of inquiry are represented by the role of technologies in human experience, from a point of view capable of considering that technologies have extended and continue to extend human agency by grounding it in human natural conditions, while at the same time affecting the natural conditions of human behavior and transforming the world in increasingly dramatic ways (Steiner 2010; Hildebrand 2023). Another line of thought concerns the diverse and often competing human interests that seem to be central to human issues (cf. Santarelli 2019). On the one hand, it is a question of whether interest always equals self-interest and, on the other hand, it is a question of whether only a disinterest attitude can be an alternative to the human exploitation of natural resources (Dreon 2024) and aggressive

action against the more vulnerable components of the social environment. It is time to investigate the role of interest in a conception of human experience as a function of organic life in an environment, its connections with a theory of organic sensibility, and, complementarily, the peculiar variety of interests that characterizes human speech and the human world.

26 But all of these are matters for future work.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BAGGIO Guido & Andrea PARRAVICINI, (2019), "Introduction to Pragmatism and Theories of Emergence," *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, 11(2). Online: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejpap.1611>.
- BARANDIARAN Xabier & Ezequiel DI PAOLO, (2014), "A Genealogical Map of the Concept of Habit," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 9, 1-7. Online: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2014.00522>.
- BERNSTEIN Richard, (2020), *Pragmatic Naturalism: John Dewey's Living Legacy*, AmazonBooks. Originally printed as BERNSTEIN Richard, (2019), "Pragmatic Naturalism: John Dewey's Living Legacy," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, 40(2), 527-94.
- BRADY Emily, (1998), "Don't eat the Daisies: Disinterestedness and the Situated Aesthetic," *Environmental Values*, 7(1), 97-114. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30302271>.
- BRANDOM Robert, (1998), *Making it Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment*, Cambridge-London, Harvard University Press.
- CANDIOTTO Laura, (2023), "Review of *Human Landscapes: Contributions to a Pragmatist Anthropology* by Roberta Dreon, New York: SUNY 2022," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-023-09913-2>.
- CARLISLE Clare, (2014), *On Habit: Thinking in Action*, London and New York, Routledge.
- CARUANA Fausto & Italo TESTA (eds), (2020), *Habits: Pragmatist Approaches from Cognitive Science, Neuroscience, and Social*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- COHEN Morris R., (1940), "Some Difficulties in Dewey's Anthropocentric Naturalism," *The Philosophical Review*, 49(2), 196-228. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2180800.pdf>.
- COLOMBETTI Giovanna, (2014), *The Feeling Body: Affective Science Meets the Enactive Mind*, Cambridge-London, The MIT Press.
- DAMASIO Antonio, (1994), *Descartes' Error*, New York, Grosset/Putnam.
- DAMASIO Antonio, (1999), *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*, New York, Harcourt.
- DEWEY John, (1981), *Experience and Nature*, in *The Later Works of John Dewey*, vol. 1, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press.

- DEWEY John, (1985), *Ethics*, in *The Later Works of John Dewey*, vol. 7, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press.
- DEWEY John, (1988), *Human Nature and Conduct*, in *The Middle Works of John Dewey*, vol. 14, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press.
- DEWEY John, (1989), *Art as Experience*, in *The Later Works of John Dewey*, vol. 10, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press.
- DEWEY John, (1991), *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, in *The Later Works of John Dewey*, vol. 12, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press.
- DEWEY John, (2007), "The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy," in John Dewey, *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy and Other Essays on Contemporary Thought*, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 3-12.
- DREON Roberta, (2022), *Human Landscapes: Contributions to a Pragmatist Anthropology*, New York, State University of New York Press.
- DREON Roberta, (2024), "Feeling the Environment: Aesthetic Interestedness and Environmental Aesthetics," *Contemporary Aesthetics* (Special Issue "Toward a Sustainable Attitude"). Online: <https://contempaesthetics.org/2024/07/13/feeling-the-environment-aesthetic-interestedness-and-environmental-aesthetics/>.
- DUPRÉ John, (2001), *Human Nature and the Limits of Science*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- EGBERT Matthew & Xabier BARANDIARAN, (2014), "Modelling Habits as Self-Sustaining Patterns of Motor-Behavior," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 8, 1-15. Online: http://dx.doi.org/10.1162/artl_a_00094.
- GAUDIN Olivier, (2023), "Roberta Dreon, 2022, *Human Landscapes: Contributions to a Pragmatist Anthropology*, Albany, State University of New York Press. Recension par Olivier Gaudin," *Pragmata. Revue d'études pragmatistes*, 6, 806-26. Online: <https://revuepragmata.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/pragmata-2023-n6-24-olivier-gaudin.pdf>.
- GEERTZ Clifford, (1973), *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, New York, Basic Books.
- GIREL Mathias, (1999), "James critique de Spencer. D'une autre source de la maxime pragmatiste," *Philosophie*, 64, 69-90.
- GOULD Stephen Jay & Elisabeth S. VRBA, (1982), "Exaptation: A Missing Term in the Science of Form," *Paleobiology*, 8, 4-15. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2400563>.
- HICKMAN Larry, (1990), *John Dewey's Pragmatic Technology*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press.
- HILDEBRAND David (ed.), (2014), "Language or Experience: Charting Pragmatism's Course for the 21st Century," *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, 6(2). Online: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejpap.275>.
- HILDEBRAND David, (2023), "Philosophical Pragmatism and the Challenges of Information Technologies," *The Pluralist*, 18(1), 1-9. Online: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5406/19446489.18.1.01>.
- HUSSERL Edmund, (1973), *Experience and Judgment*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press.
- HUSSERL Edmund, (1989), *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press.

JAMES William, (1878), "Remarks on Spencer's Definition of Mind as Correspondence," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 12(1), 1-18. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25666067>.

JAMES William, (1879), "Are We Automata?," *Mind*, 4(13), 1-22. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2246561.pdf>.

JAMES William, (1890/1981), *The Principles of Psychology*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

JOHNSON Mark & George LAKOFF, (1980), *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago, The Chicago University Press.

JOHNSON Mark & Jay SCHULKIN, (2023), *Mind in Nature: John Dewey, Cognitive Science, and a Naturalistic Philosophy for Living*, Cambridge-London, The MIT Press.

LORIMER Frank, (1929), *The Growth of Reason: A Study of the Role of Verbal Activity in the Growth of the Structure of the Human Mind*, London-New York, Routledge.

MADDALENA Giovanni, (2015), *The Philosophy of Gesture: Completing Pragmatists' Incomplete Revolution*, Québec, McGill-Queen's University Press.

MARGOLIS Joseph, (2002), *Reinventing Pragmatism: American Philosophy at the End of the Twentieth Century*, Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press.

MARGOLIS Joseph, (2009), *The Arts and the Definition of the Human: Toward a Philosophical Anthropology*, Stanford, Stanford University Press.

MARGOLIS Joseph, (2017), *Three Paradoxes of Personhood: The Venetian Lectures*, Milan, Mimesis International.

MEAD George Herbert, (1934/2015), *Mind, Self and Society*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.

MEAD George Herbert, (2011), *Essays in Social Psychology*, New Brunswick and London, Transaction Publishers.

MERLEAU-PONTY Maurice, (2000), *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Paris, Gallimard.

MERLEAU-PONTY Maurice, (2002), *La Structure du comportement*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France.

MILIUS Ben, (2018), "Three Types of Anthropocentrism," *Environmental Philosophy*, 15(2), 159-94. Online: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5840/envirophil20184564>.

MITHEN Steven & Lawrence PARSONS, (2008), "The Brain as a Cultural Artefact," *Cambridge Archeological Journal*, 18(3), 415-22. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0959774308000450>.

NOË Alva, (2006), *Action in Perception*, Cambridge-London, The MIT Press.

PARRAVICINI Avdrea & Telmo PIEVANI, (2018), "Continuity and Discontinuity in Human Language Evolution: Putting and Old-fashioned Debate in its Historical Perspective," *Topoi*, 37(2), 279-87. Online: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11245-016-9431-y>.

PEARCE Trevor, (2013), "The Origins and Development of the Idea of Organism-Environment Interaction," in Gillian Barker, Eric Desjardins & Trevor Pearce (eds), *Entangled Life: Organism and Environment in the Biological and Social Sciences*, Springer, 13-32.

QUANTE Michael, (2018), *Pragmatistic Anthropology*, Paderborn, Mentis.

QUÉRÉ Louis, (2016), "Bourdieu et le pragmatisme américain sur la créativité de l'habitude," *Occasional Paper*, 37, Paris, CEMS-IMM. Online: https://cems.ehess.fr/system/files/2022-12/OP37_CEMS_QUERE_0.pdf.

- QUÉRÉ Louis, (2024), "Anthropologie philosophique et critique culturelle," *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, 16(2). Online: <https://journals.openedition.org/ejpap/4179>.
- RAMAZZOTTO Nicola, (2023), "Human Landscapes: Contributions to a Pragmatist Anthropology, Roberta Dreon, Book Review," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 1-3. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1093/aesthj/ayac055>.
- SANTARELLI Matteo, (2019), *La vita interessata. Una proposta teorica a partire da John Dewey*, Macerata, Quodlibet.
- SANTAYANA George, (1925), "Dewey's Naturalistic Metaphysics," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 22(25), 673-88.
- SCHOPENHAUER Arthur, (2010), *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. I, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- SIANI Alberto, (2023), "Human Landscapes: Contributions to a Pragmatist Anthropology di Roberta Dreon," *Rivista di Estetica*, 83(2), LXIII, 139-40. Online: <https://doi.org/10.4000/estetica.9325>.
- SINHA Chris, (2009), "Language as a Biocultural Niche and Social Institution," in Vyvyan Evans & Stéphanie Pourcel (eds), *New Directions in Cognitive Linguistics*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 289-309.
- SINHA Chris, (2015), "Language and Other Artifacts: Socio-Cultural Dynamics of Niche Construction," *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6, 1-18. Online: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01601>.
- STEINER Pierre, (2010), "Philosophie, technologie et cognition. États des lieux et perspectives," *Intellectica*, 53/54, 7-40. Online: https://www.persee.fr/doc/intel_0769-4113_2010_num_53_1_1176.
- SULLIVAN Shannon, (2013), "Oppression in the Gut: The Biological Dimension of Deweyan Habit," in Tom Sparrow & Adam Hutchinson (eds), *A History of Habit: From Aristotle to Bourdieu*, Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Plymouth, Lexington Books, 255-74.
- THOMPSON Paul B. & Zachary PISO, (2019), "Dewey and Environmental Philosophy," in Steven Fesmire (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Dewey*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- TOMASELLO Michael, (1999), *The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.

NOTES

1. This paper represents a renewed synthesis of the proposal I made in my book *Human Landscapes: Contributions to a Pragmatist Anthropology*, published by SUNY in 2022. In the meantime, I have benefited from the valuable comments of generous colleagues, either in the form of reviews – Candiotto 2023, Gaudin 2023, Quéré 2024, Ramazzotto 2023, Siani 2023 – or in the form of verbal engagement in various presentations and occasions: Luigi Perissinotto, Giovanna Colombetti, Filippo Batisti, and all the members of the CLAVeS research center at Ca' Foscari; Guido Baggio, Rosa Calcaterra, Tullio Viola, David Hildebrand, Sami Pihlström, Kenneth Stickers, Matteo Santarelli, Sarin Marchetti, Michela Bella at a meeting of the Italian Association Pragma in Rome; Mathias Girel, Claude Imbert, Carole Gayet-Viaud, Barbara Formis, Alvin Panjeta, Tom Burke, and the PhD students at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris; Pierre Steiner and colleagues at the Université de Compiègne; Italo Testa, Sofia Francesca Alexandratos and Teresa Roversi at the University of Parma. I am very grateful to all of them for their precious remarks,

questions, and suggestions. *Ça va sans dire*, any eventual errors or omissions must be ascribed to the author.

2. This anti-transcendental claim is an important difference from other contemporary approaches, as Louis Quéré emphasizes with reference to Charles Taylor's proposal (Quéré 2024).

ABSTRACTS

In this paper, I defend the claim that a philosophical anthropology inspired by the Classical Pragmatists, while being explicitly naturalistic, can avoid biological reductionism and environmental determinism, as well as dogmatic forms of anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism, insofar as it offers a picture of human nature as historical and contingent, dynamically constituted through interactions with a natural, naturally social, and enculturated environment. Cultural naturalism, I suggest, provides the theoretical framework for a pragmatist anthropology that includes at least two pivotal claims. The first is the idea that continuity is not linear but circular: it implies a kind of feedback action of new organizations of resources and energies on pre-existing forms of organic-environmental interaction. A second claim regards an anti-transcendental stance, emphasizing that the transformation of animal environments into a highly social, habitualized, and enlanguaged environment is entirely contingent, albeit irreversible, and makes a capital difference within the continuity of animal life.

INDEX

Keywords: Pragmatist Anthropology, Cultural Naturalism, Human Sensibility, Habit, Enlanguaged Experience

AUTHOR

ROBERTA DREON

Ca' Foscari University of Venice
robdre[at]unive.it

Form or Practice?

On the Reconciliation of Aristotelian and Pragmatist Accounts in Anthropology

Daniel Martin Feige

- 1 In the context of recent debates within philosophical anthropology, Aristotle's philosophy has proven to be an extraordinarily productive conversation partner. In those debates the Aristotelian Legacy has been mediated by the reception of German Idealism on the one hand and Wittgenstein on the other hand. Institutionally, these debates originated above all in Pittsburgh and Chicago and are associated with the work of John McDowell, Philippa Foots, G.E.M. Anscombe and Michael Thompson.¹ In their starting point, they thus seem to be categorically different from positions that develop anthropological considerations based on the tradition of pragmatism or decidedly want to work out an implicit anthropology from the pragmatist legacy.²
- 2 The aim of what follows is to combine insights from an anthropology oriented towards Aristotle with insights from a pragmatist anthropology (understood in a broader sense). My basic argument, showing that there is room for a reconciliation between those two traditions, goes as follows: The specific spelling out of the Aristotelian idea that rationality means the form of our being alive leads to the idea that the human being is an essentially indeterminate living being (an idea already familiar from classical German anthropology like Plessner, Gehlen and Scheler). This is because our thoughts and actions are not subject to biologically describable imperatives, but rather are an expression of a self-conscious form of life and thus an expression of the fact that we have a concept of ourselves. Being able to think and to act (and not to just lead a merely conscious life and to do things that are embedded in a merely biologically describable form of life) exactly means to be an agent that is a bearer of a self-conscious form of life. This achievement of self-determination is to be understood in a concretization of an idea developed by Kant through Hegel in such a way that it takes place in the form of collective practices, which are to be understood as an expression of collective forms of life. In this sense, the neo-Aristotelian transformative theory can be reconciled with a theory of practice in the spirit of pragmatist thinking.

- 3 The argument outlined above will also guide the structure of the present article as follows: In the first part (1), I explicate the basic idea of a transformative anthropology based on Aristotle. My lead authors here are Michael Thompson, Philippa Foot, and John McDowell. The second part (2) shows that a properly understood transformative position is also to be understood in terms of an indeterminacy of the human being that is concretized in collective practices in forms of life. Here I go back to arguments developed by Hegel. In the last and third part (3), I comment on the dispute between McDowell and Dreyfus to show that and to what extent a neo-Aristotelian determination of the form of our being alive does not clash with a pragmatist perspective understood in a broad sense. My aim is decidedly not to spell out such a perspective in detail, but rather to make it understandable as an attractive option.

1. Rationality as Form of Our Being Alive: Neo-Aristotelian Anthropology

- 4 The positions recently discussed under the rubric of a transformative theory are to be understood as contributions to the classical question of the anthropological difference. The anthropological difference gives a specific answer to the question what separates human beings from animals in terms of the idea that there is a categorially difference despite all that they might share. The contemporary neo-Aristotelian proposal thus distance themselves from both reductionist biological adoptions (which have been developed in sociobiology or evolutionary psychology, for example)³ and classical religious justifications of this difference. In order to undermine the false alternative between reduction and exaltation, the neo-Aristotelian positions have (as the name says) returned to Aristotle. In *De Anima* (Aristoteles 2015), Aristotle develops the idea that the human soul differs from the animal soul and the plant soul in terms of the different faculties it possesses: nutrition, perception, locomotion, and reason. Plants only have the first faculty; animals have the first three and humans have all four.
- 5 The point of a transformative understanding of the anthropological difference can be seen in an indication of how these distinctions should not be read. They should not be read in such a way that the faculties mentioned here stand in an *additive* relationship to one another. If one were to do so, then, with regard to human beings, their rational capacities would be an additional feature that they have over and above beings that cannot be addressed as being bearers of a rational form of life. Instead, transformative theories understand the Aristotelian distinction in such a way that the relationship between the faculties is not additive, but transformative: It is true that for each “higher” faculty the respective “lower” faculty must be present (in this sense, neo-Aristotelianism insists on continuity in the realm of the living), but the respective “higher” faculty *changes the meaning* of the respective “lower” faculty. If we think about reason as the traditional definition of the difference between humans and other animals (and understand it to mean responsiveness to reasons as reasons with a view to what is the case and what is to be done), we can state with Matthew Boyle (cf. Boyle 2012): Reason is not a property we have in addition to the properties animals have. Rather, reason is the *form* in which we have properties at all.
- 6 This idea can be developed further in the footsteps of McDowell’s philosophy, who in *Mind and World* argues not only for a transformative relationship between rationality and sensuality, but also explicitly for a concept of the human that interprets both

continuity and discontinuity with the rest of the realm of the living in terms of a transformative account. In “Lecture III,” in the context of his critical discussion of the contributions of his former companion Gareth Evans, which attempt to identify a lowest common denominator in animals and humans cognitive processes, he remarks: It is a dangerous temptation “to think it must be possible to isolate what we have in common with [non-human animals] by stripping off what is special about us, so as to arrive at a residue that we can recognize as what figures in the perceptual lives of mere animals” (McDowell 1996: 64). In contrast, he states: “Instead, we can say that we have what animals also have, namely perceptual sensitivity to features of our environment, but we have them in a special form” (*ibid.*).

- 7 In the background of this thesis stands McDowell’s criticism of the so-called “highest common factor” model (HCF) of sensory cognition – a critique he has already developed in an earlier essay (cf. McDowell 1998a); the HCF-Model attempts to explain the difference between veridical perception and illusion in such a way that both have a common basis (e.g. a given sensory impression or phenomenal indistinguishability) and veridical perception also has an additional element that is supposed to distinguish it from illusion. It is precisely this model of thought that McDowell critically examines at the end of “Lecture III”: that we must understand different but somehow related cases (such as “humans” and “non-human animals”) in terms of a common core and additional features. Such a position is an additive position; a position that attempts to distinguish the cases in question in terms of something they have in common, such that it is identical in both cases and then something is added in one case. The mistake, for McDowell, is to imagine that what is supposedly the core is not transformed into and by the supposed additional features. With this we end up with a position that James Conant has coined as the “layer cake” model of rationality (cf. Conant 2017). And we end up in an unproductive arms race with primatologists and sociobiologists in the search for the one and only features that man and only man has, but not non-human animals.
- 8 The alternative to such an additive explanation is that in the case of rational animals nothing is added to what is characteristic of non-human animals, but that rationality transforms what it means to be a living being in comparison to non-human animal life. To be a rational living being is not to have certain desires and biological drives that are then somehow moderated by rational capacities; rather, it is to be oriented toward oneself and one’s world in a formally different way than non-human animals. Even if something can go wrong here (after all, there can also be privations here, as in the case of a blind eye), the following applies: While animal behavior can be explained with information about what is good for them in their lives, which is determined by the form of life under which the respective animal falls, human action must be explained on the basis of what humans *see* as good; in Philippa Foot’s words: “For it can be said while [dumb] animals go for the good (thing) *that they see*, human beings go for *what they see as good*” (Foot 2003: 56). Not only do humans have different goals than animals, but they have goals in a different way, namely in a self-conscious way. Even if much of what we do is based on physical conditions and perceptual abilities for which a certain evolutionary explanation can be found, the way in which we deal with our bodies and how we develop our perceptual abilities is not within the scope of an evolutionary explanation.

- 9 Transformative theories of the human form of life understand our mindedness in terms of our answerability to reasons as reasons in such a way, that it makes a difference for what the nature of the thing in question is (meant in a double sense: what the nature of that being is as well as what its natural properties are). However, while Aristotelians such as Philippa Foot explain these natural properties as positively defining a spectrum of the good in human life (she notes that “[t]he bearing and rearing of children is not an ultimate good in human life, because other elements of good such as the demands of work to be done may give a man or woman reason to renounce family life” (*ibid.*: 42)), McDowell argues that the status of such kinds of statements about the good in human life tends to be unclear when reason enters the scene.

2. The Historicity of the Human Form of Life: The Legacy of German Idealism

- 10 To this end, McDowell has developed the thought experiment of a rational wolf (cf. McDowell 1998b); for such a wolf, determinations of the “good” in the life of a wolf (for example, that they hunt in packs and share prey) would lose their unproblematic validity. For such a wolf would be able to reflect on the question of what it should do and act accordingly (and if it did not do so, this would not be because its “nature” is realized here, but because it perhaps does things out of mere habit – for which it could then be criticized from a rational point of view). A living being that is responsive to reasons as reasons is necessarily a living being that has a concept of this responsiveness and could thus take a step back to all impulses that are characteristic of carriers of a non-rational form of life. Reason accordingly deflates the relevance of the nature of the species as McDowell states:

Reason does not just open our eyes to our nature, as members of the animal species we belong to; it also enables and even obliges us to step back from it, in a way that puts its bearing on our practical problems into question. With the onset of reason, then, the nature of the species abdicates from a previously unquestionable authority over the behaviour of the individual animal. (*Ibid.*: 172)

- 11 What McDowell is indirectly reminding us of here is not only the constitutive connection between the theoretical and practical exercise of reason, but he is also directly reminding us (to take up an explication by Sebastian Rödl (also cf. Rödl 2007)) of the unity of reason, freedom and self-consciousness as a central insight of the philosophy of German Idealism. At the same time, with regard to McDowell’s argument, this means that we are rational beings in such a way that what we are and what is good for us cannot be determined independently of the exercise of reason.
- 12 McDowell has further developed his project on the basis of the distinction between a first and a second nature, for which he draws on Sellars’s distinction between a realm of laws and a realm of reasons (cf. Sellars 1997). In the former, simply put, to understand something is to explain it through causal explanations or natural laws, whereas in the latter we understand something by understanding the reasons for which someone does something or on the basis of which someone has a belief; with Sellars as well as Donald Davidson (cf. Davidson 1980; also cf. McDowell 2009). McDowell rightly insists that the realm of reasons is *sui generis*, since reasons can only be supported or criticized by reasons. Instead of defending here the Aristotelian notion of the nature of a thing and the thing of nature, McDowell speaks only of a “partial re-

enchantment of nature”; the natural sciences are taken seriously in their claim to actually provide a form of description of reality that no longer understands it (very simplistically) along the lines of deciphering a given meaning in nature (like reading the nature as a book written by God). However, it is rightly objected that not only can they not explain everything that exists, they also do not have a monopoly on explaining the concept of nature: One can only conceive of reason as something mysterious if one operates with an impoverished concept of nature – such is the basic thrust of McDowell’s position.

- 13 If, according to the thought experiment of the rational wolf, we not only can and must step back from the supposedly natural determinations of human nature, but the sense of what is good in our lives takes on a different form than in the life of non-human animals, then McDowell’s position, unlike Michael Thompson’s position, leads to an image of the human form of life from which the historicity of conditions cannot be subtracted. For Michael Thompson, our form of life is realized as a rational form of life in the form of a practice that is changeable, but historical facts and even what we do in our lives do not enter into the meaning of the basic concepts that Thompson develops.
- 14 I want to start with McDowell’s notion of the historicity of the human world to show why we need to understand the claims of a philosophical anthropology in a stronger sense and at the same time dialectically in contrast to straightforward Aristotelian accounts.
- 15 In *Mind and World*, McDowell draws on Gadamer’s concept of tradition to identify the specific contour of socialization into the space of reason (cf. Gadamer 2003: 278ff.): In acquiring a second nature, we not only acquire the ability to navigate in the space of reasons, but at the same time learn what is a good reason for what. The space of reasons thus has a formal and a substantive side; McDowell admits (as can be seen in the postscript of “Lecture VI” in *Mind and World*) that linguistic utterances can change the “topography of intelligibility” itself (McDowell 1996: 187). He concretized this idea in a contribution to a commemorative publication for Pippin by distinguishing between two concepts of freedom and reason (cf. McDowell 2017). Someone who adopts her or his orientations uncritically from tradition is rational in the sense that she or he orients herself or himself to reasons as reasons. Let us think of someone who wants to favor the occurrence of a certain event in nature by making an offering as worship to a god: This person also behaves rationally in the sense that we cannot understand what she does without an appreciation of her responsiveness to reasons as reasons. But such a person still realizes the concept of reason in a privative way because she makes an imperfect use of the ability to answer to reasons as reasons. For she is not really free; what appears to her as a reason is to be explained from a reflexive perspective in such a way that it is merely an expression of her socialization, and as soon as she realizes this, her hitherto binding reasons lose their normative force. For modernity, as McDowell argues with recourse to Hegel’s explication of the role of the modern state (cf. Hegel 2008), reflexivity is to a certain extent practically and institutionally permanent: Here we are not only dealing with an orientation towards reasons as reasons, but also with such an understanding of ourselves as free persons that we constantly put the claims that we inherit from our tradition to the test. The endpoint is thus a formal and not a substantive endpoint within the framework of Hegel’s philosophy.
- 16 In a way that goes beyond McDowell’s own explanations and invokes Hegel’s position, the following can be stated here:⁴ There is a true conception of ourselves as free living

beings, but this conception is not only the result of a collective historical process of learning but also cannot be exhaustively determined in any statement or sentence. It is thus of an indeterminate quality not only because the capacities that are in play here in doing so are not merely formal ones but ones that derive from traditions (Hegel has shown that binding those capacities back to tradition does not deflate them but rather gives them a more robust embeddedness in reality). They are of an indeterminate quality because any characterization of what it means that we are free and rational agents is itself an application and actualization of precisely the capacities that are the topic here. In this sense, modernity (contrary to what McDowell sometimes sounds like and to what he seems to attribute to Hegel) is not simply the point at which we have figured out a proper concept of ourselves in a representational sense.⁵ Rather, our process of self-determination becomes transparent in it. Thus, concepts such as freedom and reason and self-consciousness must be understood as practical concepts and not as concepts that are to be understood in terms of representationalism; not in terms of a picture of our self-and world relation that Rorty coined the “mirror of nature” (cf. Rorty 1979). The historical-practical view of our rationality that I am proposing here states that the process of collectively determining who we are in terms of how we understand ourselves enters into the meaning of the concept of ourselves. Hegel suggests that in modernity such a process of self-determination is no longer historical in a substantive sense, but becomes self-transparent in his philosophy – but this does not mean that the process of practically determining who we are as human beings has also come to an end.

- 17 I would like to suggest here that we should understand the insight into the unity of freedom, reason and self-consciousness as an insight that cannot be exhaustively summarized in any version of spelling out this idea. However, unlike a Kantian concept of an “idea,” it is not something that transcends reality, but rather something whose meaning is constantly being worked out anew in reality and thus renegotiated in practice. In my opinion, a connection between the debates in neo-Aristotelianism and pragmatism can be established along these lines.

3. Practical Knowledge, Nature, and Rationality. On the Relationship between Practice and Form

- 18 In this third and final part of my paper, I would like to show how a connecting line between neo-Aristotelian and pragmatist thinking emerges here, in two respects: Firstly (i) with regard to the practice-theoretical side of pragmatism, and secondly (ii) with regard to its naturalistic side. I am aware that the singular “pragmatism” is not unproblematic in view of its eventful history and the diversity of often competing approaches at the time of its genesis, but I nevertheless will go on with taking about pragmatism or neo-pragmatism in the singular because my aim is a broad and general view on how to connect pragmatist and Aristotelian accounts.
- 19 Remarks on the first point (i). For McDowell and other neo-Aristotelian positions, Wittgenstein’s philosophy is a central point of reference alongside Aristotle and the positions of German Idealism. Even if Wittgenstein’s philosophy cannot be classified as pragmatist in the narrower sense (cf. Hensley 2012), it shares with pragmatism from Peirce to Dewey the idea that our rationality is not free-floating or can be understood in the context of the representationalist conception of the world. It is rather realized in

the context of collective practices. However, while “praxeological” readings of Wittgenstein end, so to speak, with a listing of modes of usages of words (and, in the sense of grammatical remarks on these modes of use, accuse deviations from those usages of meaninglessness), the transformative positions discussed here (and above all McDowell’s position) develop the idea that these contexts of practice are each different realizations of the human form of life: *The* human form of life (in the singular) is realized in a multiplicity of human *forms* of life (in the plural). While a position in ordinary language philosophy that refers to the late Wittgenstein, for example, leaves the question of human nature unanswered, more recent recourses to Wittgenstein can be read in their connection to Aristotle and Kant in such a way that they provide an answer to this question. In this sense, a practice-theoretical answer to the question of what we are, which also refers to its origins in pragmatism, and the thesis that what we are is to be sought out in its concretions (from collective forms of life to specific and local practices), is not in competition with a correctly understood determination of the essence of what humans are: In collective forms of activity, we redefine and further determine what we are, and this happens here in such a way that we have a (however one-sided or distorted) concept of ourselves.

- 20 A critique of the just developed outlines of a connection of an Aristotelian analysis of form with a pragmatist theory of practice can however be found with Hubert Dreyfus’ critique of McDowell’s so-called “myth of the mental.” The now called McDowell-Dreyfus-Debate took off from a presidential address at the APA by Hubert Dreyfus and continued through a series of papers by both authors in *Inquiry* (cf. also Schear 2013). It basically is a series of papers that debate the question whether McDowell’s picture of human mindedness is too theoretical. Addressing this critique can sharpen the way in which practice-theoretical and rationality-logical points of view could converge in a connection between Aristotle and pragmatism. Dreyfus himself, however, has primarily relied on positions in the phenomenological spectrum to attack McDowell’s concept of knowledge.
- 21 One of his central starting points here is the philosophy of Martin Heidegger and Heidegger’s unique conception of the human world as a holistic network of affordances. In his book on Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, Dreyfus’ reading of Heidegger is actually itself already strongly pragmatist in character (cf. Dreyfus 1991): A central achievement of Heidegger’s philosophy is his destruction of a model of knowledge that is Cartesian and brings about a contemplative picture of the relation of mind and world. A corresponding critique converges in part with Rorty’s already mentioned neopragmatist critique of cognition using the metaphor of mirrors of nature.
- 22 Dreyfus charges McDowell with saying goodbye to the myth of the given and adopting another myth: the myth of the mental. According to Dreyfus, what is missing in McDowell’s picture of our relationship to the world is our entanglement with the world and the fact that our everyday actions cannot be meaningfully addressed within the framework of an ultimately hyper-rationalistic picture of our thinking and acting (as he suggests McDowell is developing). Dreyfus, in defense of the notion of a practical world reference, rejects McDowell’s thesis of the pervasive conceptual penetration of our doing: In blitz chess, the player does not think, but does something (and, according to Dreyfus, could not say what he or she is doing because he is torn out of the flow of doing with such a question). The world is practically present in our actions, but not

thematically, and a practical reference to the world excludes a rational-reflective reference to the world according to Dreyfus.

- 23 McDowell however can reject Dreyfus' criticism with apt arguments. For, on the face of it, he does not dispute what Dreyfus complains about: McDowell, too, would say that someone who plays blitz chess is not approachable by rational aspects in such a way that he or she would reason alongside his or her actions.⁶ Rather, what McDowell means is that such a player is in his or her doing in principle within reach of justification – in that the blitz chess player, who has habitualized many moves, can justifiably say afterwards, when evaluating the game, that he or she did this or that as an attack on the queens or as this or that maneuver. The fact that an experienced jazz musician can construct meaningful musical lines off the cuff, which he or she has not necessarily played before or played in this way, does not contradict the idea that he or she is also a rational agent in playing here. Rather, McDowell turns the tables on Dreyfus argument by arguing that Dreyfus can no longer really tell the difference between catching a frisbee, which happens to fly at me by accident, and playing blitz chess intelligently (the former is indeed, as McDowell says, on the outer limits of rational action). And overall, he argues, correctly I think, that it is not he but Dreyfus who is guilty of the myth of the mental: Only if one understands the mental as something that is understood in a contemplative way as removed and decoupled from the world can one make this accusation against McDowell. His thesis consists solely in the fact that our actions are potentially within the reach of rational thematizations and that, in terms of action theory, there is a difference in the question of why one does something when someone answers that they did not know that they were doing it, or answers that they did not do it for any particular reason (on this cf. Anscombe 2000: §4-18).
- 24 Such a form of critique, as Dreyfus pursues it, cannot serve as a resource for a pragmatist perspective in the broadest sense; it is not a good advocate of such a concern. There is nothing to prevent McDowell's position, informed by Aristotle, Kant and Wittgenstein, from being understood as one that also incorporates essential features of a pragmatism interpreted in terms of practice theory – a pragmatism that is not allergic to topics like the topic of what the nature of human beings is.
- 25 I end with some remarks on the second point above (ii). Dewey's reflections on the concept of experience embed the logical structure of experience in a totality of human life processes.⁷ This raises the question of the concept of the human being not as a practically active agent, but as a natural living being. Peirce in contrast had declared scientific research to be the paradigm of an exploration of nature (cf. Peirce 1877), as well as its fundamental incompleteness with a simultaneous approach to a hypothetical ideal point as the paradigm of knowledge. McDowell's position and the related positions of Thompson and Brandom do not deny the significance of scientific research, but they do deny that it represents a kind of Archimedean point for all references to the world of life. Here, McDowell's position of a relaxed naturalism in a tradition (by means of Rorty's arguments) could be reconstructed genealogically from Dewey rather than coming from Peirce: McDowell points out that a reduction of our responsiveness to reasons as reasons understood as a moment of the form of our being alive, which is concretized in collective practices or to be seen against their background, to a scientific description can only lead to apologies, no longer to justifications. If I want to know why someone crosses the street, I should ask her why she does so; trying to describe what

she does here in terms of neurophysiological processes or genetic transmission processes is not doing justice to the dignity of the natural sciences. Rather, it is the expression of a shallow metaphysic. A description of the former can be quite informative in some exotic cases (for example, if the person constantly stumbles while walking and we learn on enquiry that she has just had a brain tumor surgically removed and that there are consequences of this operation), but it is not a standard explanation of actions. Moreover, scientific research itself is not capable of grounding rationality in anything, but is itself, when well-formed, an exercise of our rationality. In short, McDowell's second nature naturalism is at least amenable to those strands of pragmatist thought that give scientific research a serious place but do not explain it in the context of an ultimate justificatory program.

- 26 If these final remarks were convincing, they show the following: The alternative of either starting from a given form of our being alive or explaining the human form of life exclusively in praxeological terms is incomplete. Michael Thompson, a student of Philippa Foot, has coined his own approach, which describes reason as the nature of man simpliciter, "naive Aristotelianism" and McDowell's naturalism as "sophisticated Aristotelianism";⁸ in his model, unlike McDowell's model, the question of the natural sciences and thus of a realm of laws and its authority for our concept of reason plays no role. In this sense, Michael Thompson represents a concept of the form of our rationality that understands the form as a given form; it does not exist in a Platonic realm of ideas, but whenever we think or act, we realize our rational form of life. It is precisely the first central pragmatist motif discussed here that plays a rather subordinate role for Thompson.⁹ In this way, McDowell's concept of the second, acquired nature, which can be understood in a certain way as a rationality-theoretical reconstruction of the concept of culture, proves to be more compatible with the legacy of pragmatism. McDowell shows that the alternative between reason as form and reason as practice is an incomplete alternative.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ANSCOMBE Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret, (2000), *Intention*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.
- ARISTOTELES, (2015), *On the Soul*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- BEARDSLEY Monroe C., (1958), *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, New York, Hartcourt, Brave.
- BOYLE Matthew, (2012), "Essentially Rational Animals," in Günter Abel & James Conant (eds), *Rethinking Epistemology*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 395-427.
- CONANT James, (2017), "Kant's Critique of the Layer-Cake Conception of Human Mindedness in the B Deduction," in James R. O'Shea (ed.), *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason: A Critical Guide*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 120-39.

- DAVIDSON Donald, (1980), "Mental Events," in Donald Davidson, *Essays on Action and Events*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 207-25.
- DAWKINS Richard, (1976), *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- DEWEY John, (1980), *Art as Experience*, New York, Perigee.
- DREON Roberta, (2022), *Human Landscapes: Contributions to a Pragmatist Anthropology*, New York, State University of New York Press.
- DREYFUS Hubert, (1991), *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being in Time, Division I*, Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press.
- FEIGE Daniel M., (2022), *Die Natur des Menschen. Eine dialektische Anthropologie*, Berlin, Suhrkamp.
- FEIGE Daniel M., (2024), "Indeterminate Life: Themes of a Hermeneutical Anthropology in Gadamer and McDowell," in Daniel M. Feige & Thomas J. Spiegel (eds), *McDowell and the Hermeneutic Tradition*, New York, Routledge, 151-65.
- FOOT Philippa, (2003), *Natural Goodness*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- GADAMER Hans-Georg, (2003), *Truth and Method*, London, Bloomsbury.
- GOLDMAN Loren, (2023), *The Principle of Political Hope: Progress, Action, and Democracy in Modern Times*, New York, Oxford University Press.
- HEGEL Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, (2008), *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- HENSLEY Judy M., (2012), "Who's calling Wittgenstein a Pragmatist?," *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, 4(2). Online: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejpap.716>.
- MCDOWELL John, (1996), *Mind and World*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.
- MCDOWELL John, (1998a), "Criteria, Defeasibility, and Knowledge," in John McDowell, *Meaning, Knowledge, and Reality*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 369-94.
- MCDOWELL John, (1998b), "Two Sorts of Naturalism," in John McDowell, *Mind, Value and Reality*, Cambridge/Mass., Harvard University Press, 167-97.
- MCDOWELL John, (2009), "The Constitutive Ideal of Rationality: Davidson and Sellars," in John McDowell, *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 207-20.
- MCDOWELL John, (2017), "Why does it matter to Hegel that Geist has a History?," in Rachel Zuckert & James Kreines (eds), *Hegel on Philosophy and History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 15-32.
- PEIRCE Charles Sanders, (1877), "The Fixation of Belief," *Popular Science Monthly*, 12, 1-15. Online: <https://philpapers.org/archive/PEITFO.pdf>.
- RÖDL Sebastian, (2007), *Self-Consciousness*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.
- RORTY Richard, (1979), *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Harvard, Harvard University Press.
- SELLARS Wilfrid, (1997), *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, London, Harvard University Press.
- SCHEAR Joseph K. (ed.), (2013), *Mind, Reason, and Being-in-the-World: The McDowell-Dreyfus-Debate*, London, Routledge.

TAYLOR Charles, (1985), "Theories of Meaning," in Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language. Philosophical Papers 1*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 248-92.

THOMPSON Michael, (2008), *Life and Action: Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.

THOMPSON Michael, (2011), "Forms of Nature: 'first', 'second', 'living', 'rational' and 'phronetic'," in Gunnar Hindrichs & Axel Honneth (eds), *Stuttgarter Hegel-Kongress 2011*, Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann, 701-35.

VOLBERS Jörg, (2018), *Die Vernunft der Erfahrung. Eine pragmatistische Kritik der Rationalität*, Hamburg, Meiner.

NOTES

1. The major contributions are McDowell 1996, Foot 2003, Anscombe 2000, and Thompson 2008.
2. See for example Dreon 2022, and Goldman 2023. See also, as a suggestion to actualize Dewey in the context of the Pittsburgh debates, Volbers 2018.
3. A canonic example is Dawkins 1976.
4. For critical remarks on the way McDowell conceptualizes of the historicity of the human world also cf. the last part of Feige 2024, and Feige (2022: Part II).
5. Something along these lines has been developed by Charles Taylor with regard to the question of a non-formal conception of language. Cf. Taylor 1985. Also cf. Feige (2022: Part III).
6. This would be an additive conception of action and reasoning a way that would allow for a clear distinction in the description of what I am doing and what it means that I have reasons in doing so. Anscombe has effectively refuted such a position.
7. Cf. especially Dewey 1980. His Theory of experience is indispensable in the Anglo-American tradition as a building block of a concept of aesthetic experience; Monroe Beardsley has developed his concept of aesthetic experience in relation to Dewey's Theory. Cf. Beardsley 1958.
8. Cf. Thompson (2011: 701-35). For this debate also cf. Feige (2022: Part II).
9. This holds true even he decidedly attempts to develop a concept of practice in Thompson (2008: Part III).

ABSTRACTS

Pragmatism can be understood as a position that conceives of epistemic and moral claims in the terms of a realization within the framework of our collective forms of activity. In this respect, it on the one hand proves to be compatible with current discussions in anthropology, which take Aristotle and German Idealism as their starting point. At the same time however, the two seem to be in tension with regard to the concept of form presupposed in the neo-Aristotelian debates which seems to block a practice-theoretical reading. This article argues for a reconciliation of the two concepts: The human form of life is realized in collective practices that further define the concept of this form of life. For such a reconciliation, both pragmatist as well as neo-Aristotelian accounts however must partially be re-engineered.

INDEX

Keywords: Anthropology, Form, History, Practice, Rationality

AUTHOR

DANIEL MARTIN FEIGE

State Academy of Art and Design, Stuttgart
daniel.feige[at]abk-stuttgart.de

The Scope of Mind in Nature

Charles W. Morris' Early Theory of Symbolism and Critical Reading of G. H. Mead

Etienne Raduly

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Acknowledgments

I am very grateful to Jean Markert for kindly accepting to read over this paper and for his thorough corrections of stylistic flaws in my English writing. I also wish to thank the two anonymous reviewers for the *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, whose suggestions have helped me improve significantly the final version of this article.

1. Introduction

- 1 The notoriety of Charles W. Morris (1903-1979) in contemporary scholarship rests essentially on his division of the “dimensions” of meaning into syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics. Among his contemporaries, however, Morris was known chiefly as a disciple, editor, and exponent of the thought of George H. Mead. Morris' editorial work was part of a more general and constant effort to present Mead as “a thinker of the magnitude and importance of Peirce, James, and Dewey” (quoted in Huebner 2014: 298, n. 26), and to include him among the original founders of the pragmatist tradition. Mead himself spoke very highly of Morris throughout his lifetime, and regarded him as his natural successor at the University of Chicago.¹
- 2 While the importance of Mead's influence on Morris cannot be overemphasized, in this article I wish to bring attention to a subtle yet significant criticism of Mead by Morris in his early writings on the “symbolic” theory of mind. As yet, this first period of his career has received very little attention in the secondary literature, although Morris' 1925 PhD dissertation, *Symbolism and Reality* (1925/1993),² has been made available in 1993. Thus, the aim of this paper is twofold: first, to point out some noteworthy aspects

of the early theory of symbolism, as I believe it deserves to be studied for itself (and not only as a prefiguration of Morris' later and more mature philosophy); second, to identify some points of dissent between Morris and Mead on some key ideas that were to be found in Mead's posthumous and arguably most influential book, *Mind, Self, and Society* (1934/2015),³ edited by Morris between 1931 and 1934.

- 3 These two lines of exposition go hand in hand, since Morris' own views are very closely linked to his critical understanding of Mead. In particular, he appears to have identified, as early as 1927, some questionable points in Mead's definition of the symbol, thus anticipating by some seventy years the heated argument – which originated in the 1990s – on Mead's alleged “anthropocentric” conception of the symbol, the mind, and the self. As I will not attempt to give a definite answer to this argument, I intend rather to reconstruct Morris' reservations and criticisms toward the ideas of his mentor, through a summary of the main goals and concepts of his symbolism, and a survey of some controversies in the field of comparative psychology at the turn of the 20th century. Morris' critical reading of Mead has two main consequences: first, his symbolism proposes a continuous, non-dualistic view of biological evolution, in which the decisive role of the symbol in his definition of mind enables him to conceive of a form of animal symbolism and mentality; second, with respect to the development of Morris' own thought, such a definition of the symbol allows us to understand the later stages of his semiotics, where language is viewed only as a particular instance of sign-use, thus giving its study a larger scope than that of a number of “mainstream,” language-based 20th-century approaches.⁴ Morris' symbolism thus outlines an alternative form of pragmatist anthropology, which ought to be conceived in the larger, natural setting of biological evolution: the human use of symbols – especially in its evolution into linguistic forms – only represents a difference in degree with respect to animal symbolism. In this sense, Morris seems to have attempted to bridge what he perceived as a chasm opened by Mead between animality and humanity, because of an overly restrictive communicational and linguistic criterion in the definition of mind.

2. Symbolism as a Metaphilosophical Program

- 4 Morris' symbolic theory of mind can be regarded as an expression of the wave of “new eclecticism” in the 1920s and 30s (Richardson 2003: 4), which emerged subsequent to the decline of absolute idealism.⁵ Many contemporaries, such as Ralph B. Perry, rejoiced at the signs of “a confluence of currents which have hitherto run in separate channels,” so that “we are (and I am glad, as well as convinced, that it is so) less inclined than formerly to pride ourselves on partisan loyalties and polemical victories” (Perry 1930: 200). This intellectual evolution also reflects a sociological one: the 1920s mark the emergence of philosophy “as a narrowly defined discipline within a modern university setting” (Brodrick 2015: 45), as well as of a generalized belief in the idea of philosophical “progress,” which ought to follow the example set by the experimental sciences. The movement of philosophical “professionalization” (Campbell 2006: 35-7) is thus closely connected, from the beginning, with the metaphilosophical program of rendering the discipline scientific, by adopting a mode of inquiry aiming at “collaborative efforts and progress” in order to “move philosophy away from an endless repetition of competing systems that led nowhere” (Kuklick 2001: 201). This

conception had a profound and lasting influence on Morris, whose most characteristic intellectual traits throughout his philosophical career were his constant opposition to dualistic modes of thinking and his philosophical syncretism.⁶

- 5 As such, Morris regarded his symbolism as a contribution to the construction of a scientific philosophy. Since this transformation involves the strengthening of its transdisciplinary ties, the problem of mind is “undoubtedly the central philosophical problem” (SR: 2), as it has immediate consequences upon the fields of psychology, biology, anthropology, or sociology, as well as logic and the philosophy of mathematics: “philosophy and science are again drawing much closer together, and the topic of mind furnishes a fruitful point of cooperation” (Morris 1929: 155). This close interdependence of a synthetic, or “eclectic” spirit, and a scientific one, is also apparent in the list of “criteria” proposed by Morris in order for his theory to be “comprehensive in its scope and fertile in its implications” (*ibid.*: 157):

[The] theory of mind must be neither so general nor so limited in character that it fails to clarify the philosophical discussions of mind; it must be in harmony with whatever material the various psychological points of view can offer; it must harmonize with the general theory of the development of animal intelligence; it must be applicable to the study of the mind of primitive man; it must throw light upon the relation of logic and mathematics to mental phenomena; and finally, it must not be [...] a “silly theory,” that is a theory which one hotly defends before his colleagues but would hesitate to mention to one of his friends of good common sense. (*ibid.*)

- 6 Above all, for Morris, such a theory ought to be “metaphysically neutral” and capable of being “harmonized with any one of the typical philosophical doctrines” (*ibid.*: 238).

3. The “Total Self-Inclusive View” of Mind

- 7 “Metaphysical neutrality,” however, does not amount to accepting any and all metaphysical doctrines of mind, but rather to *neutralizing*, as it were, their detrimental effects with respect to a science-oriented (meta)philosophical project. Therefore, Morris’ theoretical starting point is not philosophical, but is found in psychological research. More specifically, in this context, behaviorism appears as a preferential reference for leading the “revolt against the dominance of the concept of consciousness as meaning some psychical entity or process revealed by a unique method of observation, or which, along with other drives or entities or urges is invoked to explain the observable process of active organisms in a world itself observable” (SR: 2). The particular significance of behaviorism thus lies in its opposition to the mind-matter metaphysical dualisms inherited from the “Galilean-Cartesian-Newtonian” tradition (Morris 1927b: 253; 1929: 172), and in its attempt to “give a concrete meaning to intelligence and thought in terms of the interaction of the animal and its world” (SR: 2). As such, the most apparent metaphilosophical implication of Morris’ approach is one of simplification and unification: by casting aside all concepts and observational devices pointing to the existence of a separate ontological realm, and by adhering to a behavioral conception of mind (a conception that he would consistently defend throughout his career), Morris was able to devise his own positive contribution to the philosophical “hope” of the 1920s, that of “healing the breach between mind and matter, soul and body, [...] teleology and mechanism, or substance and attribute” (Perry 1930: 200).

8 Despite its importance for overcoming the substantial view of mind, however, behaviorism can only be a *moment* in a more general and inclusive attempt to produce a scientific approach to mental phenomena in philosophy. The allusion to Hegel is not gratuitous or accidental here:⁸ in virtue of his anti-dualism, Morris often attempts to reconcile conflicting theoretical positions, which are not without their merits, but which, taken in and for themselves, inevitably lead to unacceptable consequences. It is such a philosophical *Aufhebung* that is attempted by Morris in his interpretation of behaviorism. As such, despite the fruitfulness of the stimulus-response relation, as well as of the notion of substitute stimulus (or conditioned response), in the explanation of certain learning processes in animal and human organisms, the behaviorist's interpretation is unable to satisfactorily account for mental and symbolic phenomena.

9 At first sight, the concept of substitute stimulus contains all the characteristics of symbolic phenomena, since it elicits the same behavioral reactions as the original stimulus it is a substitute for: e.g., the perception of smoke, viewed as a substitute stimulus for a fire, elicits the same responses as the perception of the fire itself would.

Primarily the learning process is one of continually effecting a co-ordination of behavior and of connecting behavior with new aspects of the environment by the process of the substitution of stimuli. A stimulus present along with another stimulus that releases a certain act may in time acquire the function of releasing the same act. The possibility of learning is dependent upon the ability of making such substitutions. (Morris 1927a: 259)

10 The problem, however, lies in the behaviorists' unilateral focus – in the study of conditioned behavior – on the organism's response. More precisely, by identifying the response with the object, or rather by *reducing* the latter to the former, they face insurmountable difficulties, which ultimately make them defend a “silly theory”: despite their intention to develop a purely scientific study of mind, their method paradoxically prevents them from taking seriously the reality of the external world, and leads them to share “the same philosophical bed” as the “subjective solipsist,” insofar as they “practically [admit] that there is no logical reason why the external cosmos cannot be regarded as an episode in man just as well as man can be regarded as an episode in the cosmos” (Morris 1927b: 254). Indeed, this conclusion is found verbatim in the writings of psychologists like Karl S. Lashley⁹ or Albert P. Weiss¹⁰ – the latter goes as far as characterizing his position as a form of “behavioristic solipsism,” and rejects “the fiction of an external world of stimuli” (quoted in Morris 1927b: 254). The reduction of mental processes to reactions to substitute stimuli leads to casting aside the object referred to, and by extension external reality itself.

The behavioristic emphasis on the response obscures the reference of the symbol to experienced events, and so confuses “substitutable for” with “standing for” or “being a symbol of.” Merely because a secondary stimulus arouses the response which a primary stimulus aroused does not make this secondary stimulus a symbol of the primary stimulus. Behaviorism, then, is able to bring in the dynamic and responsive side of the symbol and thought which introspectionism fails to do, but is unable on the basis of its chosen perspective to distinguish the symbol from the substitute stimulus. (*Ibid.*: 261-2)

11 Thus, while the behavioral approach to mind is fully valid inasmuch as it wipes out the “ivory tower view of mind” (*ibid.*: 253; 1929: 211) and helps to “heal the breach” between matter and mind by replacing the latter in a “naturalistic” (Morris 1932: 17) setting, it needs to be amended and transformed into what we may call a “referential”

or “semantic behaviorism,” which will be able to account for the object’s reality and its function in symbolic phenomena.

- 12 Paradoxically, Morris’ attempt to “save the object” entails a reference to introspective psychology. More precisely, he seeks to find a middle ground between the “self-exclusive view” (i.e. behaviorism) and the “partial self-inclusive view” (i.e. introspectionism). This alternative is the “total self-inclusive view,” which combines the respective merits of the other two. It should be noted, however, that this third view is not the result of a synthesis, but, on the contrary, is revealed as the original and comprehensive conception (1929: 227), the “common perspective for the adult human being” (1927b: 257) – behaviorism and introspectionism being only partial subdivisions of it, on a narrower scope. The total self-inclusive view of mind takes into account “the focal organism, tactual objects, and non-tactual objects” (1929: 227), thus simultaneously allowing the observation of (1) the observer’s private experiences, of (2) the relation of their organism to other organisms, and of (3) the relation of organisms to one another. Admittedly, the private experiences of other organisms remain out of reach; nevertheless, “the observer’s own experience is observed [...] in an unbroken continuum with such material as the behaviorist deals with” (1927b: 257), so that the separation between private content and overt behavior is far from being as clear-cut as the behaviorist supposes it is.
- 13 Morris’ position certainly owes much to Mead’s reading of behaviorism, although, since a significant part of Mead’s thought was not available in published form during his lifetime, the “ideas” (see e.g. SR: 64) Morris refers to in his early writings are seldom referenced precisely, and correspond, for the most part, to the views held in *Mind, Self, and Society*. There is, in particular, a very close resemblance between Morris’ total self-inclusive view and Mead’s “behavioristic” brand of social psychology, which attempts to work “from the outside to the inside,” while recognizing “the inner experience of the individual” (MSS: 7-8), as it appears in the course of “Advanced Social Psychology,” which makes up the first chapter.¹¹ At the same time, Morris’ own theoretical interests in the late 1920s and early 1930s were no doubt an important factor in the invention of the phrase “social behaviorism,” which, though never used by Mead, eventually became the subtitle of the 1934 volume, in order to highlight the singularity of his position, as well as its significance for the development of a non-dualistic approach to mind.
- 14 Morris’ starting point is therefore the same as that of the founder of behaviorism (and his fellow student of Mead in Chicago), John B. Watson: any change in an organism (i.e. any form of action or reaction) ought to be explained as a response to a stimulus caused by the environment of the organism or by another organism (see e.g. Watson 1913). The concept of the substitute stimulus is also fundamental to account for an organism’s learning processes and the development of its “freedom,” i.e. the ability to extend the scope of its environment by responding to parts of it which are not immediately given and perceived: “control by absent stimuli means freedom from present stimuli” (SR: 36). Such a freedom, however, can only be fully attained through the symbol; yet the substitute stimulus is not necessarily a symbol, although it is a precondition of it. More precisely, if every symbol is (genetically) a substitute stimulus, not every substitute stimulus is a symbol. The substitute stimulus in itself does not attest to the “mental” dimension of behavior (SR: 13): only the symbol does. As such, it must meet an additional condition, i.e. it must “arouse the memory image of the original stimulus” (*ibid.*). In other words, the symbol must be “connected with the original stimulus and

not merely with the original response” (SR: 14). A word, for instance, is a symbol insofar as it is not only “a condition for the action which the tactual object called out, but because it is also the condition for the givenness of some memory image of [it], that is, for the reinstatement of the original stimulus in a non-tactual form” (*ibid.*). The symbol is thus liable for a semantic or denotative condition, which can only be met by an introspective or “private” interpretation of the psychological phenomenon of reference to an object. That is not to say, however, that the symbol ought to be understood as a private reality or entity; in fact, Morris denies the existence of “psychical phenomena” as belonging to a specific order of reality. Mental phenomena are symbolic phenomena: the field of the latter completely exhausts, and corresponds to, the field of the former.

- 15 This amounts to saying that the ultimate or complete significance of symbols, and therefore of mind itself, is of an adaptive nature: characterized as a “present-as-absent” (Morris 1932: 300), the symbol points to a portion of experience different from itself, that is, not immediately given to the organism. Symbolic activity ought to be understood in the larger evolutionary process “which has passed from the dealing with objects by touch, to the dealing with distant objects by the development of the distance receptors, and finally to the dealing with absent objects through the functioning of their present symbolic substitutes” (*ibid.*). The use of symbols, which for Morris is completely synonymous with the term “mind,”¹² thus assumes a crucial biological significance, since it increases the plasticity of the “symbolic animals”: their environment is no longer limited to what is given in immediate perception, but is drastically extended by the possibility to respond to certain parts or traits of the immediately given as indicating or referring to something beyond it.

4. Who are the Symbolic Animals? Morris versus Mead

- 16 Morris’ position can be characterized as a resolutely functional approach to mind, which he fully identifies with the use of symbols: for the functional view,
- [...] mind would appear to have nothing of its own, drawing its entire content from nature. Mentality resides in the relation which the apprehended Form assumes in the presence of the Form of the apprehending organism. Just as a stone may be a paper weight in a certain situation, so it would seem that an aspect of nature gains the status of mentality by appearing as content for the Form of an apprehending organism. (Morris 1932: 19)
- 17 As such, Morris’ and Mead’s conceptions are very close to one another.¹³ However, some important differences with Mead arise in Morris’ classification of the kinds of symbols, where he distinguishes three levels of complexity. (1) On the first level, the “simple symbol” (Morris 1927c: 288) performs a purely substitutive or referential function; in this context, “an organism may utilize symbols as cues to behavior without being conscious of self, and without knowing that it ‘has’ symbols” (*ibid.*). The production and use of simple symbols remains largely involuntary, and depends for the most part on actually experienced stimuli. According to Morris’ example, when a cat sees a mouse disappear in a hole, subsequent perceptions of the latter will be associated to the appearance of the mouse, and will prompt the appropriate behavior toward it (*ibid.*). (2) On the second level, the “potential language symbol” (*ibid.*) includes an identical or highly similar referent for two or more organisms (as when the perception of the whole conjures up the absent mouse for two cats (*ibid.*)). (3) Finally, on the third

level, the “actual or internalized language symbol” (*ibid.*: 289) involves a social component as a decisive factor in its genesis and functioning. It is closely linked with the development of a “social self” (*ibid.*) which has “taken within itself the original objective social situation,” and is thus capable of referring to himself as well as to others. The hole would thus be an actual language symbol if the cat could point it out to another cat, “in order to reinstate ‘ratness’ in the other cat’s experience” in this way (*ibid.*). This third level is identical to Mead’s concept of the “significant symbol,” and is of an essentially social nature:

According to Mead, the symbol, when limited to what he calls the significant symbol, arises in those social situations where one participant can take the role of the other and stimulate himself as the other would stimulate him. Speech makes this possible, for in talking to others one stimulates oneself at the same time and in a way similar to the way one is stimulated when others are talking. In the use of significant symbols the user is anticipating a social situation, that is, anticipating the effects upon others of the symbols to be used. The situation may however be further “internalized,” so that one becomes the other to oneself. Thinking as opposed to overt talking becomes the conversation of the self with the “generalized other.” In moral conflicts, in particular, it is not unusual to be aware of an inner conversation, one member of which is the voice of the desires and urges of the individual, while the other member is the voice of the “generalized other,” the social phases of the self, the social attitudes reflected in the voice of conscience. Whenever a person acts in the light of what “people” will say, the situation which Mead so acutely describes is unmistakable. (Morris 1929: 223-4)

- 18 As this last quotation shows, however, the significant symbol (or, in Morris’ terminology, the language symbol) only allows for a “limited” interpretation of symbolism in general. While the third level certainly corresponds to the highest developmental stage of symbols, so much so that Morris presents it as a quasi-*telos* of the former ones, the fact remains that, as a basic principle, the “post-behaviorist” criterion of reference is a matter of *private* experience: “the possibility of the symbol must be found in the mechanisms of the individual” (*ibid.*: 237). For Mead, the reconciliation of the “inside” and the “outside” is made possible by the social nature of the significant symbol, which involves simultaneously the internalization of the social situation and the ability of “taking the role of the other” when conversing with oneself: “the process is not essentially different in these two cases, that is, of thinking and of talking to somebody else” (Mead 1936: 401). For Morris, however, such a reference to the other is not necessary in all symbolic processes, since the criterion of the symbol in general is, more simply, its ability to recall the original situation. Yet such a “rearousal” (Morris 1929: 241) can only happen in “some private non-tactual form” (Morris 1927c: 284), and thus be observed from the self-inclusive point of view (*ibid.*: 287). As a result, even though the linguistic phases of the symbol enable a much higher theoretical and practical control of the environment by the organism, the simple symbol is nevertheless genetically prior and is “presupposed in the process” as a whole (*ibid.*: 290): a given stimulus has to become a symbol for the individual before he can communicate it to others. This entails a significant consequence for Morris’ position, where thought is identified *in toto* to sequences of symbols, but does not always consist in sequences of *linguistic* symbols: “the contention is not that thought is impossible without words, but that thought is impossible without symbols” (SR: 19).
- 19 Morris thus refuses the reduction of the symbol to its linguistic, or “social-vocal” dimension (Morris 1929: 237), mainly because it would lead to an overly strict

demarcation between animal and human behaviors: yet such a chasm “is not borne out by recent studies on animal behavior” (Morris 1927c: 290). This remark, apparently made in passing in the latter article, has a number of serious consequences and directly refers to the thorny problem of Mead’s attitude toward animal or comparative psychology. It has indeed been argued, especially in the field of human-animal studies (or anthrozoology), that Mead defended a “Cartesian model of animal behavior that has been largely discredited by more recent research” (Alger & Alger 1997: 69), by adhering to the conception of the animal as a “reacting machine [...] devoid of self-consciousness” (Konecki 2005: 72-3), and drawing “a clear boundary between the human and animal world [...] fixed mainly by a language of symbolic nature,” without any “intermediate levels of development of this language or its equivalents (a non-verbal language, for instance) allowing the rudiments of self-consciousness and self to emerge” (*ibid.*: 73). According to this view, Mead replaced the “Aristotelian and Cartesian markers of human difference – ‘soul’ or ‘mind’ – [by] a secularized [...] version: language behavior” (Myers 2007: 42). The implication of Mead’s linguistic definition of the symbol, and of mind in general, results in an “unnecessarily and unjustifiably phono/lingua-centric and anthropocentric” approach to animal phenomena (Young & Thompson 2013: 470), which are incapable of satisfying to the criteria of “mind-as-internal-conversation,” a perspective both “inadequate and confining” (Sanders 2003: 407) inasmuch as it makes language “the sole vehicle of the self and meaningful behavior,” and thus “overlooks the significance of other forms of communication” (Irvine 2003: 47).

- 20 As mentioned above, the aim of this article is not to confirm or infirm such an interpretation of Mead, especially since the editorial circumstances leading to the publication of *Mind, Self, and Society* forbid us from treating it as a direct, transparent, and thoroughly coherent expression of his thought.¹⁴ As such, it is equally possible to find some radically anthropocentric contentions,¹⁵ as well as some instances in which Mead would seem to attribute a form of mind or self to animals (see e.g. the references given in Wilkie & McKinnon 2013). However, it would be equally dubious to explain away Mead’s views by referring to the contemporary “consensus” in comparative psychology. To say, for instance, that “during Mead’s lifetime, nothing arose in the scientific literature to challenge [the] assertion” that “in the absence of symbolic language, consciousness of self was limited if not impossible” (Gallagher 2016: 162), or that “the sciences of the time, and the accumulated knowledge based on the question of non-human animal minds when Mead was investigating these questions in the first three decades of the 20th century, permitted no other conclusion if mind was defined only in terms of symbolic language” (*ibid.*: 165), is factually incorrect.
- 21 As a matter of fact, such a consensus on the question of animal mentality did not exist at the time, and Mead clearly favored hypotheses and experiments defending a negative answer, as illustrated in particular in the work of Edward L. Thorndike, who denied animals any ability to think, or even to associate perceptions to representations (see e.g. 1911: 123). For Thorndike, animal learning can be reduced to a trial-and-error process leading to the formation of “S-R connections which are strengthened or weakened by immediately subsequent events” (Boakes 1984: 75), i.e. by pleasure and pain, or, in his terminology, a “positive reinforcement” or an “aversive event.” This amounts to saying that “an animal learns what to do in a situation without in any sense knowing the consequence of the action. The sole effect of a reward in such a process is to ‘stamp in’ the S-R connection. Such a theory leaves an animal with a very

impoverished understanding of its world” (*ibid.*: 71-2). Some remarks by Mead tend to suggest that he adopted, at least in part, this view of animal behavior,¹⁶ including in an experimental context.¹⁷ However, it should also be noted that he seems to have adhered to this hypothesis for methodological reasons, and only as a provisional stance, in view of the uncertain state of current comparative psychology. As such, although it is possible to consider that for Mead “humans are unique in comparison to all other life forms” (Deegan 2001: xxxv), it must be noted that his favorable reading of Thorndike was primarily a way for him to criticize the approaches of G.J. Romanes, C.L. Morgan or L.T. Hobhouse, whom he accused of overemphasizing animal intelligence without having developed a satisfactory concept for it (see e.g. Mead 2001: 46-50, 67-72). It would thus appear that, for Mead, animal intelligence or mentality remained an open question, which, to be answered, would require more careful experiments and observations in order to determine the existence (or not) of similarities in animal and human behaviors.

- 22 Morris’ brand of symbolism, however, is precisely intended to account for the new results in animal or comparative psychology, and thus assigns a crucial significance to two experiments carried out and published during Mead’s lifetime,¹⁸ namely, the “delayed reaction experiment” by Walter S. Hunter (1913), and Wolfgang Köhler’s observations of chimpanzees recorded in his *Mentality of Apes* (1917/1921/1925). Both psychologists present decisive evidence revealing some significant shortcomings in Mead’s outlook:

With Mead’s general position we are in essential agreement and it is in large part due to his influence that the present position was developed, but we question the wisdom of defining the symbol in exclusively social terms. If it is so defined, just how does one take the role of the other, and how on this basis can one explain the results of the delayed reaction experiment and of Köhler’s observations on the chimpanzee? (Morris 1927c: 290, n. 21)

- 23 Hunter’s experiment, on the one hand, addressed the issue of mnemonic behavior in animals (rats, raccoons, dogs) and children through a series of tests involving several doors, one of which was placed under a light and led to a reward (food or sweets); after having taught the subject to open the lit door, the experimenter turns the light off before they reach it, at increasingly longer intervals – while they are moving toward it at first, then before they even start moving. For Morris, the animals’ successful behavior in opening the right door was an evidence of the “selective” role played by the “memory of the original stimulus,” which adds a decisive additional “factor” with regard to the mere substitute stimulus (SR: 31): while the latter explains the association of the door with food through a process of positive reinforcement in Thorndike’s sense, it does not account for the answer to the problem regarding *which* door should be opened. Admittedly, in short intervals, the right choice can be ascribed to the persistence of the external stimulus (through the action of “after-images” or the “retention of bodily orientation” (*ibid.*)); however, in the case of longer intervals, “something else must be operative, something which utilizes the past experience of the animal for an adjustment to an external situation” (*ibid.*: 34). In other words, the sole presence of a “continuing reaction” (*ibid.*), i.e. prompted only by an external stimulus, can only have as a consequence the attempt to open a door, but not to select *the* previously lit one.
- 24 The other attack on Thorndike’s view came from the experiments conducted by Wolfgang Köhler, when he directed the Anthropoid Research Station on the Tenerife

Island between 1913 and 1920.¹⁹ Köhler's various tests and observations famously led him to devise the notion of "insight," conceived as a sudden "perceptual restructuring" (Boakes 1984: 191) enabling the animal to understand the situation as a whole²⁰ in order to solve a specific problem, and resulting in an abrupt and resolute change in behavior. In his book, Köhler criticized the difficulty of Thorndike's tests (1925: 23), and concluded that they did not provide decisive evidence against animal intelligence. His numerous experiments and observations allowed him to show that, on the contrary, chimpanzees do not behave in a discrete manner, merely reacting to a succession of stimulations, but are capable of solving problems in a "roundabout" way (*ibid.*: 4):

The genuine achievement takes place as a single continuous occurrence, a unity, as it were, in space as well as in time; in our example, as one continuous run without a second's stop, right up to the objective. A successful chance solution consists of an agglomeration of separate movements, which start, finish, start again, remain independent of one another in direction and speed, and only in a geometrical summation start at the starting-point, and finish at the objective. (*Ibid.*: 16-7)

- 25 In this way, it can be said that Köhler's experimental method satisfactorily answered Mead's expectations:²¹ an animal's success or failure to solve a given problem will directly depend on whether the situation makes sense to it – but its ability (depending on biological and individual factors) to grasp the meaning of *certain* situations cannot be denied.
- 26 For Morris, the contemporary trends in comparative psychology supply sufficient evidence in favor of the animals' ability to produce and understand symbols, despite the absence of language. Thus, the latter can only be a specific modality of sign-use, and appears as an extremely restrictive criterion for a general and naturalistic theory of symbolism. This entails, in particular, reserving Mead's account of the significant symbol to human linguistic communication only; however, even then, "it is doubtful if all of the experiences of the adult human being that normally are called symbolic really involve this reference to self and to others. Are not even here many simple symbols found that are utterly devoid of social reference?" (Morris 1927c: 290). According to Morris, Mead's criterion for the symbol and mind is too demanding, and fails to explain its own constitution. On the contrary, his own classification appears capable of accounting both for (1) the evolution of mind in nature, by overcoming the dualism between animals and men, as well as for (2) the development of the social-linguistic level of symbolization from the natural-private level:

[It] would seem that to imaginatively take the attitude of another organism, certain present experiences must be symbolic of experiences that appeared at one time to the first organism and are now regarded as occurring in the experience of the other organism. How else does one take the role of another? It would seem that the simple symbol is presupposed in the process, that consequently the more social phases of the symbol are genetically related to the simpler processes, and that this may well be recognized by the employment of a generic name. It is unwise, therefore, to limit the term "symbol" to the level of the significant or actual language symbol even though we must grant that the more important and complex phases of the symbol and of the mind are socially conditioned. (*Ibid.*: 290-1)

5. Conclusion

- 27 Though of considerable theoretical importance, Morris' criticism of Mead remains a minor trend in his writings overall, which raises the question of why he did not

attempt to explore its consequences. I can think of at least two reasons: (1) first, the editorial project of *Mind, Self, and Society*, that Morris saw as an opportunity to promote Mead's work to a larger audience, particularly in Europe.²² It can be assumed that, with this goal in mind, it would have been "strategically" unwise to undermine some of his mentor's core theoretical principles – especially given the fact that, in his writings of the mid-1930s leading up to the *Foundations of the Theory of Signs*, Morris consistently based his attacks on the epistemology of logical empiricism on Mead's interpretation of meaning as an essentially social phenomenon.²³ (2) Second, and perhaps more importantly, Morris was also involved in a second editorial project, namely the publication *The Philosophy of the Act* (1938), which was set to become his main reference to Mead (rather than MSS)²⁴ in his ulterior writings, especially in *Signs, Language, and Behavior* (1946) and *Signification and Significance* (1964). Admittedly, Mead did not draw any new and explicit conclusions with respect to animal mentality in the drafts making up the posthumous 1938 volume. Nevertheless, the configuration of the organic act, by contrast with the behavior of the physical "thing" as a mere inertial volume subject to external influences, allowed him to break with the mechanical S-R model as it appears in Watson and Thorndike: the four stages, or aspects, of the act (impulse, perception, manipulation, and consummation), do not make up a causal chain of determinations set off by the stimulus, but rather an integrative process wherein the response is already at play by organizing the "field of stimulation," through the "field of selective attention" (impulse and perception), in a given way (Mead 1938: 5). This distinction between organism and thing, between movement and action (Blumer 2004: 84), enables us to conceive of the animal organism as a transformative agent, and hence as a member of a widened naturalistic semiotic community, in the terms set out by Mead himself: "Perceptual experience is that in which we control our conduct with reference to spatiotemporally distant stimulation by the promise of contact experience" (Mead 1938: 105; *emphasis added*).

- 28 What is particularly noteworthy in Morris' critical assessment of Mead is that he seems to have noted, as early as 1927, a possible ambiguity, or tension, between a *language-based* and an *act-based* philosophy.²⁵ Thus, I do not wish to suggest that Morris' own theoretical outlook started with a "revolt" against Mead, but rather that it developed in conjunction with a progressive clarification of the thought of his mentor (a process undoubtedly influenced and encouraged by Morris' editorial and promotional endeavors). Of course, this clarification in turn entailed some substantial additions and revisions to Morris' own theory of signs, especially in his more mature writings. Nevertheless, these works retain the ambition of an inclusive or "global" semiotics (Sebeok 1997), as evidenced for instance by Morris' last important book on the subject: thus, in his attempt to delineate the "scope" of the theory of signs, he states that "[it] has for its goal a general theory of signs in all their forms and manifestations, whether in animals or men, whether normal or pathological, whether linguistic or nonlinguistic, whether personal or social" (Morris 1964: 1). It is not surprising, then, that Morris' approach has deliberately been taken as a fruitful source of inspiration for a research program such as biosemiotics (see Sebeok 2001: 69). As Susan Petrilli puts it, "this is perhaps Morris's major contribution to semiotics: he broadens the scope of semiotics and develops a totalizing vision while at the same time being sensitive to the specific differences occurring in the semiotic totality" (1999: 83).²⁶ There is no doubt that a careful re-reading of Mead from this perspective would prove considerably profitable

in reevaluating his conception of animal mentality and symbolism, and in showing his relevance to contemporary discussions on this matter.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ALGER Janet M. & Steven F. ALGER, (1997), "Beyond Mead: Symbolic Interaction between Humans and Felines," *Society and Animals*, 5(1), 65-81. Online: <https://www.animalsandsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/alger.pdf>.
- BLUMER Herbert, (2004), *George Herbert Mead and Human Conduct*, ed. by Thomas J. Morrione, Walnut Creek, Ca., Altamira.
- BOAKES Robert, (1984), *From Darwin to Behaviourism: Psychology and the Minds of Animals*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- BRODRICK Michael, (2015), "Philosophical Legacies of the 1920s," in Richard T. Hull & John R. Shook (eds), *Historical Essays in 20th Century American Philosophy: The American Philosophical Association Centennial Series*, vol. 11, Tallahassee, RTH Pub., 45-67.
- CAMPBELL James, (2006), *A Thoughtful Profession: The Early Years of the American Philosophical Association*, Chicago, Open Court.
- DEEGAN Mary Jo, (2001), "Introduction: George Herbert Mead's First Book," in George H. Mead, *Essays in Social Psychology*, New Brunswick (US)/London, Transactions Publishers, xi-xliv.
- GALLAGHER Timothy J., (2016), "Human-Animal Studies, G. H. Mead, and the Question of Animal Minds," *Society & Animals*, 24(2), 153-71.
- GU Yueguo, (2019), "Morris' Lost Pragmatics: A Plea for Multimodal Semiotic Pragmatics," *Chinese Semiotic Studies*, 15(2), 217-42.
- HUEBNER Daniel R., (2014), *Becoming Mead: The Social Process of Academic Knowledge*, Chicago/London, The University of Chicago Press.
- HUEBNER Daniel R., (2015), "Appendix: The Sources of *Mind, Self, and Society*," in George H. Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society: The Definitive Edition*, Chicago/London, The University of Chicago Press, 391-505.
- HUNTER Walter S., (1913), *The Delayed Reaction in Animals and Children*, New York, Henry Holt and Co.
- IRVINE Leslie, (2003), "George's Bulldog: What Mead's Canine Companion Could Have Told Him about the Self," *Sociological Origins*, 3(1), 46-9. Online: https://www.academia.edu/35773155/Georges_Bulldog_pdf.
- KILPINEN Erkki, (2013), "George H. Mead as an Empirically Responsible Philosopher: The 'Philosophy of the Act' Reconsidered," in F. Thomas Burke & Krzysztof Piotr Skowroński (eds), *George Herbert Mead in the Twenty-first Century*, New York, Lexington Books, 3-20.
- KLEIN Alexander M., (2024), *Consciousness is Motor: William James on Mind and Action*, New York, Oxford University Press.

- KÖHLER Wolfgang, (1917/1921/1925), *The Mentality of Apes*, New York, Harcourt, Brace & Company.
- KONECKI Krzysztof T., (2005), "The Problem of Symbolic Interaction and of Constructing Self," *Qualitative Sociology Review*, I(1), 68-89. Online: <https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.1.1.05>.
- KUKLICK Bruce, (2001), *A History of Philosophy in America, 1720-2000*, Oxford/New York, Clarendon Press.
- MEAD George Herbert, (1934/2015), *Mind, Self, and Society: The Definitive Edition*, ed. by Charles W. Morris, Daniel R. Huebner & Hans Joas, Chicago/London, The University of Chicago Press. [MSS].
- MEAD George Herbert, (1936), *Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Merritt H. Moore, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.
- MEAD George Herbert, (1938), *The Philosophy of the Act*, ed. by Charles W. Morris, John M. Brewster, Albert M. Dunham & David L. Miller, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press
- MEAD George Herbert, (2001), *Essays in Social Psychology*, ed. by Mary Jo Deegan, New Brunswick (US)/London, Transactions Publishers.
- MORRIS Charles W., (1925/1993), *Symbolism and Reality: A Study in the Nature of Mind*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins. [SR].
- MORRIS Charles W., (1927a), "The Total-Situation Theory of Ethics," *International Journal of Ethics*, 37(3) (Apr.), 258-68.
- MORRIS Charles W., (1927b), "The Concept of the Symbol. I," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 24(10) (May 12), 253-62.
- MORRIS Charles W., (1927c), "The Concept of the Symbol. II," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 24(11) (May 26), 281-91.
- MORRIS Charles W., (1929), "The Nature of Mind": Three Lectures delivered at the Rice Institute on January 6, 13, and 20, 1929, *Rice Institute Pamphlet*, 16(44) (Houston), 153-244.
- MORRIS Charles W., (1932), *Six Theories of Mind*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.
- MORRIS Charles W., (1936a), "Semiotic and Scientific Empiricism," in *Actes du Congrès International de Philosophie Scientifique 1935*, vol. 1: *Philosophie scientifique et empirisme logique*, Paris, Hermann, 42-56.
- MORRIS Charles W., (1936b/1968), "The Concept of Meaning in Pragmatism and Logical Positivism," in *Actes du Huitième Congrès International de Philosophie, Prague, Czechoslovakia, 2-7 September 1936*, Nendeln/Liechtenstein, Kraus Reprint Ltd., 130-8.
- MORRIS Charles W., (1942/1956), *Paths of Life: Preface to a World Religion*, New York, Harper and Brothers.
- MORRIS Charles W., (1946/1971), *Signs, Language and Behavior*, New York, Prentice Hall, reprinted in *Writings on the General Theory of Signs*, The Hague, Mouton, 73-397.
- MORRIS Charles W., (1964), *Signification and Significance: A Study of the Relations of Signs and Values*, Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press.
- MYERS Olin Eugene, (2007), *The Significance of Children and Animals: Social Development and our Connections to Other Species*, West Lafayette, Purdue University Press.
- PERRY Ralph B., (1930), "Realism in Retrospect," in George P. Adams & Wm Peperell Montague (eds), *Contemporary American Philosophy*, vol. 2, New York, Russell and Russell, 188-209.

- PETRILLI Susan, (1999), "Charles Morris's Biosemiotics," *Semiotica*, 127(1-4), 67-102. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1515/semi.1999.127.1-4.67>.
- RICHARDSON Alan W., (2003), "Logical Empiricism, American Pragmatism, and the Fate of Scientific Philosophy in North America," in Gary L. Hardcastle & Alan W. Richardson (eds), *Logical Empiricism in North America: Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, vol. XVIII, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1-24.
- SANDERS Clinton R., (2003), "Actions Speak Louder Than Words: Close Relationships between Humans and Non-Human Animals," *Symbolic Interaction*, 26(3) (Aug.), 405-26. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1525/si.2003.26.3.405>.
- SEBEOK Thomas A., (1997), "Global Semiotics," in Irmengard Rauch & Gerald F. Carr (eds), *Semiotics Around the World: Synthesis in Diversity*, Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter, 105-30.
- SEBEOK Thomas A., (2001), "Biosemiotics: Its Roots, Proliferation, and Prospects," *Semiotica*, 134, 61-78. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1515/semi.2001.014>.
- THORNDIKE Edward L., (1911), *Animal Intelligence: Experimental Studies*, New York, The Macmillan Company.
- WATSON David, (1981), "Social Theory and National Culture: The Case of British and American Absolute Idealism, 1860-1900," *Social Science History*, 5(3), 251-74.
- WATSON John B., (1913), "Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It," *Psychological Review*, 20(2), 158-77. Online: <https://www.ufrgs.br/psicoeduc/chasqueweb/edu01011/behaviorist-watson.pdf>.
- WILKIE Rhoda & Andrew MCKINNON, (2013), "George Herbert Mead on Humans and Other Animals: Social Relations after Human-Animal Studies," *Sociological Research Online*, 18(4). Online: <https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.3191>.
- YOUNG Robert L. & Carol Y. THOMPSON, (2013), "The Selves of Other Animals: Reconsidering Mead in Light of Multidisciplinary Evidence," *Studies in Symbolic Interaction*, 40, 467-83. Online: [https://doi.org/10.1108/S0163-2396\(2013\)0000040023](https://doi.org/10.1108/S0163-2396(2013)0000040023).

NOTES

1. See e.g. Huebner (2014: 147).
2. Hereafter noted SR.
3. Hereafter noted MSS.
4. See e.g., for the field of pragmatics, the criticism of its "monomodal" character by Gu (2019: 218 sq.).
5. For a historical and sociological overview of absolute idealism, see Watson 1981.
6. This is especially true of his "scientific empiricism," devised in the second half of the 1930s as a collaborative program between pragmatism and logical empiricism.
7. In the omitted part of this quotation, Perry mentions the opposition between "religion and science" (*ibid.*): although a number of Morris' writings (especially his 1942 book, *Paths of Life: Preface to a World of Religion*) illustrate such an attempt to overcome it, this issue is far from being a central topic in *Symbolism and Reality* (wherein Morris mostly exhibits a critical stance toward religious symbolism), and thus lies outside the scope of this article.
8. For an explicit reference to Hegel, see e.g. Morris' history of the "speculation concerning mind" (1929: 157 sq. and 183 sq.). The sixth and last chapter of *Symbolism and Reality*, entitled "Philosophy and Civilization," also bears some striking similarities with a Hegelian view of

history in the discussion of the relations between symbols and reality throughout various intellectual and cultural contexts.

9. “A consistent behaviorism cannot admit any accurate direct knowledge of reality, since, if reactions constitute knowledge, the reactions may be to a part only of the total situation and knowledge is, therefore, limited by the reaction capacities of the mechanism” (quoted in Morris 1927b: 254).

10. “For me, ‘I am observing’, only means ‘I am responding’; and ‘I am experiencing’ also means ‘I am responding’” (quoted in Morris 1927b: 262).

11. While the material of the chapter itself is drawn from student notes taken in 1928 and 1930, it can be surmised that Morris himself had heard Mead develop similar ideas, given that the footnotes supplementing the main text are drawn from his personal student notes on the 1924 “Advanced Social Psychology” and “Problems of Consciousness” classes. My exegetic hypothesis is based on the detailed material presented in Huebner (2015: 393-7).

12. “Thought is not something different from symbols and which uses them; thought is identical with the sequences of symbols” (SR: 19).

13. See e.g. (MSS: 10-1).

14. On this issue, see in particular Huebner (2014: 86-8).

15. For instance, in the oft-quoted passage according to which animals have no personalities, and consequently “no rights,” so that “we are at liberty to cut off their lives” (MSS: 183).

16. “An animal makes combinations, as we say, only by trial and error, and the combination that is successful simply maintains itself” (MSS: 95).

17. In the true spirit of the Chicago School, Mead was actively embedded in the experimental work of his colleagues and students, as recalled by Watson (see Huebner 2014: 107). Huebner also uncovered a very interesting remark by Jessie Blount Allen, a student in experimental psychology at Chicago, who wrote in her 1904 dissertation on *The Associative Processes of the Guinea Pig* that “it was suggested by Mr. G. H. Mead that the reactions of the guinea pig might be direct responses to immediate contact stimuli, and that a distant stimulus, e.g., a recollection of the path, was not responsible for the reaction” (*ibid.*: 280, n. 48).

18. Another possibly relevant source on this matter is William James, whose involvement in the “automatism controversy” in the 1870s, as well as his analyses of “remote sensations” or “prudential reflection” in non-human organisms, played a major role in the construction of his *Principles of Psychology* and his theory of consciousness (see especially Klein 2024, chapters 7 and 9). However, although James is a crucial reference throughout SR, there is no textual evidence suggesting that Morris was familiar with his writings on comparative psychology – which he does not use in his criticism of Mead. I am very grateful to Alexander Klein for sharing with me a proof of his yet unpublished book for the preparation of this article.

19. Köhler’s research was made available to the English-speaking public with the translation of his *Mentality of Apes* in 1925, and he was a visiting lecturer at Clark University the same year (Boakes 1984: 194-5).

20. In this sense, the concept of insight does not refer to a mysterious intuitive ability, but to a unitary perceptual grasp, as suggested by the German term: *Ein-sicht*.

21. References by Mead to Köhler’s work remain, however, very infrequent overall. One noteworthy mention is a passage of *The Philosophy of the Act* where Mead discusses “mediation” in experience and perception, but he does not seem to consider Köhler’s experiments of special importance for his own approach: “Existence in the field of experience belongs to mediation, and mediation belongs to percepts [...]. The degree to which these things can enter into the experience of apes depends upon the degree of use to which the ape puts the objects of his manipulation. Köhler certainly found certain situations within which the beginnings of things could be located, but even here they must occupy an utterly insignificant part of the ape’s experience” (Mead 1938: 136).

22. See especially Huebner (2014: 149, and 296-7).

23. See e.g. Morris (1936a: 47; 1936b/1968: 132-5).

24. It must be noted that, while *The Philosophy of the Act* is, according to Morris himself, his main source of inspiration for the behavioral theory of signs developed in *Signs, Language, and Behavior*, on the other hand the references to MSS are mainly critical (see especially 1946/1971: 119-22, where Morris reiterates his criticisms of 1927, while also pointing out Mead's problematic use of the notion of consciousness "in his occasional attempts to differentiate the significant symbol from the conditioned reflex").

25. On this topic, see especially Kilpinen (2013: 5, n. 2).

26. She rightfully adds that "this biosemiotic orientation is present from the very beginning of his studies, which authorizes us to speak of continuity from the beginning to the end of his work" (Petrilli 1999: 99).

ABSTRACTS

This article aims to explore the origins of Charles W. Morris' semiotic anthropology through an analysis of his "symbolism," a theory of mind wherein the latter is completely identified with the production and use of symbols. Developed in the late 1920s, this theory consists in transforming the behaviorist approach by means of a semantic or referential emphasis, i.e. by underlining the importance of the symbol's object rather than studying only the responses that it elicits. Considering, however, that the experience of reference is of a private or "self-inclusive" nature, Morris' conception of the symbol entails a number of significant consequences, not only with respect to classical behaviorist views, but also to Mead's. By founding his conception of the symbol on a self-inclusive basis, Morris questioned the linguistic and social criteria that governed the outlook of his mentor in *Mind, Self, and Society*. This critical reading thus implies a rehabilitation of animal symbolism, against a number of remarks by Mead indicating his refusal of the existence of symbolization, and so of mind, in the non-human world. Insofar as Morris' line of thought was heavily influenced by contemporary research in comparative psychology, it is possible to consider that he anticipated recent discussions of Mead's alleged "anthropocentrism," and suggested an evolutionary and continuous view of mind through a generalized symbolism that refuses any difference of nature between human and animal mentalities.

INDEX

Keywords: Charles W. Morris, George H. Mead, Symbolism, Philosophy of Mind, Animal Psychology

AUTHOR

ETIENNE RADULY

Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3, CRISES EA 4424
etienne.raduly[at]ens-lyon.fr

The Entanglement of Ethics and Anthropology

Dewey's Interactionist Account of Self-Realization

Armando Manchisi

I am firmly convinced that when all the dust of controversy settles, John Dewey will be regarded as the philosopher of human growth in the age of modern science and technology, as the philosopher who saw man not as a creature with a fixed nature, whether conceived as a fallen soul or a soulless configuration of atoms, but as a developing mind-body with an historical career, who because he does something in and to the world, enjoys some degree of freedom, produces consequences never witnessed before, and leaves the world different from the world into which he was born. (Hook 1959: 1013)

1. Introduction

- 1 The idea of self-realization is one of the most significant points of intersection between ethics and philosophical anthropology.¹ It holds together two basic principles: on the one hand, that in order to understand the conduct of human beings it is necessary to clarify the kind of entities they are, thus examining their characteristics, potentialities and limitations; on the other hand, that it is not possible to describe human nature without taking into account its active side, that is, the tendency of human beings to shape their lives on the basis of their beliefs and evaluations. The idea of self-realization thus makes it possible to show the entanglement between anthropology and ethics, and thereby to shed light on both fields. Nevertheless, contemporary philosophers (as well as psychologists, economists, theologians, etc.) have rarely provided detailed accounts of this idea – which they call, depending on the context,

human flourishing, human development, self-fulfillment, self-actualization – and the issues it involves.²

- 2 A notable exception is John Dewey. In his philosophy, Dewey not only explicitly addresses the idea of self-realization, providing a detailed analysis of its components and conditions, but also clarifies – as perhaps only Aristotle and a few others have done before and after him – the role of this idea in the different contexts of individual and social experience. In this way, he sheds light on both the ethical dimension of human nature and the anthropological basis of ethics, framing the two issues within a unifying view.
- 3 But Dewey has another, more important merit. Not only did he help clarify the idea of self-realization, but he also proposed an original and productive interpretation of it. At the heart of this interpretation is the claim that self-realization does not consist in the mere actualization of a given essence, but in the interaction of a human being with her natural and social environment. For this reason, I will understand Dewey's view as an "Interactionist Account" of self-realization.
- 4 My goal in this contribution is to present this account and to show its philosophical relevance. This theoretical purpose, however, must first come to terms with the exegetical concern that Dewey's view of self-realization and his naturalism belong to two separate phases of his philosophy and therefore should not be conflated. This concern rests on the traditional "discontinuist reading," according to which Dewey pursued the project of an ethics of self-realization in the early stage of his career, under the influence of British neo-idealism, but finally set it aside after the discovery of Darwin's evolutionary biology and William James' pragmatism.³ Leaning on the more recent "continuist reading," I argue instead that in his later work Dewey does not relinquish the idea of self-realization, but rather translates and partially reworks it in naturalistic terms through the concept of *growth*.⁴
- 5 In order to keep my theoretical goal and this exegetical concern together, I proceed as follows: in section 2, I present the most popular view of self-realization, namely the Essentialist Account; in order to uphold Dewey's alternative, in section 3 I examine the *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, i.e., the text in which he lays the foundation for the Interactionist Account; in section 4, I focus on some of the main areas of Dewey's later philosophy (anthropology, ethics, politics) in order to show the permanence of the earlier account; in section 5, I compare more explicitly the Interactionist Account and the Essentialist Account; finally, in section 6, I turn back to the entanglement of ethics and anthropology.⁵

2. The Essentialist Account

- 6 In order to clarify the originality and value of Dewey's account of self-realization, it is useful first to examine the most common view of this topic, both in science and in everyday language. According to this view, self-realization is the process by which an individual actualizes her potential, that is, those properties and abilities that *essentially* characterize her and which she therefore has reason to value. These properties and abilities are hence conceived as latent powers that need to be unfolded and manifested. For the sake of simplicity, I will call this view the "Essentialist Account."

- 7 At the heart of this account are an anthropological thesis and an ethical thesis. According to the anthropological thesis, every human being possesses several properties, both physical and mental. Some of these properties (e.g., having green eyes) are contingent, or extrinsic, that is, they depend on the existence of other entities or accidental circumstances. Other properties (e.g., being able to communicate), on the other hand, are essential, or intrinsic, that is, they belong to the very nature of the individual. The ethical thesis claims that it is good for human beings to actualize their essential properties, i.e., to exercise and develop them: insofar as they define an individual for who she is, in fact, these properties are what is most valuable to her.
- 8 In the context of ethical perfectionism, for example, these two theses are often summarized in the idea of human flourishing as the excellent exercise of (theoretical or practical) reason, i.e., the capacity that is considered essential to human nature. As a consequence, according to this view, human beings realize themselves only by living rationally.⁶
- 9 To some extent, this account conceptually frames a popular insight, namely, that what defines an individual in a relevant way lurks within her, so she must express it as fully as possible. Of course, this is only possible within the right circumstances, since human beings always act within a natural and social environment. According to the Essentialist Account, however, the influence of context is merely extrinsic. The environment can foster or block the development of a human being: for example, a just society or good friends can be crucial for leading a flourishing life. But the fact of being a human, provided, for instance, by the property of rationality, does not depend on external circumstances, since it is part of someone's very nature as a member of the human life-form. Indeed, the traits that truly characterize an individual are not context-dependent, for otherwise they would be something accidental rather than essential. According to the Essentialist Account, therefore, the environment has an *instrumental* rather than a constitutive function: that is, it is a means to self-realization, not its source.

3. The Interactionist Account: Dewey's Early View

- 10 The first work in which Dewey presents his account of self-realization in detail is *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics* (1891). He wrote this text primarily, though not exclusively, as support for courses he taught at the University of Michigan, devoted to such topics as "Anthropological Ethics" and "Ethics of Human Relations."⁷ The choice of these topics stemmed from his purpose to address the classical question of moral conduct in light of the findings of modern science. Not surprisingly, the book opens precisely by stating that ethics shares with anthropology and other disciplines its content, but differs from them in form, that is, in its non-descriptive but *normative* approach:

This does not mean that it belongs to ethics to prescribe what man ought to do; but that its business is to detect the element of obligation in conduct, to examine conduct to see what gives it its *worth*. Anthropology, etc., do not take into account the *whole* of action, but simply some of its aspects – either external or internal. Ethics deals with conduct in its entirety, with reference, that is, to what makes it conduct, its *end*, its real meaning. Ethics is the science of conduct, understanding by conduct man's activity in its whole reach. (EW.3: 241)

- 11 The aim of the work, then, is to examine *human conduct*. Dewey makes it clear that this term – which he will also use extensively in his later writings – is not identical with “action”: while the latter refers to any kind of activity (even “the working of a pump”), the notion of “conduct” “implies more than something taking place; it implies purpose, motive, intention; that the agent knows what he is about, that he has something which he is aiming at. All action accomplishes something or brings about results, but conduct has the result *in view*” (EW.3: 242). Investigating human conduct therefore means first identifying and evaluating the ends in view that guide it.
- 12 This involves two important issues for my analysis. First, that analyzing conduct means shedding light on the fundamental features of human nature, such as “character – [...] feelings and inclinations” (EW.3: 247). From this perspective, ethics is thus entangled with anthropology. Second, if the main object of ethics is the ends of conduct, then self-realization is its ultimate point. Indeed, while an agent usually pursues external goals, in realizing herself she intentionally pursues her own fulfillment. Put differently: self-realization consists in the identity of the agent and her end in view.
- 13 Dewey presents his account of self-realization specifically in §§ XXXIII-XLI of the *Outlines*. This account is based on four basic concepts: (1) *individuality*, (2) *interest*, (3) *adjustment to the environment*, (4) *community*.

3.1. Individuality

- 14 The starting point is the following formula: “*The Moral End or the Good Is the Realization by a Person and as a Person of Individuality*” (EW.3: 301). This formula holds together three notions: (a) the *moral end*, i.e., the ultimate goal of human conduct; (b) the *person*, which Dewey defines here as “a being capable of conduct – a being capable of proposing to himself ends and of attempting to realize them” (*ibid.*); (c) *individuality*. The latter is the notion on which he dwells most and which he explains thus:
- We may distinguish two factors – or better two aspects, two sides – in individuality. On one side, it means special disposition, temperament, gifts, bent, or inclination; on the other side, it means special station, situation, limitations, surroundings, opportunities, etc. Or, let us say, it means *specific capacity* and *specific environment*. Each of these elements, apart from the other, is a bare abstraction and without reality. Nor is it strictly correct to say that individuality is constituted by these two factors *together*. It is rather, as intimated above, that each is individuality looked at from a certain point of view, from within or from without. (EW.3: 301-2)
- 15 This quote already summarizes some of the key elements of Dewey’s account of self-realization. Individuality is composed of two inseparable and interdependent aspects:
- a. a person’s *capacities*, that is, the specific traits that characterize her and make her able to be and do certain things rather than others;
 - b. a person’s *environment*, that is, the specific context in which she finds herself and which thus establishes possibilities and limits to her actions.
- 16 Dewey makes it clear right away that these are not really two different aspects, but simply two ways of considering individuality: it is possible to describe a person by referring, “from within,” to her characteristic traits (“she is intelligent, brave, melancholic, good at drawing...”) or, “from without,” to the conditions in which she lives and which have shaped her (“she was born in Italy, grew up in a working-class family, studied architecture, married to Agnese...”).

- 17 There is something surprising about this idea. As the Essentialist Account also suggests, we are used to considering as constitutive of a person only her “internal” characteristics, and at most her physical traits, but we regard the external environment as a contingent factor, i.e., something that can change or even disappear, without a person ceasing to be who she is. But, according to Dewey, this is a mistake. The environment, in fact, “is not simply the facts which happen objectively to lie about an agent; it is such part of the facts as may be *related* to the capacity and the disposition and gifts of the agent” (EW.3: 302-3).
- 18 Thus understood, then, a person’s environment does not coincide with mere space-temporal circumstances, but with those aspects of a (material, but above all cultural and social) context that “motivate” this person, that is, capture her interests, attract her desires, activate her abilities, and so on. As a consequence, for Dewey it is not only the individual who comes into contact with an environment and is influenced by it, but it is also the environment itself that is shaped by the individual, i.e., by her dispositions, goals, cognitions, skills, etc. In other words: what counts as an environment for a certain person are those aspects of a context that are “meaningful” to her. Dewey thus considers the environment “a constituent factor” of individuality, since it contributes to “make it what it is” (EW.3: 302). As a consequence, two people, e.g., a brother and a sister, while living in the same circumstances (same parents, same house, same town), do not really have the same environment, since their individual capacities “carve out” the context in different ways, so that something that is, say, exciting or frightening to one is not so to the other.
- 19 Unlike the Essentialist Account, then, Dewey believes that a person’s identity – meaning the answer to the question “who is she?” – is not reducible to her physical or psychological characteristics, but also involves her surroundings and her interactions with them. We could also put it this way: for Dewey, we come to define who we are and what we want to do only by interacting with the environment (by learning a language, becoming familiar with a system of values and meanings, taking on certain social roles, and so on), so our evaluative relationship with ourselves – that is, our personal identity – is structurally mediated by our relationship with the contexts in which we act.
- 20 This twofold aspect of individuality has consequences on how people realize themselves. For Dewey, we can fulfill ourselves only by interacting with our environment. A capacity, in fact, is nothing more than *the power to do something*, so without a world in which it is possible to actively exercise this power, the very concept of “capacity” loses its meaning. Dewey explains it as follows:
- the manner and the purpose of exercising his capacity is always *relative* to and *dependent* upon the surroundings. Apart from the environment the capacity is mere emptiness; the exercise of capacity is always establishing a relation to something exterior to itself. All we can say of capacity apart from environment is that *if* certain circumstances were supplied, there would be something there. We call a capacity *capability*, possibility, as if for the very purpose of emphasizing the necessity of external supplementing. (EW.3: 302)
- 21 If realizing oneself means cultivating one’s individual capacities, that is, developing those properties and abilities that make us the specific persons we are, then self-realization involves successfully interacting with those contexts that actually allow one to activate and exercise those capacities. Dewey speaks in this regard – with perhaps too mechanistic a term – of the “*function*” of individuality, which he defines as “an active relation established between power of doing, on one side, and something to be

done on the other” (EW.3: 303). To exercise one’s function, then, is to employ one’s subjective capacities to ‘respond’ to the objective requirements of the environment. It is important, however, that both factors are present. On the one hand, a person does not realize herself by narcissistically fulfilling her own desires, namely, by disregarding the context: “To exercise a function as a student is not to cultivate tastes and possibilities internally; it is also to meet external demands, the demands of fact, of teachers, of others needing knowledge” (*ibid.*). But on the other hand, realizing oneself does not mean simply conforming to external directives either: “Without the inner disposition and inclination, we call conduct dead, perfunctory, hypocritical. An activity is not functional, unless it is organic, expressing the life of the agent” (EW.3: 304). Thus understood, then, self-realization is structured as a *twofold movement*: on one side, the person exercises her abilities and achieves her goals; on the other side, the environment grows and improves as a result of the person’s contribution.

3.2. Interests

- 22 Once he has clarified individuality and how it is realized, Dewey moves on to examine the components of this process in more detail. To this end, in §§ XXXIV-XXXVI he focuses on the role of *interests*, understood as the “inner side” of a person’s function, while in § XXXVII he discusses the person’s *adjustment to the environment*, that is, the way in which she realizes her function externally. Dewey identifies three main characteristics of interests:
- a. they are *active*, since they involve a person’s engagement with something; Dewey writes that this is why we talk of “a man’s interests, meaning his occupations or range of activities” (EW.3: 305);
 - b. interests are *objective*, since they are directed toward an object; interest is thus not merely an inner state, but an involvement with the world: we in fact “are always interested in something” (*ibid.*);
 - c. interests consist in *satisfaction*, since they imply unity between the interested subject and the interesting object; while desire is a state of tension of a person toward something other than herself and which she does not possess, interest always presupposes an engagement with the object: we are interested in something because this thing *concerns* us and therefore, to some extent, already belongs to us; in other words, by being interested in an object, we find ourselves in it.
- 23 Dewey then distinguishes two general forms of interest: in *persons* and in *things*. Interest in persons can concern both *self* and *others*. Self-interest, which may also be called *prudence*, consists in that care which each individual should have for her own well-being. It must not, however, be confused with selfishness or sentimentalist indulgence for oneself: rather, it involves the self-respect and self-valuing that underlie honor, dignity and moral commitment. Interest in others, or *sympathy*, consists in having others as ends in view of one’s conduct. Dewey specifies that sympathy should not be understood in terms of altruism (just as self-interest is not merely egoistic); more generally, the very distinction between altruism and egoism is not very helpful in understanding human conduct:
- If man is truly a social being, constituted by his relationships to others, then social action must inevitably realize himself, and be, in that sense, egoistic. And on the other hand, if the individual’s interest in himself is in himself as a member of society, then such interest is thoroughly altruistic. (EW.3: 308)

- 24 Interest in things, on the other hand, can be *contemplative* or *productive*. The former is directed toward the world, both natural and social, and its most eminent form is intellectual work, i.e., *science*. This should not be understood, however, as cold, detached observation: when there is true interest, “Man identifies himself with the meaning of this world to the point that he can be satisfied only as he spells out and reads its meaning” (EW.3: 310). Productive interest is driven by a similar involvement with the things of the world, that is, with “the large and goodly frame of things” (*ibid.*); but its end is fulfilled in the creation and manipulation of reality, for aesthetic or instrumental reasons. Its prominent form is thus *art*.
- 25 By inquiring into these forms of interest, Dewey thus presents the basic modes of a person’s interaction with the environment, that is, of engagement with the natural and social world. Depending on the person involved, each of these modes can be a source of self-realization.

3.3. Adjustment to the Environment

- 26 In § XXXVII Dewey addresses the issue of adjustment to the environment in more detail. Having already explained the concept of “environment,” here I dwell mainly on that of *adjustment*, which Dewey takes, as he himself states, “by evolutionists” (EW.3: 313).⁸ He thus argues that “adjustment” does not mean passive conformity to a fixed context, but “*transformation* of existing circumstances” (EW.3: 313) This occurs through a dynamic that can be broken down into three distinct, though mutually related, movements:
- a. first, a person “absorbs” the environment in which she finds herself, that is, she learns and appropriates the norms and ends that structure the surrounding reality; this is the condition of possibility for the formation of her individuality, just as for a child learning a language, a value system, etc., is a condition for being able to relate to the world and to herself;
 - b. second, adjustment requires the person to “assert [herself] *against* [her] surroundings,” (*ibid.*) that is, to take a critical distance from what she has found: this is necessary to determine her own ends autonomously;
 - c. third, the person “goes back” to the environment, to transform it according to what she has established as valuable; this involves “a reconstruction of the prior environment” (EW.3: 314).
- 27 Hence, for Dewey, adjustment “is not outer conformity; it is living realization of certain relations in and through the will of the agent” (*ibid.*). Self-realization is but the highest and most successful form of adjustment to the environment, that is, *a plastic and rational interaction of a person with the natural and social world*. This is why Dewey’s early account of self-realization can be characterized as *interactionist*.

3.4. Community

- 28 Dewey closes his analysis with a second formula, which he calls the “ethical postulate,” since it is both the presupposition and the foundation of human conduct:

IN THE REALIZATION OF INDIVIDUALITY THERE IS FOUND ALSO THE NEEDED REALIZATION OF SOME COMMUNITY OF PERSONS OF WHICH THE INDIVIDUAL IS A MEMBER; AND, CONVERSELY, THE AGENT WHO DULY SATISFIES THE COMMUNITY

IN WHICH HE SHARES, BY THAT SAME CONDUCT SATISFIES HIMSELF. (EW 3: 322
[capitalization in original])

- 29 This formula completes in a sense that of § XXXIII. There Dewey had claimed that the moral end is the realization of individuality. After showing that individuality is constituted by its relation to the environment, here he argues that its realization necessarily entails the realization of the environment, and particularly of the community to which a person belongs. This means that by exercising one's function, i.e., pursuing the ends that make a person the specific individual that she is, she contributes to the development of her environment. For example, a father who fulfills himself as a father thereby also contributes to the making of a good family; a physician who performs her work with intelligence and involvement realizes herself while doing good for her patients and the hospital.
- 30 From an anthropological perspective, this stems from the social embeddedness of human beings, that is, from the fact that people are always and primarily members of one or more groups. The ethical consequence of this is that individual ends are always also collective in scope, so that personal self-realization implies social commitment.

4. The Interactionist Account: Dewey's Later View

- 31 I would now like to shift the focus of my analysis to Dewey's later writings in order to show the permanence of the Interactionist Account of self-realization that he developed in the *Outlines*. As I have already mentioned, the "discontinuist reading" of Dewey's philosophy considers this exegetical move a hermeneutical mistake. However, this reading is mostly based on the occurrence of the term "self-realization," which Dewey himself links to the neo-idealist ethics of Green and Bradley and which he therefore stops using (though never entirely) when he distances himself from them from 1892 onward.⁹ This thus seems to lead to the conclusion that in his later work Dewey rejects the idea of self-realization as such.
- 32 In my opinion, however, this is a misunderstanding. On the one hand, it is true that Dewey progressively abandons the more idealistic elements of his early view; but, on the other hand, he never relinquishes his belief that self-realization plays a fundamental role both in the lives of individuals and in the organization of society. Evidence of this is that he keeps throughout his career insisting on the importance of the development of human capacities and the freedom of individuals to flourish – although he refers to it in terms of *growth*, in accordance with the naturalistic framework of his later philosophy.¹⁰
- 33 But this continuity can be demonstrated more specifically by examining the way Dewey understands self-realization, or growth, in his later works. This is what I aim to do in this section. As we have seen, at the heart of Dewey's early account are three basic claims:
- a. self-realization is the ultimate goal of human conduct;
 - b. it consists in the adjustment to the environment, i.e. the interaction of a human being with her material and social conditions;
 - c. it thus implies a mutual development between the human being and the environment.
- 34 As I will show in the following pages, in his later philosophy Dewey rejects only claim (a), while sticking to (b) and (c).

- 35 To this end, I focus on three central areas of Dewey's work to demonstrate the key role that the Interactionist Account of self-realization plays in them: (1) *anthropology*, (2) *ethics*, (3) *politics*. Of course, I cannot go into the details of Dewey's ideas in these areas; here I merely point out their continuity with the earlier view.

4.1. Anthropology

- 36 The work in which Dewey most extensively develops his anthropological view is *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922). For the purposes of my analysis, there are three issues in this work on which it is important to dwell.
- 37 First, Dewey takes up the problem of the relationship between what in the *Outlines* he called the “two sides” of *individuality*, namely capacity and environment, which he here examines and justifies within a fully naturalistic philosophical framework. At the heart of this work, too, is the claim that “all conduct is *interaction* between elements of human nature and the environment, natural and social” (MW.14: 9). This means that, in order to understand human conduct, it is necessary to focus on that peculiar “encounter” between the innate dispositions that characterize human beings (instincts, inclinations, needs, etc.) and the behaviors acquired through education and socialization. This makes it possible to identify, on the one hand, the biological and anthropological conditions that enable moral action and freedom, and, on the other, the ways through which human nature can be directed toward the realization of individual and social good. This allows Dewey to restate the *entanglement of ethics and anthropology*, which he summarizes in the idea that “morals is the most humane of all subjects. It is that which is closest to human nature” (MW.14: 204).
- 38 Second, Dewey again emphasizes the crucial role of the *environment* in human conduct, which he explains as follows:
- Human nature exists and operates in an environment. And it is not “in” that environment as coins are in a box, but as a plant is in the sunlight and soil. It is of them, continuous with their energies, dependent upon their support, capable of increase only as it utilizes them, and as it gradually rebuilds from their crude indifference an environment genially civilized. (*Ibid.*)
- 39 The key issue that needs to be stressed here is the idea of the “mutual benefit” of interaction: namely, it is not only the environment that enables human growth, but it is also human growth that fosters the flourishing of the environment.
- 40 Third, Dewey returns to the topic of *interest* as a mode of engagement of the self with the environment. In the fully naturalistic framework of his late philosophy, he explains it as a stage in the determination of *habit* – a concept that was not developed in the *Outlines*. Interest in something or someone, in fact, consists in an involvement toward the object or person of reference; it thus involves a positive tendency that, if reiterated and stabilized, can produce a habit. Dewey defines this concept as “an acquired predisposition to ways or modes of response” (MW.14: 32), that is, a cognitive and practical disposition to interact with external stimuli in definite ways. Like interest, then, habit represents one of the main ways through which a human being's interaction with the environment occurs. More specifically, habit is that characteristic that makes interaction sufficiently smooth and effective to enable an individual to grow and freely achieve her ends. So, according to Dewey's later view, realizing oneself involves not only having an interest in the world, that is, an active involvement with

the natural and social environment, but also well-established habits of such involvement.

- 41 From a strictly anthropological point of view, Dewey thus develops a conception according to which human beings are *constitutively relational on both the phylogenetic and ontogenetic levels*: on the one hand, he embraces Darwinian theory, by considering even the distinctive traits of the species as adaptive responses to the environment (rather than as essential features); on the other hand, he shows that individual development is the product of complex interactions with material circumstances and with other humans, their artifacts, symbols, norms and institutions. For Dewey, then, human nature is doubly tied to the environment: both in its “endowment” and in its capacity for growth.¹¹

4.2. Ethics

- 42 The 1932 volume, *Ethics* (here I refer only to the second edition), is particularly important for assessing continuities and differences between Dewey’s early view of self-realization and his later philosophy. More specifically, this work clearly shows that he, on the one hand, continues to advocate the importance of placing human nature and its tendency toward growth at the center of moral theory, but, on the other hand, no longer considers self-realization the ultimate goal of conduct. Unlike the *Outlines*, in fact, the theoretical framework of *Ethics* is pluralistic in nature, since it understands moral agency as directed toward three factors: right, good, and virtue. At the same time, however, Dewey argues that these factors should not be regarded as abstract and separate ideals, but as mutually integrating parts of the individual’s conduct, that is, as ways through which she unfolds and at the same time shapes her identity through her actions:

It is not too much to say that the key to a correct theory of morality is recognition of the *essential unity of the self and its acts*, if the latter have any moral significance; while errors in theory arise as soon as the self and acts (and their consequences) are separated from each other, and moral worth is attributed to one more than to the other. (LW.7: 288)

- 43 This is a point of strong continuity with Dewey’s earlier philosophy. However, the focus on the growth of the self does not invalidate the separation of the three moral factors of right, good, and character that Dewey defends in *Ethics*, but rather allows for a better justification of their role in understanding moral conduct. Indeed, in this work, self-realization is no longer the ultimate goal toward which human agency must aim, but rather a by-product that is achieved through right, good or virtuous action.¹² He therefore writes, “Self-realization may be the end in the sense of being an outcome and limit of right action, without being the *end-in-view*” (LW.7: 302).
- 44 This shows, then, that Dewey certainly gives up what I indicated above as claim (a), but he does not relinquish claims (b) and (c). Indeed, he holds even in *Ethics* to the idea that interaction with the environment can be a source of growth and development for the individual: “our actions not only lead up to other actions which follow as their effects but they also leave an enduring impress on the one who performs them, strengthening and weakening permanent tendencies to act” (LW.7: 170).

4.3. Politics

- 45 It is no coincidence that the interpreters who have been most willing to acknowledge the central role of self-realization even in Dewey's later philosophy are mainly those who have dealt with his political thought. Indeed, this is the area in which Dewey most strongly emphasized the importance for individuals to flourish, that is, to develop their capacities and freely achieve the goals they value.¹³ He defends this idea especially in *The Public and Its Problems* (1927), where he very clearly restates some of the key issues he had examined in *Outlines*. In particular, he takes up, reworking them within a new theoretical framework, claims (b) and (c) mentioned above that self-realization consists in a process of interaction and mutual benefit between an individual and her social environment. Dewey writes:

From the standpoint of the individual, it consists in having a responsible share according to capacity in forming and directing the activities of the groups to which one belongs and in participating according to need in the values which the groups sustain. From the standpoint of the groups, it demands liberation of the potentialities of members of a group in harmony with the interests and goods which are common. (LW.3: 327-8)

- 46 The specific character of democracy, that is, what makes it a way of life and not just a form of government, is that it therefore embodies the ideal of growth through interaction. As already stated in *Outlines*, therefore, the individual can flourish only to the extent that she contributes her own capacities to the common good, just as society can develop only if it allows people to realize themselves.
- 47 Dewey expresses this idea even more explicitly in *Freedom and Culture* (1939), where he writes that "the cause of democratic freedom is the cause of the fullest possible realization of human potentialities," whereby "self-governing institutions are the means by which human nature can secure its fullest realization in the greatest number of persons" (LW.13: 154-5).

5. The Meaning of Dewey's Interactionist Account

- 48 Having completed the diachronic analysis of Dewey's Interactionist Account, I would like to finally summarize its central features and show its meaning. For this purpose, it is useful to make a comparison with the Essentialist Account. This can be condensed into the following claims:
- a. what matters in an individual is determined by her intrinsic potential, i.e., the properties and abilities she possesses independently of the environment;
 - b. self-realization consists in the actualization of this potential;
 - c. the environment is an external means for self-realization, i.e., it can either foster or block it.
- 49 Instead, the account that Dewey develops in the *Outlines* and then maintains, despite some major changes, in his later works can be summarized as follows:
- a. what matters in an individual is determined by the relationship between her capacities and the environment;
 - b. self-realization, or growth, consists in the plastic and rational interaction between these capacities and the environment; this is made possible by the role played by:
 - i.) interests,
 - ii.) habits;

c. the environment is a constitutive component of self-realization, so that an individual's growth also involves the growth of the environment (and vice versa).

50 Along with these more structural aspects, it is important to note the role played in Dewey's account by *school education*, which enables the self-knowledge necessary to define one's valuable capacities and goals, and by *democratic social conditions*, which allow in practice the free and successful interaction between individuals and the environment.

51 The differences between the Essentialist Account and the Interactionist Account are clear. Both assume that the idea of self-realization involves the development of an individual's fundamental capacities. They differ, however, on how to understand both this development and the nature of capacities. For the Essentialist Account, capacities are inner powers that, given favorable circumstances, can be manifested outwardly; their development is thus a transition from potentiality to actuality. For example, if my main talent is having a beautiful voice, realizing myself will involve something like becoming a professional singer, as a way of expressing my "inner" power "outwardly."

52 For Dewey, on the other hand, capacities are not simply an individual's dispositions, but her characteristic ways of interacting with the environment. Having capacity *x*, then, does not mean having latent power *x* (although this also plays a role), but being able to *x*-ing. For example, it is not a matter of having a "beautiful voice" (whatever that means), but of actually singing well: it is the kind of interaction between the voice and the environment that allows someone to be ascribed a "singing talent." For Dewey, in fact, it makes no sense to talk about a power without clarifying the specific ways in which that power is exercised. Put another way: it does not matter that I "have" a talent, but how I employ it, namely, what role it plays in my experience, what value it has for me, and how it therefore guides my choices. Dewey explains this point clearly in *Individualism, Old and New* (1929):

Individuality is at first spontaneous and unshaped; it is a potentiality, a capacity of development. Even so, it is a unique manner of acting in and with a world of objects and persons. It is not something complete in itself, like a closet in a house or a secret drawer in a desk, filled with treasures that are waiting to be bestowed on the world. Since individuality is a distinctive way of feeling the impacts of the world and of showing a preferential bias in response to these impacts, it develops into shape and form only through interaction with actual conditions; it is no more complete in itself than is a painter's tube of paint without relation to a canvas. The work of art is the truly individual thing; and it is the result of the interaction of paint and canvas through the medium of the artist's distinctive vision and power. (LW.5: 121)

53 In Dewey's account, therefore, an individual's self-realization does not depend on the degree to which she is able to manifest her inner powers, but on the quality of her interaction with the environment, i.e., her success in achieving her valuable goals.

6. Concluding Remarks

54 In this contribution, I investigated the relationship between ethics and anthropology, focusing on one of their most significant entanglements: the idea of self-realization. To this end, I examined two possible explanations of this idea: the Essentialist Account and the Interactionist Account. By looking at several of Dewey's works, I have tried to show that the interactionist explanation of self-realization is richer and stronger than that

provided by the essentialist one. In conclusion, I would like to use this result to explore more explicitly the issue of the entanglement between ethics and anthropology.

- 55 Both the Essentialist Account and the Interactionist Account reject the idea that human nature is a blank slate on which the environment can write anything. They differ, however, on how they explain this rejection. The Essentialist Account is based on the assumption that human nature has content in it that is independent from the environment. Human beings therefore are cores loaded with powers that must be discovered and manifested.
- 56 For Dewey, on the other hand, it is not possible to isolate human nature from the environment, not only because it is part of it, that is, it belongs to the natural and social world, but also because it is only in interaction with the environment that human capacities are truly articulated and can therefore be comprehended. To describe human nature by detaching it from the circumstances that activate it and make it “work” would be like trying to explain a musical instrument without ever making it play. On the one hand, then, human beings have internal dispositions and tendencies (both individual and universal, i.e., relative to the species); but on the other hand, these features are formed only through engagement with the environment, which shapes them as much as they are shaped by it.
- 57 All of this has important ethical consequences. For both the Essentialist Account and the Interactionist Account, human nature has an inherently ethical dimension. The Essentialist Account holds that this is determined solely by the internal powers of human nature, which define an individual for who she is and are therefore worthy of actualization. For the Essentialist Account, hence, the entanglement between ethics and anthropology is all within anthropology, that is, the explanation of human nature and its capacities.
- 58 For Dewey, by contrast, this entanglement is due to the particular way in which human nature interacts with the environment. For it is not a question of whether or not there are inherent traits, but of identifying the best, that is, the most intelligent and valuable ways of making them “function.” It is the fact that this involvement of human nature in the environment can be better or worse, i.e., can be more or less beneficial for one and the other, that implies an entanglement between the ethical and anthropological planes. In other words: it is not a matter of explaining how it occurs that two separate things – human capacities and the environment – come into relationship, but of assessing the *quality* of this relationship, which pre-exists their distinction and is thus the fundamental condition for their realization.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ALTOBRANDO Andrea, NIIKAWA Takuya & Richard STONE (eds), (2018), *The Realizations of the Self*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan.

- DEWEY John, (1969), *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, in *The Early Works, 1882-1898*, vol. 3, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 237-388. [EW.3].
- DEWEY John, (1983), *Human Nature and Conduct*, in *The Middle Works, 1899-1924*, vol. 14, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press. [MW.14].
- DEWEY John, (1984), *Individualism, Old and New*, in *The Later Works, 1925-1953*, vol. 5, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 41-143. [LW.5].
- DEWEY John, (1984), *The Public and Its Problems*, in *The Later Works, 1925-1953*, vol. 2, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 235-372. [LW.2].
- DEWEY John, (1985), *Ethics*, in *The Later Works, 1925-1953*, vol. 7, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press. [LW.7].
- DEWEY John, (1988), *Freedom and Culture*, in *The Later Works, 1925-1953*, vol. 13, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 63-188. [LW.13].
- DREON Roberta, (2022), *Human Landscapes: Contributions to a Pragmatist Anthropology*, Albany, State University of New York Press.
- FESTENSTEIN Matthew, (1997), *Pragmatism and Political Theory*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.
- FOOT Philippa, (2001), *Natural Goodness*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- FRANKEL Paul Ellen, MILLER Fred D. Jr. & Jeffrey PAUL (eds), (1999), *Human Flourishing*, New York, Cambridge University Press.
- FREGA Roberto, (2019), *Pragmatism and the Wide View of Democracy*, Cham, Palgrave.
- GEWIRTH Alan, (1998), *Self-Fulfillment*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- GOOD James A., (2006), *A Search for Unity in Diversity: The 'Permanent Hegelian Deposit' in the Philosophy of John Dewey*, Lanham, Lexington.
- GOOD James A. & Jim GARRISON, (2010), "Traces of Hegelian *Bildung* in Dewey's Philosophy," in Paul Fairfield (ed.), *John Dewey and Continental Philosophy*, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 44-68.
- HOOK Sidney, (1959), "John Dewey: Philosopher of Growth," *Journal of Philosophy*, 56(26), 1010-8.
- HURKA Thomas, (1993), *Perfectionism*, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- LEVINE Steven, (2020), "The Speculative Identity of Self and Act," in Roberto Frega & Steven Levine (eds), *John Dewey's Ethical Theory: The 1932 Ethics*, London and New York, Routledge, 134-55.
- MARTIN Jay, (2002), *The Education of John Dewey: A Biography*, New York, Columbia University Press.
- MOUNTBATTEN-O'MALLEY Eri, (2024), *Human Flourishing: A Conceptual Analysis*, London and New York, Bloomsbury.
- PEARCE Trevor, (2020), *Pragmatism's Evolution: Organism and Environment in American Philosophy*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press.
- RENAULT Emmanuel, (2024), "Dewey et la reconstruction du concept de nature humaine," *Archives de Philosophie*, 87(2), 43-60.
- ROTH Robert J., (1962), *John Dewey and Self-Realization*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall.

SHOOK John R., (2000), *Dewey's Empirical Theory of Knowledge and Reality*, Nashville, Vanderbilt University Press.

STUHR John J. (ed.), (2023), *Philosophy and Human Flourishing*, New York, Oxford University Press.

TOMASELLO Michael, (2019), *Becoming Human: A Theory of Ontogeny*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.

WELCHMAN Jennifer, (1995), *Dewey's Ethical Thought*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press.

NOTES

1. In this article I use the term “anthropology” to refer to *philosophical anthropology*, i.e., the discipline that focuses on human nature in conceptual terms.
2. For an overview of the topic in philosophy cf. Gewirth 1998; Frankel Paul, Miller & Paul 1999; Altobrando, Niikawa & Stone 2018; Stuhr 2023; Mountbatten-O'Malley 2024.
3. Cf. Welchman 1995.
4. Cf. Shook 2000; Good 2006; Good & Garrison 2010; Pearce 2020. More specifically on the permanence of the idea of self-realization in Dewey's later work see Festenstein 1997; Levine 2020.
5. I quote Dewey's writings according to the edition of *The Collected Works of John Dewey*, published in the three series of *The Early Works* (= EW), *The Middle Works* (= MW), *The Later Works* (= LW). References follow the order: series, volume number in the series, page number (e.g. EW.3: 237).
6. A prominent example is Hurka 1993. See also Foot 2001.
7. See Martin (2002: 120).
8. As Pearce (2020: ch. 4) has shown, Dewey takes the concept of “adjustment to the environment” from Oxford idealists Edward Caird and Samuel Alexander, and in particular from their attempt to reconcile Hegel's dialectic with evolutionary theory, and thereby interpret thought and action in terms of interaction between organism and environment. More generally, Pearce has proved, in my opinion incontrovertibly, that a “naturalistic bent” is already to be found in Dewey's early philosophy, since it is not in conflict with his Hegelianism, but rather is nourished by it. This thus seems to me to refute Welchman's (1995: 121) claim that Dewey's “rather free use of this [notion of ‘adjustment’] and other terms drawn from evolutionary biology does not argue a close acquaintance with, let alone comprehension of, either Darwinian theory or subsequent developments in the life sciences.”
9. The two main texts that testify to this distancing are the essays “Green's Theory of the Moral Motive” (1892) and “Self-Realization as the Moral Ideal” (1893).
10. See Roth 1962, which maps the idea of self-realization in various areas of Dewey's philosophy. Unfortunately, it deals only with Dewey's later works, thus ignoring not only the “seeds” of this idea, but also its changes over time.
11. A contemporary version of this view is Tomasello 2019. More extensively on Dewey's account of human nature cf. Dreon 2022; Renault 2024.
12. Levine 2020 is particularly clear on this issue.
13. See Festenstein 1997; Frega 2019.

ABSTRACTS

The idea of self-realization is one of the most significant points of intersection between ethics and philosophical anthropology, the disciplines that study, respectively, human conduct and human nature. An examination of this idea, therefore, allows us to shed light on these two fields and their entanglement. In this article I present two possible accounts of self-realization: the Essentialist Account, which understands it as the actualization of an intrinsic potential, and the Interactionist Account, which conceives it as the successful interaction between an individual and her environment. My goal is to argue for the Interactionist Account, in the comprehensive version developed by John Dewey. To do so, I proceed as follows: I introduce the Essentialist Account; I present Dewey's alternative, by examining first the *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics* and then some major later works, thereby showing the continuity (and discontinuity) of his conception of self-realization, or growth, throughout his career; after a closer comparison between the Interactionist Account and the Essentialist Account, I finally clarify the relevance of Dewey's view for understanding the entanglement between ethics and anthropology.

INDEX

Keywords: Dewey, Human Nature, Individuality, Interaction, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, Self-Realization

AUTHOR

ARMANDO MANCHISI

Università di Torino

armando.manchisi[at]unito.it

Dewey's Anthropology of Interests – and Values

Matteo Santarelli

- 1 In recent years, several authors have contributed to the articulation of a pragmatist anthropology. Despite their differences, these contributions seem to share some common features and thus contribute to a pluralistic yet unitary pragmatist view of anthropology. First, pragmatist anthropologies entail an endorsement of non-reductivist naturalism, inspired by an original interpretation of evolutionism (Pearce 2020). Such an approach emphasizes the continuity between biological and cultural processes, without seeing the latter as a mere epiphenomenon of the former (Dreon 2021), and rather contribute to an original understanding of culture (Viola 2020).¹ In a nutshell, pragmatist anthropologies involve a focus on the recurring conditions and features of “*human changeableness*” (Honneth & Joas 1980).
- 2 Second, pragmatist anthropologies are characterized by close interaction with contributions from the theoretical and empirical work of anthropologists. This statement is trivial only at first glance. In fact, a long tradition of philosophical anthropology – especially German philosophical anthropology – has developed throughout the twentieth century and up to the present day without taking significant account of the work of social and cultural anthropologists. On the contrary, the significant and mutual interaction and influence between John Dewey and anthropologists such as Franz Boas, Bronislaw Malinowski, and Ruth Benedict, among others, is well known and well documented in the scholarly literature on the subject (Zask 2003; Goldman 2012; Torres-Colòn & Hobbs 2015; Viola 2020; Dreon 2022).
- 3 Third, despite their commitment to naturalism, pragmatist anthropologies do not entail a depoliticizing stance. References to nature and biological processes are not used to present the main features of human action and experience as fixed, fully determined, and indisputable. On the contrary, pragmatist anthropologies can be understood as the exercise of an original form of critical naturalism (Gregoratto *et al.* 2022).

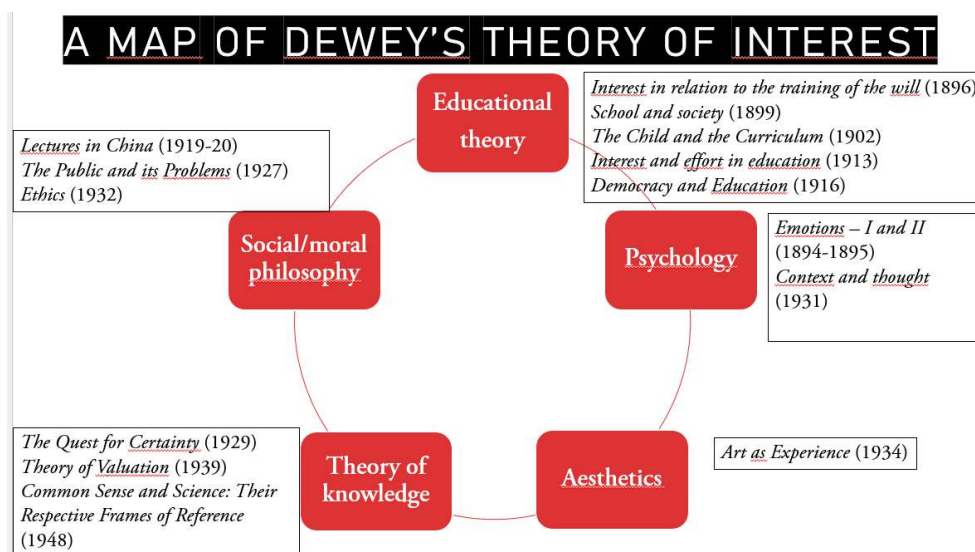
- 4 In the following paragraphs, I will contribute to this multifaceted project of articulating a pragmatist anthropology. I will do so by reconstructing Dewey's theory of interest. My main thesis is that throughout his intellectual production, Dewey developed an original *anthropology of interests* – i.e., a definition of the recurring conditions and features of human changeability that: a) depends on Dewey's original idea of interest; b) has distinct features from other influential anthropologies of interest.
- 5 Developing the idea of a pragmatist anthropology of interests necessarily requires clearing the field of two potential misunderstandings. First, theories of interest are usually understood to be either subjectivist – in the guise of various versions of *homo oeconomicus* – or objectivist – along the lines of basic versions of Marxism and political realism. From a subjectivist standpoint, interest should be reduced to self-interest, and self-interest in turn should be understood in the sense of the more or less rational pursuit of purely subjective preferences. From an objectivist perspective, interests are purely given, in the sense that their existence and their definition: (1) do not depend on subjective factors (individuals and groups might feel more or less attached to them, but either way interests will just simply exist); (2) are by definition close to any possible transformative criticism (you can criticize them, but your criticism will leave them unaffected). On the contrary, as we will see, pragmatism clearly involves a position that transcends the subjectivism/objectivism dichotomy. Second, both in the scientific realm and in public discussion, advocates of interests tend to be dismissive of values. They support a kind of discourse in which values are unrealistic conceptual inventions, while interests are not. Interests – either subjective or objective – are real, and they are the only thing that matters when it comes to explaining human nature and behavior. On the contrary, Dewey has made an original and productive contribution to the understanding of values and valuations (Joas 2000; Petit-Ballett 2023; Alexandratos 2024).²
- 6 To avoid these misunderstandings, it will be necessary to: (1) show how Dewey's theory of interests strategically aims at overcoming the subjective/objective dichotomy; (2) develop a pragmatist anthropology of interests *and* values. This emphasis on “and” is not accidental. In fact, interests and values are often pitted against each other as pivotal concepts of incompatible anthropologies – e.g., *homo oeconomicus* vs. *homo interpretans* (Michel 2019). Interests and values indicate two dimensions in necessary and inevitable conflict in human beings – respectively, a structural and causally determinative dimension, and on the other hand a superstructural and ideological dimension – an opposition that we typically find in political realism. As we will see in the final section of the paper, the coexistence of both categories allowed for by Dewey's rejection of the interests-values dichotomy opens the way to a third path beyond basic forms of political realism and political idealism.
- 7 The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 1 will include a map of Dewey's uses of the concept of “interest” in the various domains of his intellectual production, and a working Deweyan definition of interest. In section 2, I will reconstruct Dewey's theory of interest in the crucial area of educational theory. I will then show how Dewey's rich understanding of interests involves a rejection of the concept of disinterestedness (section 3) without abandoning the concepts of common interest (section 4), evaluations and values (section 5). The way Dewey portrays the relationship between interests and evaluations, however, could be perceived as a relapse into a rationalist and intellectualist anthropology. To address this criticism, I will show the importance

of processes of articulation and conflict in Dewey's anthropology of interests and values (section 6).

1. A Map and a Working Definition of Interest

- 8 The concept of interest spans all areas of Dewey's work. Coherently, the scholarly literature focuses mainly on Dewey's use of the term in specific areas – especially educational theory (Hansen 2006; Jonas 2011; Pennacchini 2015; Wilson 2016; Girel 2023) and moral and social theory (Frega 2015; Hogan & Marcelle 2022). Thus, articulating a unified definition of interest is no easy task.
- 9 I will approach this complicated task in three steps. First, I will present an initial working definition of interest in Dewey's work. Second, I will present a map of Dewey's uses of interest in his multifaceted intellectual production. Third, I will discuss some specific use cases in greater detail to enrich the initial working definition.
- 10 A Deweyan working definition of interest includes at least four points:
 1. Interest is a mode of transaction between organism and environment;
 2. Interest organizes and channels emotions/impulses/needs/desires;
 3. Interest is qualitatively characterized (it has to do with sensitivity, concern, cognitive and aesthetic selectivity);
 4. Interest is a hinge concept between biological/social/political.
- 11 Even this extremely schematic definition suggests several original aspects of Dewey's concept of interest. First, interests are neither purely subjective nor purely material and objective—they necessarily involve both the pragmatic and qualitative relation of subject and object. Second, interests are grounded in the impulsive and affective dimension of behavior and experience, and yet they involve something more than impulses, emotions, and desires. To fully grasp the originality of these aspects, however, requires a small interdisciplinary journey into the various areas of Dewey's work.

Picture 1. A map of Dewey's theory of interest



- 12 Above is a map of Dewey's theory of interest in the main areas of his thought. In the context of this article, however, I will not undertake a painstaking reconstruction of Dewey's uses of interest in each domain.³ Rather, I will offer a more detailed look into Dewey's uses of the concept of interest in the areas of pedagogy, social and moral theory, and the theory of knowledge and evaluation. I have chosen to focus on these three domains because they offer me the opportunity to highlight the anthropological significance of Dewey's theory of interest – that is, the specific understanding of human specificity advocated by Dewey.

2. Interests and Educational Theory

- 13 As widely acknowledged in the scholarly literature, Dewey's pedagogical essays from 1896 to 1916 represent an original theory of interests in the field of educational theory. In *From Absolutism to Experimentalism*, Dewey writes that his interest in pedagogy and educational theory “merged with and brought together what might otherwise have been separate interests – those in psychology and those in social institutions and social life” (LW.5: 156). This, of course, has implications for his whole theory of interests. Indeed, the significance of his reflections in essays such as *Interest in Relation to the Training of the Will*, *The Child and the Curriculum* and *Interest and Effort in Education* goes well beyond the realm of educational theory. More ambitiously, Dewey identifies and challenges three common misconceptions about interest, misconceptions which also affect psychology, social and moral theory, and the theory of knowledge. According to the first misconception, interest can (and/or should) be reduced to self-interest. According to the second misconception, the concept of disinterestedness is necessary if we are to account for: a) learning processes; b) moral acts; c) aesthetic experience. And finally, according to the third misconception, the plurality of interests necessarily leads to moral and social chaos. As can easily be seen, challenging these three misconceptions entails paving the way for an anthropology of interests that is radically alternative to the two models presented in the previous section.
- 14 To challenge these misconceptions, Dewey drew on the philosophical and psychological ideas he had developed in his Ann Arbor and Chicago years (Westbrook 1991). The main thrust of Dewey's argument rests on his rejection of the reduction of interest to self-interest. In fact, the concept of disinterestedness is only necessary if interests are reduced to self-interest and understood as purely subjective and private. The more human interests are reduced to self-interest, the more one needs the concept of disinterestedness to account for these areas of action that do not fit an explanation in terms of self-interest. But this subjective understanding of interests is untenable and problematic. Dewey agrees that interests are intimately related to the self (Pappas 2008: 213; Hansen 2012: 165), to the possibility of self-realization. Yet they are transactional in nature, they play an integrative role as they are situated precisely between organism and environment, subjective and objective, means and ends. Interest is about both ends and means. It is “the identification of mind with the material and methods of a developing activity” (MW.7: 195).⁴ Complementarily, the decline of interests is a sign of separation. From this perspective, disinterestedness does not mean impartiality, but rather the rupture of the connection between means and ends, subjective and objective. The prototypes of this lack of interest are not altruistic

behavior – which is a specific organization of interests directed toward others – but rather routine work and depression.

- 15 This subjective understanding of interests is untenable and problematic, and it also leads to blocking dichotomies. If interests are nothing but self-interests, if they are subjective and originally removed from practice and interaction, then interest must be handled from outside – by arousing interest or by disinterested discipline and effort. If the educational object is something “outside the sphere of self,” then it must either be made artificially interesting or mastered through sheer exertion of will (MW.7: 156). On the contrary, the goal of education is the reorganization and reconstruction of the child’s existing powers. The starting point is a feeling and acting child with its incomplete tendencies and concerns. Therefore, in the classroom the interests of the child should be neither indulged, not suppressed for the sake of discipline.

I believe that these interests are neither to be humored nor repressed. To repress interest is to substitute the adult for the child, and so to weaken intellectual curiosity and alertness, to suppress initiative, and to deaden interest. To humor the interests is to substitute the transient for the permanent. The interest is always the sign of some power below; the important thing is to discover this power. To humor the interest is to fail to penetrate below the surface and its sure result is to substitute caprice and whim for genuine interest. (EW.5: 92-3)

- 16 But again, if interests are not synonymous with egoistic self-interest, the fear of a chaotic and immoral world ruled by interests loses at least some of its force. As Dewey makes clear in *Democracy and Education*, the natural plurality of interests becomes compatible with the possibility of common interests (Dewey 1916). But what does Dewey mean by common interests? To answer this question, it is necessary to say something more about Dewey’s skepticism towards both the concepts of self-interest and disinterestedness.

3. Dismantling the Self-Interest- Disinterestedness Dichotomy

- 17 As often happens with Dewey, when rejecting the reduction of interest to self-interest he hardly mentions explicit polemical targets. Yet, it is quite uncontroversial to argue that this rejection involves rejecting a perspective that had been gaining significant traction in the social sciences of his time – i.e., the model of the *homo oeconomicus*. From a theoretical perspective, we can understand *homo oeconomicus* as the final point of convergence between two historical theses in the history of the concept of interest: (1) the universal thesis – all are moved by interest; (2) the reductive thesis – interest is self-interest. In its earliest formulations – for example, that of J. S. Mill (1836)⁵ – *homo oeconomicus* is conceived as a purely theoretical model. The idea is that if one wants to formulate the laws of human behavior in the economic sphere, one must consider not concrete human beings, but the prototypical human being, that is, a *homo oeconomicus* acting according to self-interest. This would imply that *homo oeconomicus* is not an anthropological model, but only an explicit abstraction aimed at predicting a very specific domain of human action, i.e. the economic domain. But there are good reasons to think that *homo oeconomicus*, far from being a pure model of a particular kind of action-economic action, has become a full-fledged anthropological model. First, this model presupposes invariant anthropological elements – e.g., the basic needs that unite every human being – and/or universal psychological mechanisms – e.g., preferences,

means-ends relations. Second, one might argue that this model has exerted a performative force: it has *become* the image through which rational human action is described and understood as the optimal allocation of scarce resources to alternative ends and, in general, the interaction between organism and reality (see Foucault's (1978-1979) remarks on von Mises and Becker).

- 18 According to John Levi Martin and Alessandra Lembo (2020), this is precisely the point where the concept of interest and the concept of disinterestedness join forces. Levi Martin's and Lembo's thesis runs as follows: While attractive, the idea that human action is mainly motivated by interest – narrowly understood as self-interest – posed a problem to philosophers and sociologists of the late 19th century and of early 20th century. If interest is reduced to the pursuit of self-interest, then logically all the different kinds of behavior incompatible with such reduction must be understood as disinterested. Moreover, the domain of disinterested behaviors grows if self-interest is in turn reduced to economic interests, as it happens in the well-known model of the *homo oeconomicus*. This is precisely the conceptual work that the concept of value is expected to do in social and moral philosophy and sociology – i.e., to account for those domains of human action that seem to be oriented toward ultimate ends that cannot be reduced to the logic of self-interest.
- 19 The anthropological consequences of this compensatory strategy are quite clear. Human beings living in modern capitalist societies are expected to act, and expect others to act, according to their own interests. As Adam Smith famously argued, if we want a steak, it is definitely better to appeal to the butcher's self-interest than to his benevolence. Yet some domains of human action – from bureaucracy and public service (Parsons 1934) to moral life – require disinterested action. In these domains, we are expected to act, and we expect others to act according to our ultimate ends – i.e., our values – rather than our bargainable interests.⁶ A second anthropological model, involving a division of labor between interests and values, thus emerged as both a reaction to and a compensation for the anthropological model of *homo oeconomicus*.
- 20 Dewey's theory of interest is irreducible to the two paradigms outlined above. Unlike the *homo oeconomicus* paradigm, Dewey radically and explicitly challenges the reduction of interest to self-interest – even more so when self-interest is further reduced to economic interest. To the extent of my knowledge, there are no extensive discussions of the *homo oeconomicus* in Dewey's work, yet he was certainly familiar with similar developments within liberalism, for example marginalist theories. Tilman and Knapp (1999) showed in detail how Dewey had already prepared some *Lectures* in 1913 which focused on a philosophical, psychological and economic criticism of marginalism. Moreover, his criticism of marginalism leans on two essential tenets of his understanding of interest: (1) the critique of subjectivist understandings of interests; and (2) the focus on the means-ends continuum.⁷ Unlike the second *compromise* model, Dewey radically and explicitly rejects the idea of disinterested behavior, and – as we will see – he does so without getting rid of the concept of value.

4. Common Interests without Disinterestedness

- 21 Dewey's rejection of the idea of disinterestedness plays a key role in his articulation of the concept of common interests. As we have anticipated at the end of section 2, the idea that interest cannot be reduced to self-interest goes together with the idea that

the plurality of interests characterizing contemporary societies is not an evil source of uncompromised conflicts in itself. At the same time, Dewey clearly does not buy the idea that the market society and the demand-supply mechanism will automatically and spontaneously adjust themselves, and contribute to the common good of society. To fully grasp the originality of Dewey's ideas on this topic, it is useful to contrast it with the idea of the *natural identity of interests*.

- 22 As Parsons points out in his 1937 masterpiece, *The Structure of Social Action*, old school liberals often argued that common interests are only possible if we postulate the natural identity of interests. It is true that each individual pursues his own interest, but this egoistic orientation is tempered by the fact that these interests are naturally identical. This leads to the equally natural recognition of a relative right to limit each other. For example, the fact that each individual has a natural interest in his or her own property is the origin of the natural right to property. Society is thus spontaneously and originally organized around such rights, made possible by the fact that individual pursue identical interests. According to Parsons, the hypothesis of the natural identity of interests is unrealistic, and the very idea of common interests is a contradiction in terms. Interests in modern societies are radically plural, heterogeneous, unreliable – as Durkheim (1893) claimed. So there are no common interests. Only values understood as ultimate ends – and thus divorced from means-ends chains – can be authentically common, shared and stable in a given community. This solution fits perfectly with the second anthropological model presented above. Values as ultimate ends are supposed to compensate for the limits of interests.
- 23 Dewey rejects the idea of natural identity of interests as early as 1888 (EW.1: 215-6). Nevertheless, unlike Parsons, he believes that common interests are possible, but not as a precondition, but rather as a result of social practices, i.e., through “the perfecting of the means and ways of communication of meanings so that a genuinely shared interest in the consequences of interdependent activities may inform desire and effort and thereby direct action” (LW.2: 332). This is Dewey's well-known theory of the public. From this perspective, social order in a democratic society is based not on the existence of a system of ultimate ends, but rather on common and shared interests that are at once cognitive, affective, and moral. Cognitive, in that – as we will see in section 5 – they require individuals to be able to reevaluate interests. Affective, in that they require individuals to participate in common activities and be affected by their consequences. Moral, insofar as common interests make possible the transition from the Great Society to the Great Community, that is, from a merely associated life to a moral and fully social community life.
- 24 Two things are worth noting here. First, common interests are not incompatible with social conflict. Rather, they are a possible outcome of social conflict between social groups (Dewey 1919-1920). These conflicts involve both pragmatic and identity issues. Second, democratic social order is not based on disinterested shared values. On the contrary, the very concept of disinterestedness is unnecessary and misleading.
- 25 It is useful to go back to Levi Martin's and Lembo's 2020 article. Levi Martin and Lembo pursued a Deweyan strategy in arguing against the necessity of the concept of disinterestedness. Their strategy is quite explicitly Deweyan. They argue that the need for the problematic and unnecessary concept of disinterestedness depends on a previous reduction of interests to self-interests, and that we should instead embrace a “new” rich idea of interests, inspired (among others) by John Dewey. Now, the adoption

of a rich concept of interest and the general rejection of the concept of disinterestedness anticipated in his pedagogical essays are explicitly expressed in Dewey's mature works, most notably in the 1932 version of *Ethics*. There we find one of the most comprehensive and detailed definitions of interest ever proposed by Dewey:

Any concrete case of the union of the self in action with an object and end is called an interest. [...] An interest is, in short, the dominant direction of activity, and in this activity desire is united with an object to be furthered in a decisive choice. Unless impulse and desire are enlisted, one has no heart for a course of conduct; one is indifferent, averse, not interested. On the other hand, an interest is objective; the heart is set on something. There is no interest at large or in a vacuum; each interest imperatively demands an object to which it is attached and for the well-being or development of which it is actively solicitous. (LW.7: 320-1)

- 26 This rich understanding of interests, in turn, leads to the rejection of the idea of disinterestedness:

It is absurd to suppose that the difference between the good person and the bad person is that the former has no interest or deep and intimate concern (leading to personal intimate satisfaction) in what he does, while the bad person is one who does have a personal stake in his actions. What makes the difference between the two is the quality of the interest that characterizes them. For the quality of the interest is dependent upon the nature of the object which arouses it and to which it is attached, being trivial, momentous; narrow, wide; transient, enduring; exclusive, inclusive in exact accord with the object. (*Ibid.*: 296)

- 27 But Dewey's attack on disinterestedness is not limited to morality. Rather, it is gradually extended to a domain that has often been understood and conceived of as disinterested – that is, scientific activity. In this sense, it is important to briefly discuss an article from late in Dewey's life: "Common Sense, Science, and Control" (published in 1948). In this paper, Dewey seems to expand upon a specific aspect of Peirce's theory of common sense as vague, as presented in "Issues of Pragmaticism" (1905, CP5.438-63) and in some unpublished manuscripts.⁸ Peirce maintained that common sense beliefs are acritically indubitable only when applied to primitive modes of life. Dewey seems to follow Peirce on the idea that the validity of commonsensical beliefs has to be limited to a specific domain of existence and experience. But he was too caught up in the anthropological debate of the time to use the term "primitive" lightly. Therefore, he defines the common sense frame of reference as something that refers to "uses and pleasures common to mankind or to a given community" (Dewey 1948: 200). But if common sense has to do with common "uses and enjoyments" (as Peirce would say: "objects of universal concern," see CP5.522), this does not mean that science is a disinterested activity, that it is "not a human concern, affair, occupation" (Dewey 1948: 204). On the contrary, if we want to explore the differences between science and common sense, we should focus on a different issue altogether: "The question to be discussed is that of the kind of concern or care which distinguishes scientific activity from those forms of human behavior which fall within the scope of common sense" (*ibid.*). The primary concern and interest of science is abstraction: "Scientific knowledge is that particular form of practical human activity which is concerned with the advancement of knowledge apart from concern with other practical matters" (*ibid.*: 206). This means that we should neither isolate science from other social and political interests, nor try to understand science as a framework that provides the truer representation of reality. The real issue is to control and direct "the return of scientific methods and conclusions to the concerns of daily life [...] so as to minimize evil

consequences and intensify and extend good consequences, and, if possible, to find out how such a return is to be accomplished” (*ibid.*: 207).

- 28 The accomplishment of this control and direction is a key concern of democracy. The articulation of democratic common interests out of existing plural interests cannot be achieved by adopting an allegedly disinterested perspective. Science plays a momentous role in achieving this control and direction, but it does so *exactly* because it follows specific interests.
- 29 The problem of the control of interests in democratic societies is a main concern of Dewey’s 1939 essay on valuation. The analysis of this text gives us the opportunity to address a crucial aspect of Dewey’s anthropology of interests. As we saw in the previous sections, this perspective rejects the reduction of interest to self-interest and rejects the very idea of disinterestedness.⁹ But does this also lead to the dismissal of the concept of values from Dewey’s view of the human being? Levi Martin and Lembo’s answer to this question is decidedly positive. From their perspective, abandoning the problematic idea of disinterestedness in favor of a new rich idea of interests means that we should abandon the concept of values. If interests are richer than self-interests, and if we do not need to postulate disinterestedness to account for the altruistic organization of interests toward others, then why do we need the concept of values?
- 30 While I sympathize with Lembo’s and Levi Martin’s paper in many respects, I would like to offer an alternative view. My idea is that Dewey’s theory of interests makes the concept of disinterestedness untenable, and yet it does not dismiss the importance of values. Rather, it paints a picture of human beings as interested and (e)valuating animals.

5. Interests and Evaluations

- 31 The basis of my argument is an analysis of Dewey’s 1939 *Theory of Valuation*. This essay provides an insightful account of three important tenets of Dewey’s theory of interests.
- 32 First, interests cannot be reduced to given and predetermined individual preferences:
[D]esire and interest are not given ready-made at the outset, and a fortiori are not, as they may at first appear, starting-points, original data, or premisses of any theory of valuation, for desire always emerges within a prior system of activities or interrelated energies [...] Interest represents not just a desire but a set of interrelated desires which have been found in experience to produce, because of their connection with one another, a definite order in the processes of continuing behavior. [...] There are no desires and interests apart from some field of activities in which they occur and in which they function, either as poor or as good means.
(LW.13: 239-40)
- 33 Two aspects are worth noting here. First, interests emerge as a part of a set of activities and energies. This means that they might appear as “starting points” only in a given situation and for specific purposes, and not in themselves. Second, interests play an integrating role in experience and conduct. They connect our actions and our feelings in a continuous and habitual process. A totally discontinuous and fragmented interest is not by definition an interest. It seems at least insincere to claim that I have an interest in global peace if do not care about current wars, if I do not read books or articles on the topic – briefly, if I do nothing to demonstrate concern about the topic.

- 34 Second, interests articulate and re-organize vital impulses. In this sense, they are both natural and cultural. Interests presuppose vital impulses as conditions *sine qua non* for their existence. Yet, differently from vital impulses, interests “include foreseen consequences along with ideas in the form of signs of the measures (involving expenditure of energy) required to bring the ends into existence [...] There is no desire and no interest which, in its distinction from raw impulse and strictly organic appetite, is not what it is because of transformation effected in the latter by their interaction with the cultural environment” (LW.13: 207). Therefore, it is necessary to acknowledge the role of “cultural conditions and institutions” in shaping interests (*ibid.*: 248).
- 35 The third point is of direct concern to us because it touches on the possibility of evaluating interests. From Dewey’s perspective, interests are evaluated as long as they are examined in their concrete makeup in relation to their place in a situation. More precisely, an interest is evaluated according to its capacity to meet “the needs of existing situations” (*ibid.*: 207). This passage has far-reaching consequences. An interest embodies a set of valuations as it selects the relevant features of a situation, and it organizes our impulses and behavior considering these features.¹⁰ But, in turn, interests can be evaluated according to the role they play in particular situations.
- 36 This idea of the evaluation of interests has far-reaching political consequences. In acknowledging this possibility, Dewey rejects both political realism – the idea that particular interests are beyond the scope of criticism and evaluation – and political idealism – the idea that authentic democratic life is based on disinterested values and ideals. On the contrary, evaluating interests is a key activity in democratic practice. Democratic life depends on the “regulated guidance of the formation of interests and purposes in the concrete” and on intelligent control “in the formation of desires and valuations” (*ibid.*: 239).
- 37 From this perspective, the difference between values and interests seems to follow the logical schema of the difference between valuations and second-order valuations – a schema that we find in various guises in authors such as Harry Frankfurt and Charles Taylor (Joas 2000). While interests involve a selective evaluation of the relevant and “interesting” objects in the environment, values have to do with second-order evaluations. Something is a “value” if it is not only the object of desires and interests, but if it is also worthy of our desires and interests – in short, if it is desirable.
- 38 Yet, as scholars have often pointed out (Welsh 2013), Dewey’s account of how interests can be shaped by intelligent evaluation in *Theory of Valuation* seems overly rationalistic and intellectualistic. The transition from first-order to second-order valuations is apparently due to an act of purely intellectual reflection that assesses the capacity of a given interest and valuation to meet the needs of an existing situation. Consequently, the ability to reconcile interests and values seems to depend on a strong reinstatement of the role of intellectual judgment. This is a rather surprising result, especially given that Dewey’s pragmatist anthropology is often conceived as a radical alternative to classical modern rationalist anthropologies.

6. Articulation and Critical Interests

- 39 There are two reasons why this charge of rationalism and intellectualism against Dewey could and should be resisted. Both reasons presuppose that we should not use

Theory of Valuation as a general account of Dewey's theory of values and interests. Rather, this text should at least be integrated with other works. The first work that needs to be part of this conversation is *The Quest for Certainty* – particularly chapter 10.¹¹ In the 1929 essay, Dewey discusses the topic of values and the relationship between the desired and the desirable in a way that seems to avoid the charges of intellectualism brought ten years after by *Theory of Valuation*.

- 40 There are two aspects to be considered here. First, in contrast to *Theory of Valuation*, Dewey in *The Quest for Certainty* has something quite substantial to say about the experience of objects of value. In particular, Dewey emphasizes that evaluation is not merely an intellectual act. It does not consist merely in controlling experiences of pleasure and desire in the restrictive sense of the term. Evaluation is not simply a test of whether an object of desire, interest, or pleasure deserves to be considered a value. On the contrary, the control and regulation exercised by evaluation involves a deeper knowledge of the object and of the experience we have of that object.
- 41 Such a deeper knowledge – second point – involves what we might call an *articulation* of the experience of that value. Articulation can be defined as the process through which an idea or a feeling is made explicit and precise through language or other symbolic tools (Jung 2009). According to Dewey, when we experience an object of desire and/or enjoyment as a value, the experience of enjoyment and/or desire is accompanied by an awareness of the worth of this object. In this way, we do not simply label the object as legitimate through a purely cognitive procedure of assessment. Quite on the contrary, the articulation of the object of value has a feedback effect on our affective and sensual attachment to that object. Our experience of desire/interest/enjoyment is not bracketed through an intellectual *epoch*. Rather, it is intensified by the awareness of its value. The drive of compulsively repeating the experience as a subjective feeling is replaced by the need to keep the object of value alive. The shift in focus from subjective feeling to evaluation is not at the expense of the affective dimension. On the contrary, the discovery that a thing is worthy of enjoyment involves a surplus of enjoyment (LW. 4: 213). Thus, the reconstruction and articulation of the relationships that develop around the object of value involves an internal transformation of the feeling that binds one to that object. Valuation transforms one qualitatively characterized situation – the enjoyment of an object whose value-status is not yet determined – into another qualitatively connoted situation – in which the object is enjoyed as a value (LW.15: 70). In contrast to *Theory of Valuation*, the centrality of articulation processes in Dewey's anthropology of interests and values is quite clear in *The Quest for Certainty*.¹²
- 42 Thus, for Dewey, human beings are capable of second-order valuations – that is, evaluations of interests. Evaluations should be understood as processes of articulation, rather than as mere external assessments of the value and legitimacy of a given interest, desire or enjoyment. In short, human beings are capable of processes of *reflective articulation* of their interests. And as Tilman and Knapp aptly point out in discussing Dewey's criticism of marginalism, neglecting the possibility of evaluating interests and values has clear political consequences:

In Dewey's view, marginal utility doctrine privatized value and by doing so induced moral agnosticism, a condition of permanently suspended judgment regarding individual and social needs, a suspension that was likely to undermine the foundations of a democratic community by immunizing value against collective appraisal by public bodies. (Tilman-Knapp 1999: 407)

- 43 But all this does not mean that we are always able to carry out reflective evaluation and articulation in a satisfying way. Rather, Dewey maintains that this activity is a possibility of human experience and action. Human beings are not naturally bound to unrestrained and uncontrolled interests. Moreover, the possibility of controlling interests through reflective articulation plays a key role in the realization of collective and individual democratic life.
- 44 However, one last piece of the puzzle we are trying to reconstruct needs to be added. Dewey's problem is not merely to determine whether human beings are capable of reflective articulation of their interests after the dust has settled. The problem is that the dust rarely settles for good. In everyday social life, evaluation must take place in situations where plural and sometimes unarticulated interests are in lively conflict. For this reason, it is necessary to bring into the picture Dewey's 1919-20 *Lectures in China*.
- 45 The *Lectures* clarify in a fairly effective and clear way some of the basic tenets of Dewey's understanding of social life. First, interests are the building blocks of individual and social life. Therefore, it is impossible to understand social issues without focusing on interests. Second, interests can (and often should) be evaluated in terms of two different relationships:
1. *The relationship between interests and the needs and vital impulses they express.* As we already know, interests do not emerge out of thin air. They express and organize impulses, desires, and needs. But the problem with the dominant interests of a given society is that they do not merely express and fulfill some needs. Rather, they begin to grow and expand and reproduce themselves inertially and independently of their relationship to the needs (Frega 2015) and impulses they are supposed to express and satisfy.
 2. *The relationship to other interests.* By definition, dominant interests dominate and hegemonize other actual or potential interests. When domination is at its peak, it is perceived as natural and unassailable by both the dominating and dominated groups. But then, in dominated groups, an initially vague and unarticulated dissatisfaction might emerge. This inchoate dissatisfaction opens the way to a denaturalization of domination and a critical evaluation of dominating interests and their dominant patterns of action (Testa 2017).
- 46 Dewey seems to go so far as to suggest that in order to criticize a dominant interest, one must appeal to another interest – either an actual or potential interest – that is dominated and/or suppressed by the former interest. This dominated interest may be either fully articulated or only incipient and inchoate. The domination exercised by the second interest may be so strong as to prevent certain groups and individuals from articulating their interests (Serrano Zamora 2017). Therefore, the vital source of critique and evaluation of existing dominant interests is the emergence (in various stages of articulation) of *critical interests*. These interests are critical in two senses: 1) they are important, vital, and decisive to certain people, and this importance must be socially recognized (Gregoratto 2017); 2) they embody a living source of critique of dominant interests and of the degeneration of associated life (Särkelä 2017).
- 47 By this, Dewey does not mean that political life should be reduced to a mere struggle between competing interests. Dewey's political anthropology of interests is an alternative to both pessimistic "realist" and naïve "idealist" anthropologies. Dewey is anti-idealist enough to distrust the possibility of evaluating existing interests as a mere exercise of philosophical virtuosity without pointing to other potential, emergent, or articulated interests.

- 48 But this does not lead him to deny the importance of values and the ideal dimension of social and political action. Dewey is not suggesting that values are merely a rhetorical and ideological cover for clashes of interests. Nor is he saying that one can evaluate and critique existing interests only if s/he is actively involved in an activist group. His much more nuanced point is that the evaluation of existing dominant interests at least points to potential and growing alternative interests, or to new articulations of common interests. On the political level, here lies the originality of his anthropology of interests *and* values.

7. Conclusions

- 49 In the previous sections I have reconstructed Dewey's anthropology of interests. I have tried to show how his theory of interest presents an idea of human beings as essentially interested animals. The diversity of human interests, however, cannot be reduced to self-interest. Moreover, human interests have a clear biological background and yet are shaped by cultural practices, habits, and institutions. Finally, while disinterestedness has no place in this view of human beings, values and evaluations do.
- 50 I am aware that Dewey's original anthropology of interests *and* values leaves us with a number of open questions that cannot be adequately addressed here. I mention them because they are a sign of how problematic (in a Deweyan – and thus not necessarily negative – sense) and vital Dewey's insights are.
1. Is the intelligent and transformative evaluation of interests envisioned by Dewey even possible? Are ultimate ends the potential objects of evaluation?¹³ And finally, in an age of nudging and hypernudging¹⁴ (see Hildebrand's 2023), is Dewey's theory of interests and (e)valuations still viable? Or is it too demanding for existing democracies?
 2. Dewey defines interests as closely related to desires, impulses, emotions, and needs. This is indicative of the biological basis of human interests. However, two aspects are not fully clarified by Dewey. First, the relationship between these various biological aspects of human action and experience is not resolved by Dewey. Second, Dewey uses different terms to define the relationship between interests and this biological bedrock – organization, expression, reflection, articulation. Because these terms refer to quite different processes, the specific way in which culturally shaped interests interact with the biological dimension of human beings is left partially unspecified.
 3. Finally, in this paper I presented Dewey's anthropology of interests as an alternative to both naive idealist and narrow realist political anthropologies. However, an alternative interpretive hypothesis could be developed. It is possible to understand Dewey's perspective as a radical redefinition of political realism. Rather than conceiving of existing interests as purely given and self-legitimizing entities – as basic forms of political realism often do – Dewey understands real interests¹⁵ as the outcome of evaluative processes. This would open up the possibility that people often pursue “unreal” interests. From this perspective, the difference between real and unreal interests would depend on the quality of the processes of articulation – that is, on the evaluation of the various ways in which interests articulate the needs, desires, and impulses of a particular group or of particular individuals.
- 51 These crucial issues – which can only be touched upon here – and their significance for a pragmatist anthropology need to be further developed in future work.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ALEXANDRATOS Francesca Sofia, (2024), "Values and Experience in Dewey's Social Philosophy," in Beatrice Centi, Faustino Fabbianelli & Gemmo Iocco (eds), *Philosophy of Value. The Historical Roots of Contemporary Debate: An Overview*, Berlin, De Gruyter, forthcoming
- BEE Michele & Maxime DESMARAIS-TREMBLAY, (2023), "The Birth of *Homo Economicus*: The Methodological Debate on the Economic Agent from J. S. Mill to V. Pareto," *Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, 45(1), 1-26. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1053837221000535>.
- BELLUCCI Francesco & Matteo SANTARELLI, (2023), "Peirce on Vagueness and Common Sense," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 59(2), 127-66.
- BOURDIEU Pierre, (1987-1989/2022), *L'Intérêt au désintéressement. Cours au Collège de France (1987-1989)*, Paris, Seuil.
- DE CARO Mario & David MACARTHUR (eds), (2022), *The Routledge Handbook of Liberal Naturalism* (1st ed.), Routledge.
- DEWEY John, (1888/1969), *The Ethics of Democracy*, in *The Early Works of John Dewey, 1882-1898*, vol. 1, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale, Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press.
- DEWEY John, (1896/1972), *Interest in Relation to the Training of the Will*, in *The Early Works of John Dewey, 1882-1898*, vol. 5, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale, Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press.
- DEWEY John, (1897/1972), *My Pedagogic Creed*, in *The Early Works of John Dewey, 1882-1898*, vol. 5, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale, Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press.
- DEWEY John, (1902/1972), *The Child and the Curriculum*, in *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924*, vol. 2, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale, Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press.
- DEWEY John, (1913/1981), *Interest and Effort in Education*, in *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924*, vol. 7, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale, Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press.
- DEWEY John, (1916/1980), *Democracy and Education*, in *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924*, vol. 9, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale, Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press.
- DEWEY John, (1919-1920/2015), "Lectures in Social and Political Philosophy," ed. by Roberto Frega & Roberto Gronda, *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, 7(2). Online: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejap.404>.
- DEWEY John, (1927), *The Public and Its Problems*, in *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953*, vol. 2, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale, Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press.
- DEWEY John, (1929/1984), *The Quest for Certainty*, in *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953*, vol. 4, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale, Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press.
- DEWEY John, (1930/1984), "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," in *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953*, vol. 5, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale, Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 147-60.

DEWEY John, (1939/1988), *Theory of Valuation*, in *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953*, vol. 13, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale, Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press.

DEWEY John, (1943/1989), *Valuation Judgments and Immediate Quality*, in *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953*, vol. 15, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale, Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press.

DEWEY John, (1948), "Common Sense and Science: Their Respective Frames of Reference," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 45(8), 197-208.

DEWEY John & James Hayden TUFTS, (1932/2008), *Ethics*, in *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953*, vol. 7, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale, Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press.

DREON Roberta, (2022), *Human Landscapes: Contributions to a Pragmatist Anthropology*, Albany, State University of New York Press.

DURKHEIM Émile, (1893), *De la division du travail social*, Paris, Alcan.

FIORITO Luca, (2011), "Frank Knight, John Dewey, and American Pragmatism: A Further Note," in Jeff E. Biddle & Ross B. Emmett (eds), *Research in the History of Economic Thought and Methodology*, 29(1), 59-72.

FORCE Pierre, (2003), *Self-Interest before Adam Smith: A Genealogy of Economic Science*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

FOUCAULT Michel, (1978-1979/2008), *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79*, English series ed. by Arnold I. Davidson, trans. by Graham Burchell, Palgrave Macmillan.

FREGA Roberto, (2010), "From Judgment to Rationality: Dewey's Epistemology of Practice," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 46(4), 591-610.

FREGA Roberto, (2015), "John Dewey's Social Philosophy: A Restatement," *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, 7(2): 98-127. Online: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejpap.410>.

GIREL Mathias, (2023), "Esprit, intérêt et attention," in Alexandra Bidet & Carole Gayet Viaud (eds), *L'Engagement comme expérience*, Paris, Éditions de l'EHESS ("Raisons Pratiques," 31), 39-45. Online: <https://books.openedition.org/editionsehess/50296>.

GOLDMAN Loren, (2012), "Dewey's Pragmatism from an Anthropological Point of View," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 48(1), 1-30.

GREGORATTO Federica, (2017), "Agonist Recognition, Intersections, and the Ambivalence of Family Bonds: John Dewey's Critical Theory Manifesto in China," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 53(1), 127-45.

GREGORATTO Federica, IKÄHEIMO Heikki, RENAULT Emmanuel, SÄRKELÄ Arvi & Italo TESTA, (2022), "Critical Naturalism: A Manifesto," *Krisis Journal for Contemporary Philosophy*, 42(1): 108-24. Online: <https://doi.org/10.21827/krisis.42.1.38637>.

HANDS D. Wade, (2006), "Frank Knight and Pragmatism," *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, 13(4), 571-605. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09672560601025779>.

HANSEN David T., (2006), "Dewey's Book of the Moral Self," in David T. Hansen (ed.), *John Dewey and Our Educational Prospect: A Critical Engagement with Dewey's "Democracy and Education"*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 165-87.

HEILBRON Johan, (1998), "French Moralists and the Anthropology of the Modern Era: On the Genesis of the Notions of 'Interest' and 'Commercial Society'," in Johan Heilbron, Lars Magnusson

- & Björn Wittrock (eds), *The Rise of the Social Sciences and the Formation of Modernity*, Amsterdam, Kluwer, 77-106.
- HILDEBRAND David L., (2023), "Philosophical Pragmatism and the Challenges of Information Technologies," *The Pluralist*, 18(1), 1-9. Online: <https://philpapers.org/archive/HILPPA-5.pdf>.
- HIRSCHMAN Albert O., (1977), *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before its Triumph*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- HOGAN Brendan & Lawrence MARCELLE, (2022), "Real Interests and Incoherent Desires," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 36(1), 51-68. Online: <https://doi.org/10.5325/jspecphil.36.1.0051>.
- HOLMES Stephen, (1995), "The Secret History of Self-Interest," in Stephen Holmes, *Passions and Constraints: On the Theory of Liberal Democracy*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 40-66.
- HONNETH Axel & Hans JOAS, (1980/1989), *Social Action and Human Nature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- JOAS Hans, (2000), *The Genesis of Values*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.
- JONAS Mark E., (2011), "Dewey's Conception of Interest and its Significance for Teacher Education," *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 43(2), 112-29. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2009.00543.x>.
- JUNG Matthias, (2009), *Der bewusste Ausdruck. Anthropologie der Artikulation*, Berlin, De Gruyter.
- KNIGHT Franck H., (1936), "Pragmatism and Social Action," *International Journal of Ethics*, 46(2), 229-36. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2989357>.
- LAZZERI Christian, (1995), "Introduction," in Henri De Rohan (1638/1995), *De l'intérêt des princes et des États de la chrétienté*, ed. by Christian Lazzeri, Paris, Presses universitaires de France.
- MARTIN John Levi & Alessandra LEMBO, (2020), "On the Other Side of Values," *American Journal of Sociology*, 126, 52-98. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1086/709778>.
- MARTIN John Levi & Alessandra LEMBO, (2021), "On the Other Side of Interests: The Rise of Values and their Transformation into Disinterest," in Seth Abrutyn & Omar Lizardo (eds), *Handbook of Classical Sociological Theory*, Springer, 671-92.
- LEVINE Steven, (2022), "Classical Pragmatism and Liberal Naturalism," in Mario De Caro & David Macarthur (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Liberal Naturalism* (1st ed.), Routledge.
- MICHEL Johann, (2019), *Homo Interpretans: Towards a Transformation of Hermeneutics*, New York, Rowman & Littlefield International.
- MILL John Stuart, (1836/2006), "On the Definition of Political Economy; and on the Method of Investigation Proper to It," in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume IV: Essays on Economics and Society*, Indianapolis, Liberty Fund, 309-39.
- PARSONS Talcott, (1934), "Service," republished in Talcott Parsons, *The Early Essays*, ed. by Charles Camic, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 47-50.
- PARSONS Talcott, (1937), *The Structure of Social Action*, New York, McGraw-Hill.
- PEARCE Trevor, (2020), *Pragmatism's Evolution*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press.
- PEIRCE Charles Sanders, (1932-1958), *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, 8 vol., ed. by Charles Hartshorne, Paul Weiss & Arthur W. Burks, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press. [CP].

PENNACCHINI Maddalena, (2015), *L'interesse in John Dewey e l'educazione dell'anziano*, Roma, Armando Editore.

PETIT Emmanuel & Jérôme BALLE, (2023), "Valuation and Emotion According to John Dewey," *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 47(6), 1019-36. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1093/cje/bead040>.

RICHARDS Isabel, (2024), "'Hypernudging': A Threat to Moral Autonomy?," *AI Ethics*, 1-11. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43681-024-00449-y>.

SANTARELLI Matteo, (2019), *La vita interessata. Una proposta teorica a partire da John Dewey*, Roma, Quodlibet.

SÄRKELÄ Arvi, (2017), "Degeneration of Associated Life: Dewey's Naturalism about Social Criticism," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 53(1), 107-26.

SERRANO ZAMORA Justo, (2017). "Articulating a Sense of Powers: An Expressivist Reading of John Dewey's Theory of Social Movements," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 53(1), 53-70.

SERRANO ZAMORA Justo, (2022), "Articulating the Social: Expressive Domination and Dewey's Epistemic Argument for Democracy," *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 48(10), 1445-63. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1177/01914537221114912>.

SERRANO Zamora Justo & Matteo SANTARELLI, (2021), "Populism or Pragmatism? Two Ways of Understanding Political Articulation," *Constellations*, 28(4), 496-510. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12522>.

SWEDBERG Richard, (2005), *Interest*, Berkshire, Open University Press.

TARANTO Domenico, (1992), *Studi sulla protostoria del concetto di interesse da Commynes a Nicole (1524-1675)*, Napoli, Liguori.

TESTA Italo, (2017), "Dominant Patterns in Associated Living: Hegemony, Domination, and Ideological Recognition in Dewey's Lectures in China," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 53(1), 29-52.

TILMAN Rick & Terry KNAPP, (1999), "John Dewey's Unknown Critique of Marginal Utility Doctrine: Instrumentalism, Motivation, and Values," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 35(4), 391-408.

TORRES-COLÓN Gabriel Alejandro & Charles A. HOBBS, (2015), "The Intertwining of Culture and Nature: Franz Boas, John Dewey, and Deweyan Strands of American Anthropology," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 76(1), 139-62.

VIOLA Tullio, (2017), *Symbolische Artikulation*, in *23 Manifeste zu Bildakt und Verkörperung*, Berlin, Boston, De Gruyter.

VIOLA Tullio, (2019), "From Vague Symbols to Contested Concepts: Peirce, W.B. Gallie, and History," *History and Theory*, 58(2), 233-51.

VIOLA Tullio, (2020), "Il primato dell'esperienza: la critica della cultura nel pragmatismo," *La Società degli individui*, 67(1), 22-35.

WALSH Vivian, (2013), "Pragmatismo: fatti, teorie e valori," in Giancarlo Marchetti (eds), *La contingenza dei fatti e l'oggettività dei valori*, Milano-Udine, Mimesis, 59-76.

WESTBROOK Robert B., (1991), *John Dewey and American Democracy*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press.

WILSON Terri S., (2016), "Interest, not Preference: Dewey and Reframing the Conceptual Vocabulary of School Choice," *Educational Theory*, 66, 147-63.

ZASK Joëlle, (2003), "Nature, donc culture: Remarques sur les liens de parenté entre l'anthropologie culturelle et la philosophie pragmatiste de John Dewey," *Genèses*, 50(1), 111-25.
Online: <https://doi.org/10.3917/gen.050.0111>.

NOTES

1. In this sense, pragmatist anthropologies seem to endorse a kind of liberal naturalism (De Caro & Macarthur 2022). On the differences between liberal naturalism and pragmatist liberalism, however, see Levine 2022.
2. For strategic reasons, I am not providing here a definition of interests and values. My overall strategy consists exactly in reconstructing Dewey's understanding and definition of interests and values, by reorganizing and reconstructing Dewey's plural uses of these terms in the various domains of his work. I would like to thank reviewer 2 for pointing to this issue.
3. My first attempt at such a reconstruction is Santarelli 2019.
4. On this topic, see Girel 2023.
5. See Bee & Desmarais-Tremblay 2023.
6. See Martin & Lembo 2021.
7. Tilman and Knapp (1999: 400) hypothesize that Dewey's critique of marginalism is perhaps influenced by Veblen's theories and Dewey's growing social radicalism (*ibid.*: 401). To these two possible roots, however, we must add the recognition of how this criticism is consistent with the epistemological assumptions that Dewey progressively develops starting from the last decades of the 19th century – above all, the means-ends continuity and the criticism of subjectivism and introspectionism.
8. On this topic, see Viola 2019, and Bellucci & Santarelli 2023.
9. One might argue that it is necessary to distinguish between disinterested and uninterested action. Indeed, Dewey seems to argue against the possibility and value of disinterested action, but not against disinterestedness as a whole – provided that the latter is understood not as an implausible lack of interest, but rather as a nonpartisan and nonpartial organization of interests. Or, in Bourdieu's terms, from this perspective Dewey would argue that disinterestedness is achieved not through a kind of divine indifference, but through the cultivation of an interest in disinterestedness (Bourdieu 1987-1989). On a theoretical and conceptual level, I think this reconstruction fits well with Dewey's ideas. On the level of terminology, however, it is no coincidence that when Dewey discusses disinterestedness in *Ethics* (1932), he defines it as a characteristic of genuine or complete interests. This suggests Dewey's insistence on reformulating the concept of disinterestedness in terms of a specific impartial attitude toward our own interests and the interests of others (LW.7: 256). I am grateful to Pierre Steiner and Vincent Colapietro for drawing my attention to the need to discuss this aspect.
10. This is where James's influence becomes clearer.
11. I would like to thank Mathias Girel for suggesting I include "The Quest for Certainty" in this conversation.
12. In recent years, many contributions focused on the importance of the concept of articulation in pragmatist philosophy and anthropology. See Frega 2010, Viola 2017, Serrano Zamora 2022, Zamora & Santarelli 2021.
13. Frank Knight, an author whose influence on the Chicago neoliberal boys is well documented, criticized Dewey on this very point – see Knight 1936. On this topic, see Hands 2006, and Fiorito 2011.

14. Hypernudging is a specific type of highly profiled nudging made possible in digital systems that use large amounts of user data and machine learning to guide decision-making in a highly personalised way. See Richards 2024.

15. The problem of real interests from a Deweyan perspective has been convincingly addressed by Hogan & Marcelle 2022.

ABSTRACTS

This article presents a reconstruction of Dewey's anthropology of interests. In particular, it aims to show the originality of Dewey's choice to place the concept of interest at the center of his understanding of human beings. This is manifested in three distinctive moves made by Dewey: (1) the critique of the reduction of human interests to self-interest; (2) the rejection of the concept of disinterestedness; and (3) the central role of both interests and values in understanding the nature of human action and experience. In the final part of the article, I will identify some problems that the Deweyan theory of interests and values fails to resolve, leaving them open for further discussion.

INDEX

Keywords: Interest, Value, John Dewey, Anthropology, Pragmatism

AUTHOR

MATTEO SANTARELLI

Università di Bologna

matteo.santarelli4[at]unibo.it

W.E.B. Du Bois as a Critical Anthropologist of Race

Shannon Sullivan

AUTHOR'S NOTE

My thanks to two anonymous reviewers who provided helpful feedback on an earlier version of this essay.

- 1 The historical connections between early American pragmatist philosophy and anthropology likely are thicker than most contemporary pragmatists and anthropologists realize. John Dewey's professional relationship with Franz Boas probably is the best-known association. Dewey (1859-1952) and Boas (1858-1942) were colleagues at Columbia University for approximately thirty years (1904-1930, when Dewey retired) and they even co-taught a seminar for three consecutive years, from 1913 to 1916.¹ Both emphasized the primacy of experience, and Boas' influence on Dewey helped Dewey develop an anthropological account of nature that intertwined it with culture. In turn, Dewey's account of nature influenced subsequent generations of anthropologists who based their work on dynamic, interconnected models of humans and their environments (Torres Colón & Hobbs 2015).
- 2 What is less well-known is the rich connection that pragmatist philosopher W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963) had with the field of anthropology, including a significant influence on Boas. In 1905, one year after Boas' move to Columbia, Du Bois invited him to Atlanta, Georgia, to give Atlanta University's 1906 commencement address and to present at its annual Conference on Negro Health and Physique, an invitation which Boas accepted. In his presentations, Boas simultaneously praised the accomplishments of ancient African peoples and encouraged Black Americans to work hard and be patient until white people realized that Black people were not inferior to them. In that way, they effectively echoed the position of Black accommodation to white culture that was (in)famously championed by Booker T. Washington (Willis 2008: 60). While Boas' speeches generally were not well received by his Atlanta audiences, they nonetheless

had a profound effect on Du Bois, who credited Boas for inspiring him to research African history and ethnology in more depth. Despite the speeches' content, they also positioned Boas, unawares, on the "radical" side – that of Du Bois against Washington – of the Black American leaders' national struggle over what racial justice for Black people should look like and how it should be achieved (*ibid.*: 65-6).

- 3 As a result, Du Bois had a powerful impact on Boas' work, pushing him to leave the ivory tower and be the critical public intellectual and activist on issues of race, racism, and social justice that he later became (Baker 2004, 2022).² Beyond Boas, Du Bois also went on to influence a great number of early African American anthropologists who received their training in the 1920s through the 1940s and developed pioneering analyses of race and culture that challenged racism and white supremacy: Allison Davis, Irene Diggs, St. Clair Drake, Carolyn Bond Day, and Arthur H. Fasset (Baker 2022). Du Bois' pragmatist philosophy thus is central to early anthropologies of race. When contemporary scholars seek historical inspiration for developing pragmatist anthropologies of race, they need not be limited to focusing on the relationship between Dewey and Boas, important though that relationship was (cf. Torres Colón & Hobbs 2016). Du Bois also is a significant part of the rich history of the intersections of pragmatism and anthropology, especially when issues of race and racism are at stake.
- 4 My goal in this article is to illuminate the anthropological aspects of Du Bois' corpus, and I will do so in two ways. First, drawing on the recent recognition of Du Bois by contemporary anthropologists, I will highlight the anthropological work that Du Bois conducted on Black people and communities in Philadelphia and Atlanta. This work often is recognized as sociological, and rightly so, but it also made important contributions to the burgeoning field of anthropology. Second, and more ambitiously, I will argue that when reading Du Bois with an eye for his anthropological pragmatism, contemporary philosophers and anthropologists should not stop at reading Du Bois' work on Black people. We also should read his analyses of whiteness and white people as components of a critical anthropology of race. This is so even though Du Bois did not empirically investigate white people and communities in the same methodological way that he did Black ones. Nevertheless, reading Du Bois as an anthropologist of whiteness has the beneficial effect of providing fresh insight into Du Bois' analyses of whiteness and deepening the links between pragmatism and anthropology in his work. As a pragmatist, Du Bois is a meliorist concerned with the concrete experiences and habits of human beings. His focus on race encourages both philosophers and anthropologists to examine how those experiences and habits are shaped by racial prejudice and domination.

1. Du Bois as a Critical Anthropologist of Black People and Cultures

- 5 Based on his early social scientific work, Du Bois has come to be recognized as one of the founders of American sociology, and related fields such as criminal justice and history also acknowledge the influence of his work (Williams 2006). In particular, *The Philadelphia Negro*, published in 1899, and Du Bois' Atlantic University publications, which he edited in the early 1900s, often are seen as groundbreaking sociological analyses of Black life and cultures. However, this work also can be read as a founding contribution to anthropology. Sociology and anthropology complement each other, of

course, and reading Du Bois anthropologically need not negate the sociological import of his work. But it is important not to erase or subsume anthropology to sociology when reading Du Bois with an eye for his social scientific contributions.

- 6 In part, this has to do with the different histories of the two fields. Somewhat oversimplified, modern sociology originated in the 19th century as an attempt to understand the workings of human society and social behavior, especially at the institutional level and in the wake of massive social change due to the Industrial Revolution. Modern anthropology originated in the 19th and early 20th centuries as the study of human cultures and behaviors in order to understand what makes us human.³ Unlike sociology, out of which the field of anthropology grew, anthropology also has significant roots in colonialism. Early anthropological field work typically took the form of white European or Euro-American scientists studying the so-called exotic customs of small cultural groups in Africa, the Americas, and East Asia and the Pacific Islands (Lewis 1973; Ma 2020; Parsons 2022).
- 7 In the United States, anthropologists focused particularly on Indigenous people in North America – so-called Native Americans – allegedly demonstrating that “the savage stands strikingly close to sub-human species in every respect,” as the soon-to-be first president of the American Anthropological Association William McGee wrote in 1901 (Parsons 2022: 2). Perhaps this was because of a natural-history focus on the indigenous origins of North America. As the Black Columbia-trained anthropologist William S. Willis lamented in 1970, Black people were not seen by “the lily-white composition of anthropology” as exotically mysterious the way that Indigenous people were (Zumwalt 2008: 28). Willis also suspected that white people still perceived conquering the frontier as heroic while they tended to feel guilty when reminded of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and these attitudes helped unconsciously steer anthropologists away from studying Black Americans (*ibid.*). Whatever the reason, even though racist stereotypes of Black Americans as uncivilized and thus as “savage” pervaded the United States, Black American communities and cultures were largely neglected by the discipline of anthropology.
- 8 This makes Du Bois’ study of Black people and communities in Philadelphia all the more striking. Not only was it the first anthropological study to focus on Black people in the United States, but it also was the first anthropological project – certainly in the United States, but also likely in Europe – in which an anthropologist studied their own people rather than a different group. (I will return to this point shortly.) In 1896, the sociology department of the University of Pennsylvania hired Du Bois to conduct in-depth research on the Black residents of Philadelphia’s seventh ward, in which the largest number of Black Philadelphians lived. Du Bois moved to the seventh ward and lived there for approximately one year while he distributed questionnaires, conducted interviews with the Black seventh ward residents, and gathered statistical data about their occupation, age, gender, health, and other relevant information. Du Bois knew that the city had different motives than he did for conducting the study. “The fact was that the city of Philadelphia at that time had a theory,” Du Bois (1940/1984: 58) acknowledged, “and that theory was that this great, rich, and famous municipality was going to the dogs because of the crime and venality of its Negro citizens, who lived largely centered in the slum at the lower end of the seventh ward.” Du Bois nevertheless accepted the job believing that he could use it for his own purposes, which were to create a more accurate and truthful picture of Black life that could counter

anti-Black prejudice. “My vision was becoming clearer,” as Du Bois explained in anticipation of the study. “The Negro problem was in my mind a matter of systemic investigation and intelligent understanding. The world was thinking wrong about race, because it did not know. The ultimate evil was stupidity. The cure for it was knowledge based on scientific investigation” (*ibid.*).

- 9 Operating with what today is called research triangulation or mixed-methods research, in his Philadelphia study “Du Bois utilized multiple tools, especially interviews, archival research, and field observations, in order to reduce the errors that might occur if only one methodology were employed” (Williams 2006: 372; see also Clayton Jr. *et al.* 2023: 156). His approach had affinities with the work of Jane Addams, Isabel Eaton, and other women sociologists at Hull House, who mapped communities in Chicago based on studies of poverty, wages, immigration, and other social and economic factors. Both Du Bois and Addams were guided by Charles Booth’s late 19th century empirical study of poor people in London (Clayton Jr. *et al.* 2023: 156). Eaton, who studied cloak-makers’ wages and living expenses in Chicago, later worked with Du Bois on *The Philadelphia Negro* while she was a graduate student in sociology, helping author a substantial portion of the report (Deegan 1988).
- 10 Influenced by the community-questionnaire model used by Booth and Addams, Du Bois and his team provided an analysis of an urban community that challenged white supremacist thinking about Black people. Rather than monolithically poor, uneducated, and/or criminal, the Black residents of the seventh ward had a great deal of class and economic diversity. Du Bois also used empirical methods to historically situate the struggles of Black people, recognizing that so-called undesirable traits such as low personal motivation and slack moral values existed but arguing that they were remnants of chattel slavery rather than inherent to Black people. Anticipating his later argument regarding “the Talented Tenth,” which was the top ten percent of “exceptional men” who could “save the Negro race” (Du Bois 1903), Du Bois identified a Black elite class in the seventh ward and argued for their importance in racial advancement for Black people. Finally, Du Bois concluded his study with public policy recommendations: “duties,” as he called them, for Black people to promote socially and economically “proper” behaviors, along with a call to white people to allow Black people to advance as far as their abilities allow (Williams 2006).
- 11 After Philadelphia study was published, the president of Atlanta University approached Du Bois and asked him to oversee the university’s work in sociology and in particular the new conferences on the so-called Negro problem that the university was beginning. From 1896-1910, Du Bois and his students published eighteen monographs based on studies of Black life in the Atlanta area. This work was notable for adding the social sciences and the data it generated to existing social reform work on the part of Black Americans, which often consisted of stories of improvement accompanied by moral admonitions for other Black people to do the same (*ibid.*: 378). The Atlantic University publications tended to focus on Georgia, for example, gathering crime data to challenge claims that crime was rising among Black Americans. But some of them had a national scope, such as the 1900 *The College-Bred Negro*, which interviewed Black college graduates across the United States, documenting that most of them were employed post-graduation in jobs and professions appropriate to their training. This helped counter prejudiced assumptions that higher education for Black people was misguided

because it supposedly left them with useless skills for the type of (presumably menial) jobs that were their only option (*ibid.*: 379).

- 12 *The Philadelphia Negro* and the Atlanta University publications are two of the most prominent examples of Du Bois' social scientific study of Black Americans. Other examples include Du Bois' 1898 publication *The Negroes of Farmville, Virginia: A Social Study*, which was commissioned by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and is notable for its documentation of class differences among Black Americans living in the Farmville area. Methodologically, Du Bois' work was groundbreaking even though it had limitations, which Du Bois himself recognized. For example, in addition to the problem of "one lone worker and little money" and white skepticism that hampered *The Philadelphia Negro* study, Du Bois was not necessarily seen as one of their own by the other Black residents of the seventh ward.⁴ As Du Bois (1940/1984: 58) frankly admits, "Blacks [in the seventh ward] said, 'Are we animals to be dissected and by an unknown Negro at that?'" Du Bois does not elaborate on how he overcame Black resistance to his work in Philadelphia, Farmville, or elsewhere, but he rightly flags some of the methodological challenges entailed, for example, by participant observation field work, which persist in contemporary anthropology and ethnology.⁵ He also was acutely aware of the dangers of personal bias and of unavoidable faults in statistical methodology, raising those as important issues for social scientists to acknowledge and grapple with (Du Bois 1940/1984: 59).
- 13 Both the achievements of and the obstacles faced by Du Bois' turn-of-the-century studies of American Black communities thus remain instructive for scholars today. As a distinctively pragmatist anthropologist, Du Bois models how to study human experience for the express purpose of improving it. Collectively, Du Bois' empirical studies of Black people thus have earned him the status of an "unacknowledged ancestor" of today's anthropologists whose research "anticipate[s] and even at points go[es] beyond the insights of such contemporary subdisciplines as urban anthropology, [...] radical historical political economy, [...] and humanistic anthropology" (Harrison 1992: 234).

2. Du Bois as a Critical Anthropologist of White People and Cultures

- 14 As important as Du Bois' studies of Black American people and cultures are, they are not the only anthropological legacy that Du Bois has bequeathed contemporary scholars. Via his substantial critical analyses of white culture, Du Bois also can be read as an anthropologist of the "odd tribes" of white people, to adopt John Hartigan Jr.'s (2005) felicitous phrase. Given that anthropology's roots lie in white scholars' examination of non-white "savage" tribes, to consider white people as a "tribe" effectively turns the tables on them. It subjects their practices, rituals, and beliefs to critical examination and treats them as culturally specific – even bizarre, abnormal, or "odd" – rather than as manifestations of a universal truth regarding the achievements of civilization and definitions of what it means to be human.
- 15 Du Bois' examination of whiteness does all that and more. He not only strips white people of their role as the unmarked exemplar of the "normal" human, as the work of white scholars critically studying white people also can do. As a Black scholar, he

eliminates the white gaze altogether. His studies of white people position non-white people – Black people, in this case – in a superior epistemological role. Black people often know white people in terms of their race better than white people know themselves. Needless to say, this is something that white people generally are unaccustomed to in societies structured by white privilege and white supremacy, as the United States (and other white-dominated countries) was and is. Du Bois' studies of whiteness and white people thus were just as, if not more groundbreaking than his work on Black people. As Hartigan (2005: 202) notes, "Arguably the first social scientific attempt to analyze – rather than champion – whiteness was W.E.B. Du Bois's account of the 'white world' in *Dusk of Dawn*."

- 16 In fact, Du Bois critically examined whiteness earlier than the 1940 publication of *Dusk of Dawn*. For example, in 1920, he published a scathing account of "the souls of white folk" in *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (1920/1999). Admittedly, that account might not strictly count as social scientific since it does not utilize any quantitative or qualitative scientific measures, but neither does the essay on "The White World" in *Dusk of Dawn*. Rather than pinpoint which is Du Bois' first social scientific analysis of whiteness, however, what is more important for my purposes is the larger question of whether Du Bois' on whiteness and white people can be profitably read with an anthropological lens. My answer to that question is yes. Even though Du Bois' work on whiteness does not fit with a methodologically strict understanding of anthropology, imaginatively reading it from an anthropological perspective shows how it can contribute to a critical anthropology of race. Here too Du Bois' distinctively pragmatist approach to anthropology shines through: his work on whiteness demonstrates how to study human experience for the express purpose of improving it.
- 17 Du Bois himself indicates his interest in explicitly connecting anthropology to studies of whiteness, at least early in his career. In *Dusk of Dawn*, quoting himself from the conclusion of *The Philadelphia Negro* as he outlines a plan for further study, Du Bois (1940/1984: 61) writes:

Particularly with regard to anthropology I said: "That there are differences between the white and black races is certain, but just what those differences are is known to none with an approach to accuracy. Yet here in America is the most remarkable opportunity ever offered of studying these differences, of noting influences of climate and physical environment, and particularly of studying the effect of amalgamating two of the most diverse races in the world – another subject which rests under a cloud of ignorance."
- 18 Du Bois does not follow up on the opportunity to empirically compare and contrast white and Black people. However, he does go on to write brilliantly and frequently about the practices and beliefs of white people, revealing them to be not just an "odd tribe" but also a malevolent one. Moreover, he uses multiple methods to analyze whiteness, providing a kind of methodological triangulation in this work as well. Somewhat loosely, we can categorize those methods as: participant observation of white people, interviews of white people, and historical research about white people.⁶

2.1. Participant Observation

- 19 Du Bois' entire life could be described as one of fieldwork via participant observation of white people and their particular customs, beliefs, and habits, especially those concerning race. He lived surrounded by white people as he grew up in a small town in

Massachusetts (the only “colored student” to graduate from its high school, in 1884), as he attended Fisk University for his undergraduate degree and then Harvard College and the University of Berlin for his advanced degrees, and in his teaching, research, and editorial jobs in Pennsylvania, Georgia, and New York (Du Bois 1940/1984: 20-5). Interacting with white people is not unique to Du Bois’ situation, of course; most Black Americans had to do so if only to remain employed. But Du Bois was particularly adept at understanding and analyzing the experience of being immersed in a cultural group that he did not belong to, and he thus could simultaneously be surrounded by and observe that group critically. As Du Bois (*ibid.*: 135), explains, he was born into a racially segregated society, but “in addition I lived in an environment which I came to call the white world.” By “world,” Du Bois intends something different than the typical meaning of the word, for example, the earth and its various countries and natural features. The white world is a distinct world in the sense of set of practices and values that are actively created through material and semiotic processes and that give definition and meaning to the people and things within that world. A particular geographical space can be the site of different worlds that conflict with one another, and people sometimes “travel” between worlds – often out of necessity for survival.⁷

- 20 The main thing we learn about the white world from Du Bois’ participatory field work in it is that white people highly value mastery and control. They seek to control other people and they are extremely devoted to controlling Black people in particular. As Du Bois explains, the white world “often existed primarily [...] to see with sleepless vigilance that I was kept within bounds [...]. I could not stir, I could not act, I could not live, without taking into careful daily account the reaction of my white environing world” (Du Bois 1940/1984: 135, 136). The mechanisms for exercising and securing that control are numerous, and they drill down into the minute aspects of quotidian life. Du Bois’ experience reveals the wide range of the white world’s attempts at mastering – pun intended vis-à-vis white slave masters – the lives of Black people in post-slavery America: “How I traveled and where, what work I did, with whom I talked, where I sought recreation, where I studied, what I wrote and what I could get published [...] this fact of racial distinction based on color was the greatest thing in my life and absolutely determined it” (*ibid.*: 136).
- 21 White Americans’ fixation on control of Black people also is apparent in their quotidian, trivial conversations with them. Du Bois (1903/1994: 1) recounts the numerous times that while making small talk, white people implicitly ask him the real question that is on their minds: “How does it feel to be a problem?” This was a question for him as a Black individual, but it also was a question being asked by white people at a national, collective level. “No sooner had Northern armies touched Southern soil” in the United States’ Civil War, Du Bois wryly notes, “than this old question [of Black enslavement], newly guised, sprang from the earth, – What shall be done with Negroes?” (*ibid.*). How, in other words, can and will white people continue to dominate and control Black people now that the institution of chattel slavery has been abolished? What new societal structures can take its place? The answer at the time was the creation of Jim Crow laws, which began in the 1870s and legally mandated racial segregation in the United States until the 1950s and 60s.⁸
- 22 Du Bois’ subsequent reflections on this old question reveal another defining characteristic of white culture, which I will call its hubristic single-consciousness about race. This aspect of white culture emerges in connection with Du Bois’ now-famous

description of his double-consciousness as a Black person: “it is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body” (Du Bois 1903/1994: 2). White people, in contrast, generally do not have double-consciousness and thus they lack the epistemic complexity that Black people generally have regarding race. White people do not look at themselves through the eyes of other racial groups, and they do not measure their value and worth against the tape of other people. They do not question or “war” with themselves over whether they are who they think they are. They single-consciously and arrogantly “know” that they are the pinnacle of civilized humanity and thus that it is appropriate for them to set up a world in which they are dominant and control other people.

2.2. Interviews

- 23 While Du Bois never conducted official interviews with white people about race, we can read his fictional conversation with a white person in the essay “The White World” as such an interview. “Fictional” is not quite accurate, however, since the conversation condenses various things that actual white people have said to or in front of Du Bois about race over the years. In that sense, the conversation is real. Du Bois’ interview subject is named Roger Van Dieman, a “white friend” who, Du Bois (1940/1984: 140) explains, is “an abstraction and integration and never existed.” While the singular person Van Dieman does not exist, the amalgamation of white beliefs presented by his words reveals a great deal about the values that undergird whiteness.
- 24 What we learn from Du Bois’ (*ibid.*: 140-53) conversation with Van Dieman spans the full array of white people’s prejudiced beliefs about themselves and Black people: white people are superior to Black people, whom white people view as objects of pity; white people are uniquely beautiful and represent the standard of beauty against which Black people are measured; white people are the intellectual pinnacle of humanity, in whatever way intellect is defined: “clear thinking, pure reason, mathematical precision and creative genius” (*ibid.*: 143); white people are morally and spiritually superior to other races; and white people have produced the highest forms of culture and civilization while other racial groups are comparative backward or primitive.
- 25 Du Bois also “interviews” another fictional white companion, who is particularly interesting to Du Bois because the friend shows how “the average reasonable, conscientious, and fairly intelligent white American faces continuing paradox” because of his race-based beliefs (*ibid.*: 153). This unnamed white person is religiously faithful, seeking to follow Christian teachings that honor peace, good will to all human beings, poverty over riches, and the idea that the meek rather than the powerful shall inherit the earth. This friend also considers himself to be a civilized gentleman; he is courteous to (white) women, charitable toward the needy, and loyal to his country. The bind that this person finds himself in, however, is that he also supports hatred, war, exploitation, and imperialism. When his conflicting values are set out bluntly before him, the white companion is shocked; how can one endorse such contradictory practices and values?
- 26 The answer, as Du Bois demonstrates, is that white people ultimately give up on the higher values out of what they consider to be a level-headed, praiseworthy practicality.

As his white companion explains, it would be ideal if peace, good will, and the golden rule could prevail, but the reality is that:

[T]his can't be a world of saints [...]. But why not have [instead] a world of gentlemen – well-policed, everybody in his place; all the rich, courteous and generous and all the poor appreciative; propaganda for the right, love of country and prosperous business; White World leading the Colored as far as the darkies can go. Certainly despite all your democracy, blood will tell. Now that seems to be practical. (*Ibid.*: 166)

- 27 And if push comes to shove – which it inevitably will, given that civilization requires money, as the white friend insists – then “we’ve got to be Americans even if we give up being Christians and Gentlemen” (*ibid.*: 168). The paradox thus is resolved thanks to white Americans’ supposedly realistic outlook on life. In their view, they are not bad people and they believe in the importance of moral and spiritual values, but they also are smart enough to prioritize practical adaptation to harsh realities – perhaps especially when those harsh realities are created by and in the service of white people themselves. Du Bois’ second interview thus reveals how white people lie to themselves, enabling them to feel good about themselves and camouflaging the actual reality that “the attitude of the white world [is] sheer malevolence” (*ibid.*: 170).

2.3. Historical Research

- 28 Finally, Du Bois provides a historical perspective on white people and nations, complementing the micro-level data gathered through participant observation, conversations, and interviews with macro-level information obtained through historical analyses. While this is not the same as the archival or archeological research sometimes pursued by anthropologists, it does fit with historical anthropology’s aim of understanding how a particular culture has changed over time. And what has changed in the case of white America, as Du Bois demonstrates, is an expansion of its white mastery and control from the national to the international level. The young nation that sought to control Black slaves and newly-freed Black Americans in the 19th century grew in power in the early 20th century and joined Europe in its efforts to control Black people and other people of color around the world. As Du Bois (*ibid.*: 47) explains, he “began to see the race problem in America, the problem of the peoples of Africa and Asia, and the political development of Europe as one.” Put another way, whiteness and the corresponding “race problem” was always more than a merely American phenomenon – in that sense, nothing has changed – but the full development and coordination of white global control did not take place until roughly the turn of the 20th century (Du Bois 1920/1999: 17).
- 29 In particular, it is during World War I that the staggering horror of global whiteness became apparent. Or rather, it became apparent to white people; it had been obvious to other people for decades. No longer content to exploit and kill non-white people in Africa and elsewhere, “the white world turned temporarily aside to kill each other” (*ibid.*). The temporary nature of this violence does not mean that it is an anomaly, however. It instead is the clearest picture of what white control and ownership has always been. As Du Bois (*ibid.*: 22) agonizingly depicts the white nations of Europe during World War I, “this is not Europe gone mad; this is not aberration nor insanity; this is Europe; this seeming Terrible is the real soul of white culture – back of all culture –, stripped and visible today.” World War II, including the horrific violence of

Nazi Germany, was a logical extension of the soul of white culture – and not just World War I, but also the 1884 Conference in Berlin that preceded it, in which white European nations carved up Africa for colonial exploitation (Du Bois 1940/1984: 170; Sullivan 2021).

- 30 Du Bois' scathing criticism of Europe does not mean that he lets the United States off the hook, however. Indeed, Du Bois delivers an equally harsh, parallel criticism of America and its actions during and after the war. He finds it almost laughable that America saw itself as fighting a good moral fight for democracy when it entered World War I and then playing a leadership role securing peace at Versailles via the creation of the League of Nations after the war concluded. As Du Bois (1920/1999: 28) wryly notes,
- [I]t is curious to see America, the United States, looking on herself, first, as a sort of natural peacemaker, then as a moral protagonist in this terrible time. *No nation is less fitted for this role.* For two or more centuries American has marched proudly in the van of human hatred – making bonfires of human flesh and laughing at them hideously [...]. Instead of standing as a great example of the success of democracy and the possibility of human brotherhood American has taken her place as an awful example of its pitfalls and failures, so far as black and brown and yellow people are concerned. (Emphasis added)
- 31 It thus is not just white Europe, but also white America that passionately declares, “whiteness is the ownership of the earth forever and ever, Amen!” (*ibid.*: 18). Du Bois' analyses of whiteness reveal that to become a member of the odd tribe of white people requires learning vicious cultural habits of possessing and controlling other people, places, and lands.⁹

3. Conclusion: From Social Science to Unconscious Habit

- 32 Contemporary anthropologists have begun to acknowledge that Du Bois' scholarship should be recognized as “intellectually and politically integral to the development of an authentic, critical anthropology” (Harrison 1992: 255). As I have argued, not only his careful empirical studies of Black people, but also his critical experiential analyses of white people can be considered part of an anthropological legacy that contemporary scholars can benefit from today. Indeed, that legacy has borne fruit, as is evident in the important anthropological work on whiteness carried out, for example, by John Hartigan Jr. (1999, 2005) and Aisha M. Beliso-De Jesús, Jemima Pierre and Junaid Rana (2023).
- 33 One of the challenges for the ongoing work of Du Bois' legacy, however, comes from the fact that his status as an anthropologist tends to be based on the first half of his career, that is, his work up until the Atlanta University studies. As noted earlier, that was the time in Du Bois' life that he saw himself as engaged in “a careful search for truth” about race that would make “the Truth clear to all,” especially white people (Du Bois 1940/1984: 64). This positivist notion of truth operated with a progressive, liberal approach to the elimination of racism. At that time, Du Bois believed that once white people had the Truth – often capitalized by Du Bois in this context – they would relinquish their prejudice against Black people.
- 34 However, by 1910, Du Bois became critical of this approach and more wary of white people's racial intentions. He moved, both geographically to New York and

academically away from empirical studies, toward producing what he called political “propaganda” via his editorship of the NAACP’s *The Crisis*, negatively characterizing his earlier work at Atlanta University as an ivory tower-focus on statistics and information about race (1940/1984: 54, 222). Even his NAACP work came under subsequent self-criticism, as Du Bois shifted more fully to confront the unconscious operations of racial prejudice (Sullivan 2003). As Du Bois (1940/1984: 296) retrospectively remarked in 1948, by 1930 he “began to realize that in the fight against race prejudice, we were not facing simply the rational, conscious determination of white folk to oppress us; we were facing age-long complexes sunk now largely to unconscious habit and irrational urge.” And in his final, 1968 autobiography, Du Bois (1968: 228) underscores, “I was not at the time sufficiently Freudian to understand how little human action is based on reason.”

- 35 Du Bois’ criticisms of his early methodology would apply not only to his work in Philadelphia and Atlanta, but also to the critical anthropology of whiteness that is implicit in his empirical studies. After all, participant observation, interviews, and historical research on and with white people are research methods consistent with the progressive, liberal approach to eliminating racism found in Du Bois’ studies of Black people and communities. This fact does not erase the importance to anthropology of Du Bois’ early work, but it does raise an important question. Given Du Bois’ self-criticism of his early work’s positivist methodology, what does his movement away from his recognizably social scientific work mean for his legacy as a founder of anthropology?
- 36 In my view, the shift in Du Bois’ methodology over the course of his career adds to, rather than detracts from, the value of his work as a critical pragmatist anthropologist of race. This is because whiteness and white supremacy substantially operate via unconscious habits of racial privilege (Sullivan 2006), and thus any adequate pragmatism or anthropology of race must confront that fact. Du Bois’ later work can help both pragmatism and anthropology do so.¹⁰ Indeed, I think appreciating Du Bois as a pragmatist entails affirming the emphasis he places not only on the consciously-driven experiences and behaviors of Black, white, and other people, but also on their subconscious and unconscious ones. As for anthropology, I would argue that Du Bois’ change of focus toward unconscious habits of racial prejudice should be considered more of a transformation than an abandonment of the social sciences. It is a positive shift that encourages contemporary anthropologists to pay attention to age-long complexes of whiteness, which can seem invisible or non-existent because they no longer operate on a conscious level.
- 37 In the contemporary field of anthropology, Hartigan’s work is notable for doing precisely that by directly tackling, rather than evading the question of the value of Du Bois’ later thinking. Acknowledging Du Bois as an inspiration for his 2005 monograph, *Odd Tribes: Toward a Cultural Analysis of White People*, Hartigan (2005: 15) describes the book as a fusion of the social sciences and cultural studies, the latter of which utilizes concepts such as the unconscious and thus makes for a somewhat unexpected partner for anthropology. Du Bois paved the way for that partnership, according to Hartigan, precisely because Du Bois “found the ability of social scientific methods and theories to objectify the nuanced dynamics of racial matters limited” (*ibid.*: 292, n. 30). Rather than being a drawback to Du Bois’ work as an anthropologist, Du Bois’ methodological turn to unconscious racialized habits can be beneficial for contemporary anthropology. As Hartigan (*ibid.*) explains, “the analytic tactics Du Bois deployed in the latter works [i.e., *The Souls of Black Folks* and *Dusk of Dawn*] are today largely the purview of cultural

studies approaches and are clearly critical to the task of understanding racial dynamics today.”

- 38 Overall, Du Bois’ pragmatism encourages anthropologists to pay close attention to the way that race and racial prejudice shape human behavior and culture and to use the results of their work for the purpose of improving human experience. It also highlights the role that whiteness historically has played and often continues to play in the racialization of human life. Finally, it underscores the centrality of unconscious habits in the operation of racial prejudice, especially unconscious beliefs and practices that assume that whiteness is the rightful measure of humanity. This constitutes a rich legacy for contemporary anthropology to embrace.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BAKER Lee D., (2004), “Franz Boas Out of the Ivory Tower,” *Anthropological Theory*, 4(1), 20-51.

Online: <https://people.duke.edu/~ldbaker/documents/baker20.pdf>.

BAKER Lee D., (2021), “The Racist Anti-Racism of American Anthropology,” *Transforming*

Anthropology, 29(2), 127-42. Online: <https://hdl.handle.net/10161/24005>.

BAKER Lee D., (2022), “W.E.B. Du Bois and American Anthropology,” in Aldon Morris (ed.), *The*

Oxford Handbook of W.E.B. Du Bois, New York, Oxford University Press. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190062767.013.18>.

BELISO-DE JESÚS Aisha M., JEMIMA Pierre & Junaid RANA, (2023), “White Supremacy and the Making of Anthropology,” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 52, 417-35.

CLAYTON Jr. Obie, HOPPS June Gary, STRICKLAND Chris & Shena BROWN, (2023), “Legacies of Jane Addams and W.E.B. Du Bois: Lessons for Scholarship on Diversity and Inclusion in Organizations,” in Patricia M. Shields, Maurice Hamington & Joseph Soeters (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Jane Addams*, New York, Oxford University Press, 149-67.

DEEGAN Mary Jo, (1988), “W.E.B. Du Bois and the Women of Hull House, 1895-1899,” *The American*

Sociologist, 19(4), 301-11. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27698433>.

DU BOIS William Edward Burghardt, (1899/1996), *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*,

Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press.

DU BOIS William Edward Burghardt, (1903), “The Talented Tenth,” in Booker T. Washington (ed.),

The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative American Negroes of Today, New York, J. Pott.

Online: <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/the-talented-tenth/>.

DU BOIS William Edward Burghardt, (1903/1994), *The Souls of Black Folk*, New York, Dover

Publications.

DU BOIS William Edward Burghardt, (1920/1999), *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*, Mineola,

Dover Publications.

DU BOIS William Edward Burghardt, (1924/1970), *The Gifts of Black Folk: The Negroes in the Making of*

America, New York, Washington Square Press.

DU BOIS William Edward Burghardt, (1940/1984), *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*, London, Transaction Publishers.

DU BOIS William Edward Burghardt, (1935), *Black Reconstruction in America*, New York, The World Publishing Company.

DU BOIS William Edward Burghardt, (1968), *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century*, International Publishers.

EZE Emmanuel Chukwudi, (1995), "The Color of Reason: The Idea of 'Race' in Kant's Anthropology," *The Bucknell Review*, 38(2), 200-41.

GROARK Kevin P., (2019), "Freud Among the Boasians: Psychoanalytic Influence and Ambivalence in American Anthropology," *Current Anthropology*, 60(4), 559-88. Online: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/704711>.

HARRISON Faye V., (1992), "The Du Boisian Legacy in Anthropology," *Critique of Anthropology*, 12(3), 239-60. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308275X9201200303>.

HARRISON Faye V. & Donald NONINI, (1992), "Introduction to W.E.B. Du Bois and Anthropology," *Critique of Anthropology*, 12(3), 229-37. Online: https://www.academia.edu/33610794/Introduction_to_W_E_B_Du_Bois_and_Anthropology.

HARTIGAN John Jr., (1999), *Racial Situations: Class Predicaments of Whiteness in Detroit*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.

HARTIGAN John Jr., (2005), *Odd Tribes: Toward a Cultural Analysis of White People*, Durham, Duke University Press.

HEALD Suzette & Ariane DELUZ (eds), (1994), *Anthropology and Psychoanalysis: An Encounter Through Culture*, New York, Routledge.

LEWIS Diane, (1973), "Anthropology and Colonialism," *Current Anthropology*, 14(5), 581-602. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2741037>.

LOPEZ-DICASTILLO Olga & Maider BELINTXON, (2014), "The Challenges of Participant Observations of Cultural Encounters within an Ethnographic Study," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 132, 522-6. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.04.347>.

LUGONES María, (1987), "Playfulness, 'World'-Traveling, and Loving Perception," *Hypatia*, 2(2), 3-19. Online: <https://wildtongues.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/worldtraveling.pdf>.

MA Guoging, (2020), "Islands and the World from an Anthropological Perspective," *International Journal of Anthropology and Ethnology*, 4(12). Online: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41257-020-00038-x>.

PARSONS Rachel, (2022), "Anthropology Association Apologizes to Native Americans for the Field's Legacy of Harm," *Scientific American*, March 28, available online: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/anthropology-association-apologizes-to-native-americans-for-the-fields-legacy-of-harm/>.

PEARCE Trevor, (2024), "John Dewey, Evolutionary Anthropology, and Comparative Jurisprudence," *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, 16(2). Online: <https://journals.openedition.org/ejpap/4269>.

PERLSTEIN Rick, (2012), "Exclusive: Lee Atwater's Infamous 1981 Interview on the Southern Strategy," *The Nation*, November 13. Online: <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/exclusive-lee-atwaters-infamous-1981-interview-southern-strategy/>.

- SULLIVAN Shannon, (2003), "Remembering the Gift: Du Bois on the Unconscious and Economic Operations of Racism," *Transactions of the C.S. Peirce Society*, 39(2), 205-25.
- SULLIVAN Shannon, (2006), *Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press.
- SULLIVAN Shannon, (2021), "Racism, Colonialism, and the Crisis of Democracy: The Contributions of W.E.B. Du Bois," in Michael Festl (ed.), *Pragmatism and Social Philosophy: Exploring a Stream of Ideas from America to Europe*, New York, Routledge, 185-99.
- TORRES COLÓN Gabriel Alejandro & Charles A. HOBBS, (2015), "The Intertwining of Culture and Nature: Franz Boas, John Dewey, and Deweyan Strands of American Anthropology," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 76(1), 139-62.
- TORRES COLÓN Gabriel Alejandro & Charles A. HOBBS, (2016), "Toward a Pragmatist Anthropology of Race," *The Pluralist*, 11(1), 126-35. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/pluralist.11.1.0126>.
- WILLIAMS Robert W., (2006), "The Early Social Science of W.E.B. Du Bois," *Du Bois Review*, 3(2), 365-94. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X06060243>.
- WILLIS William Shedrick, (2008), "Boas Goes to Atlanta," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 98(2), 41-77.
- ZUMWALT Rosemary Levy, (2008), "Willis: An Introduction," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 98(2), 1-40.

NOTES

1. Here I follow Pearce's 2024 correction to the seminar dates provided by Torres Colón and Hobbs, which limit the co-taught class to one year.
2. But see also Baker 2021 for further analysis of how Boas argued, in 1909, that Black people needed to reproductively assimilate with white people with the aim of improving their bodily type and features via the influx of "white blood."
3. However, anthropology could be said to have begun at the end of the 18th century, with Immanuel Kant's (in)famous lectures on anthropology, which were central to the development of modern racism; see Eze 1995.
4. Du Bois probably was overworked and under-resourced when conducting his study of Philadelphia; indeed, more than 5000 interviews of seventh ward community members are credited to him alone (Clayton Jr. *et al.* 2023: 153). However, Du Bois' misleading claim that there was only "one lone worker" unfortunately supports the erasure of the contributions of Isabel Eaton and others (Deegan 1998).
5. For more on those challenges, see Lopez-Dicastillo & Belintxon 2014.
6. Needless to say, contemporary anthropological methods such as focus groups and surveys of white people conducted by a Black person are not included in Du Bois' techniques for studying whiteness because white people of his day would not have tolerated that.
7. For more on worlds and world-traveling especially in the context of racial oppression, see Lugones 1987.
8. When legal racial segregation was eliminated in the United States, yet another answer to this question was developed – arguably centering on the so-called war on drugs and using the "Southern Strategy" to increase white people's racial animosity – but that topic is beyond the

scope of this paper. For more on the Southern Strategy, see Lee Atwater's infamous 1981 summary of it (Perlstein 2012).

9. See also Du Bois (1935; 1920/1999: 47-59) for additional historical analyses of whiteness, including class differences between white people both nationally and internationally and how working class and elite white people have collaborated to exploit and exclude people of color.

10. For more on the intersections of anthropology and psychoanalysis, see Groark 2019, and Heald & Deluz 1994.

ABSTRACTS

Drawing on the recent recognition of Du Bois by contemporary anthropologists, this article highlights the anthropological work that Du Bois conducted on Black people and communities in Philadelphia and Atlanta. It also argues that when reading Du Bois with an eye for his anthropological pragmatism, contemporary scholars should not stop at reading Du Bois' work on Black people. We also should read his analyses of whiteness and white people as components of a critical anthropology of race. Those components include participant observation of white people, interviews of white people, and historical research about white people. Finally, Du Bois' anthropological pragmatism underscores the centrality of unconscious habits in the operation of racial prejudice, especially unconscious beliefs and practices that assume that whiteness is the rightful measure of humanity.

INDEX

Keywords: Du Bois, Race, Racial Prejudice, Whiteness, Unconscious Habit

AUTHOR

SHANNON SULLIVAN

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte (USA)
ssullivan[at]charlotte.edu

Placing Culture in Nature

Notes from the Mid-twentieth Century American Anthropological Debate

Antonio M. Nunziante

1. Introduction

- 1 Almost thirty years ago Dan Sperber wrote:

A spectre haunts the social sciences – the spectre of a natural science of the social. Some wait for the day that the spectre will make itself known, and will at last make the social sciences truly scientific. Others denounce the threat of scientism and reductionism. (Sperber 1996: vi)
- 2 Thus, the spectre of a naturalistic approach to culture both agitates and excites the variegated world of social sciences because, on the one hand, it promises the construction of a “science of society,” while on the other it threatens to diminish their epistemic autonomy.
- 3 In the past thirty years much has been written about themes related to the so-called placement problem – that is, how to combine naturalism and “second nature.” From the now-classic analyses of McDowell (1994) to the proposal of a liberal naturalism by De Caro and Macarthur (2004, 2010, 2022), the limitations of a strictly naturalistic approach have been widely acknowledged. At the same time, scholars like Joseph Rouse (2016, 2022, 2023), Peter Godfrey-Smith (2012), and others (Lewens 2015; Laland 2017) have rightly emphasized the achievements of evolutionary biology, particularly the possibility of recognizing conceptual normativity as a purely natural phenomenon – and indeed “to understand human rationality as a form of niche construction” (Rouse 2016: 29).
- 4 An often-overlooked approach when discussing naturalisms is to adopt a historical-genetic perspective, considering contemporary naturalism not only as a meta-category of philosophical discourse, but also as a culturally and socially situated philosophical event. Explicitly detailing the historical features that have accompanied the construction of the naturalistic discourse allows for demonstrating the contingency of at least some of its motifs, thereby avoiding the kind of conceptual inevitability with

which naturalism often presents itself. This is the theoretical gain derived from such a lateral move, and it is this type of approach that I will follow in my paper.

- 5 In what follows, I will analyze some key moments that characterized the naturalization of the concept of culture in the early twentieth-century American anthropological debate. As is well known, the “American anthropological school” emerged within the boundaries of a discipline that was institutionally considered part of the social sciences and incorporated references to natural history and Darwinian evolutionary theories.¹
- 6 Analyzing the anthropological debate on the placement of culture in the natural world represents a particularly interesting topic, because it allows us to observe firsthand the theoretical tensions experienced by those who, meanwhile, were studying cultural phenomena in the field, such as the organization of clans, the structure of marriage, the issue of incest, and burial rituals. On the one hand, it was obvious for this type of naturalized approach that culture was part of natural evolution. On the other hand, there was a critical discussion about the epistemic gains obtained from a markedly reductionist approach. The idea of reducing cultural normativity to physical and biological principles raised doubts about the existence of “epistemic residues” not amenable to reduction. There was a strong conviction that a nature-culture dialectic could reemerge within a naturalized culture itself - that even starting from the assumption of naturalistic principles, one could end up facing an unresolved duality between different orders of reality.
- 7 American cultural anthropology historically developed within this type of theoretical tension, where the placement issue is dominant. Understanding why that generation of anthropologists felt the need to construct a naturalized image of culture, while simultaneously distancing themselves from it, represents the primary focus of this paper. In the following pages, I will attempt to demonstrate the great variety of epistemic strategies applied to the placement problem. Furthermore, I will analyze two of the most intriguing positions: the radically materialistic stance of culturologist Leslie Alvin White and the emergentist position of Alfred Louis Kroeber.

2. The Varieties of Placement Strategies

- 8 A significant theme in early American anthropological debates concerns the epistemic and ontological status of the concept of culture. A paper by David Bidney titled “On the Concept of Culture and Some Cultural Fallacies” (1944) helps us pinpoint some key elements of the discussion.²
- 9 First, the issue of placement:
The problem of the ontological or metaphysical status of culture, it appears, is not one that the practical social scientist can ignore by relegating it to the limbo of philosophical speculation since his basic assumption (especially when held uncritically) has a direct bearing on his methods and results. (Bidney 1944: 41)
- 10 Defining the metaphysical status of culture is not merely a matter of philosophical speculation but represents a problem that is both essential and controversial. It is essential, because the notion of culture is a fundamental premise (and thus often implicit) in the construction of anthropological discourse. It is controversial, because there is significant epistemic disagreement on the issue of its placement in the natural

world. Culture is part of nature, but in what way? Is it possible to produce a naturalized theory of cultural processes?

- 11 Bidney's paper provides us with a firsthand overview of the major epistemic approaches to the topic. He employs a philosophical classification that first distinguishes between "realist" and "idealist" approaches to culture and then, within this broad distinction, produces finer-grained descriptions that reveal a plurality of intermediate positions. The result is a fluid, finely variegated debate, rich with alternative theoretical options. The main approaches run as follows:
- 12 1) First, there is the macro-area of the realist perspective. In this view, culture is defined as a set of attitudes, habits, and customs acquired over time, representing a specific property of human behavior. "Realism" here means holding that the real subject of cultural processes is constituted by individual and social behaviors, as culture "has no independent existence of its own" (Bidney 1944: 31). The latter is to be understood as a secondary nature that supervenes on biological nature: "Human culture is, so to speak, an acquired or secondary nature supervening upon the primary innate potential human nature" (*ibid.*: 34). A controversial point in this type of approach concerns the weight to be assigned to individual behavioral variations. There is a disagreement between those who would define culture entirely in social terms and those who believe that individual behaviors represent the essential factor in any type of cultural change (Bidney 1953: 24). According to Bidney, this group includes anthropologists like Edward Burnett Tylor, Franz Boas, Ruth Benedict, and Margaret Mead.
- 13 2) According to another approach, culture should be defined in terms of "communicable intelligence" and "communication of ideas." In this case, the emphasis is on the communicability and transmissibility of knowledge. The philosophical label used here is epistemological idealism, as culture is regarded as the transmission of information that transcends the purely material aspects of individual behavior. Ideas have their own way of life, and the mode of dissemination is equally autonomous from the nature of material processes. Representatives of this approach include anthropologists like Robert Ranulph Marett, Robert Redfield, and Cornelius Osgood.
- 14 3) The third approach focuses on the notion of "social heritage." Culture is seen as a cumulative product transmitted from generation to generation and consists of material artifacts as well as of social institutions, habits, and non-material ideals. This is the most controversial approach, as the interpretation of social heritage can lead to different theoretical outcomes. For example, it can lead to a reified notion of culture by considering cultural processes as relatively autonomous from biological laws. This is the path followed by Alfred Kroeber, who argues that social heritage represents the "superorganic" trait of the natural world, meaning that it emerges from a rich complex of historical traditions and is not reducible to an ontology of material processes. Conversely, the idea that cultural heritage constitutes a peculiar entity is also open to a realist and even materialist interpretation. For according to others, technique and the material conditions of life represent the primary determinant factors in the social construction, artifact production and, ultimately, cultural evolution. A leading representative of this address is, for instance, Leslie A. White.
- 15 4) A further approach to culture is the "functionalist and pragmatist" one, whose main proponents are Malinowski and Dewey. In this case, the emphasis is placed on the "psychobiological meaning of cultural phenomena," that is, on the function that

culture performs both biologically (to satisfy individual needs) and socially (to stabilize community norms and values). The functionalist approach is fluid because it can fit into the broad category of realism, but also into that of “social heritage” as culture (especially for Malinowski) tends to be characterized as a “reality *sui generis*.” In general, however, the problem with functionalism is its lack of flexibility, as it tends to lead to an a priori modeling of the culture-society dynamics, devaluing the contingency of cultural processes in favor of universal applicability (Bidney 1953: 226). Needless to say, the reference to Dewey should be developed more extensively than Bidney actually does. While Dewey himself was not an anthropologist, his ideas permeated the intellectual milieu of early 20th century America, influencing how anthropologists conceptualized culture, approached fieldwork, and understood the relationship between nature and culture. It is precisely in the context of the “placement” debate that Dewey’s pragmatism offered a valuable alternative, namely advancing a middle ground model between strict materialism and cultural idealism. His view of culture as an outgrowth of natural processes, yet possessing emergent properties that require their own level of analysis, provides a philosophical bridge to span the gap between idealism and realism described so far. However, Dewey’s position is not actually developed by Bidney.

- 16 To recap, there are two main axes around which the debate revolves: the first is centered on the problem of determining the ultimate subject of cultural processes, and the second on the analysis of their structure and functioning.
- 17 In the first case, it is a matter of analyzing the thin line that separates (but at the same time connects) the psychobiological configuration of the individual with the social dimension of cultural behaviors. In the second case, the point is to determine what we are talking about when we refer to culture. From a certain point of view, all anthropologists are in some way “realists,” because they all take for granted that culture is an objective, empirically describable fact, which is implemented by the production of objects, artifacts, and social institutions. But the point is to understand the epistemic status of social normativity. This also marks the point of convergence between the two theoretical axes described so far. The core problem of the debate is understanding whether there is a normative autonomy of second nature compared to the primary and evolutionary features of biological processes.
- 18 This is also where placement options bifurcate. Within a naturalized framework, one can treat the issue of the nature-culture relationship as a purely epistemic matter, considering cultural dynamics as relatively autonomous from biological facts. However, from a stricter viewpoint, it becomes almost unavoidable to assume that the normative autonomy of culture is somehow a function of concomitant psychobiological processes rooted in a materialist ontology. From this perspective, Dewey’s proposal articulated in *Experience and Nature* (1925) offered an approach that recognized both the material and epistemological aspects of culture. His view of culture as arising from the “interaction among natural events” (*ibid.*: 261), yet possessing levels of complexity that require distinct level of analysis, provides a philosophical approach that could potentially reconcile materialist and emergentist views of culture. However, Dewey’s name appears rather infrequently in debates among anthropologists, as there persisted a tendency to consider philosophy and anthropology as epistemically and institutionally separate disciplines (one belonging to the humanities, the other to the natural sciences). For this reason, his position was never, in fact, analytically considered.³

- 19 Be that as it may, philosophical naturalism represents the stone guest of the debate, a sort of “cultural” precondition that links together different placement strategies. Empirically-oriented and data-driven procedures of inquiry coexist with themes that are proper to a naturalistic ontological view, including the physicalist and reductionist stance. It is within the epistemic space of naturalism, thus, that the peculiar normativity of cultural processes is alternatively assessed to be “organic” or “superorganic.”

3. Placing Culture in Nature: The Physical Stance

- 20 A strong physicalist conception of culture is advocated by Leslie Alvin White (1900-1975):

Culture is a kind of behavior. And behavior, whether of man, mule, plant, comet or molecule, may be treated as a manifestation of energy. (White 1943: 335)

- 21 Civilizing processes or cultural manifestations, White argues, can be regarded as “a form or organization of energy” (*ibid.*).⁴ This does not imply that to explain inherently cultural facts, such as the functioning of clans or polyandry, one can overlook social behaviors or group psychology. But one should not make the mistake of assuming that psychology and sociology contain sufficient descriptive resources to provide a fully naturalized explanation of them. White coins a new term, “culturology,” to indicate a new science that not only analyzes culture through the lens of social and psychological categories, but also establishes physical and environmental correlations. Thus, culturology is a kind of discipline that unfolds on a series of integrated levels:

Everything in the cosmos can be interpreted in terms of matter and energy, whether it be a star, atom, cell, or man. All life is, of course, an organization of matter-and-energy. [...] Culture is merely the name we give to matter-and-energy in symbolic form. (White 1949: 375)

- 22 Explaining the structure and functioning of a cultural process implies recognizing different epistemic levels (social, psychological, geographical, economic, etc.), all of which, however, are related to an ontology of physical processes. The normative level of manifest behaviors is thus integrated with a strong ontological naturalism. This is the specific goal of culturology as pursued by White, which was also supported by his Ann Arbor colleague Roy Wood Sellars.

- 23 It is interesting to note that one of White’s programmatic papers, entitled “Ethnological Theory,” was hosted in the volume, *Philosophy for the Future: The Quest for Modern Materialism*, edited by Roy Wood Sellars, Vivian Jerauld McGill, and Marvin Farber in 1949. The partnership with Roy Wood Sellars is not accidental. Sellars wrote in a passage of this manifesto of ontological naturalism:

It will, I believe, interest my readers to find a materialist recognizing the normative as a guiding factor in the moral order intrinsic to group life. [...] [Moral principles] are irreducible to non-moral terms. But that does not signify that they are non-natural, for man is, in group life, a moral being. (Sellars 1949: 71)

- 24 Here is the point shared with White. The culturologist, too, must perform a twofold operation as described by Roy Wood Sellars: 1) recognize the normative as a “guiding factor” in the cultural order intrinsic to group life; 2) recognize that the normative factor cannot be considered “non-natural,” and therefore admit that the ground zero of

causal explanation is provided by the description of the physical-energetic processes of the natural world.

- 25 Accordingly, White distinguishes between a manifest level and an energetic level in the treatment of cultural phenomena. From the manifest point of view, the definition of culture is as follows:

Culture is the name given to an organization of objects (tools, utensils, etc.), acts (patterns of behavior, customs, codes, institutions, etc.), ideas (belief, knowledge, lore, etc.), and sentiments (attitudes such as aversion for eating pork, “horror of incest,” avoidance of mother-in-law) that is dependent upon the use of symbols. (White 1949: 360)

- 26 Manifest phenomena such as totemism, polyandry, the “mother-in-law taboo” are to be considered specifically cultural phenomena, because there are symbolic forces at work that exceed the mechanics of social interaction and indeed influence it. From the energetic point of view, however, culture is part of a vital process that can be described in purely physicalistic terms:

Culture is a specific and concrete mechanism employed by a particular animal organism in adjusting to its environment. It is the mechanism that articulates man with the earth and cosmos. It is therefore something describable in zoological, material, mechanical terms. (*Ibid.*)

- 27 Only by achieving this integrated dimension can anthropology effectively account for cultural processes, explaining both their causal genesis and their logical-epistemic autonomy. White’s theses, therefore, are decidedly strong and entirely in line with the project of a Marxist-inspired evolutionary naturalism that represented the scientific core of Roy Wood Sellars’ *Philosophy for the Future*. Assuming that human beings are organisms with natural needs, White endeavors to trace an energetic description of human activities, taking as his primary elements of analysis the amount of energy consumed by humans, the ways in which labor is produced, and the relationship between human artifacts and harnessed energy (White 1943: 336). In this way, White comes to outline several “laws” of cultural development, such as the following one:

Other things being equal, the degree of cultural development varies directly as the amount of energy per capita per year harnessed and put to work. (*Ibid.*: 338)

- 28 Or this one:

Other things being equal, the degree of cultural development varies directly as the efficiency of the technological means with which the harnessed energy is put to work. (*Ibid.*)

- 29 White thus employs a physicalist conception of cultural evolution that relates it to the use of resources in the territory, competition for energy exploitation, the formation of social systems, differentiation of social functions, and so on. In the civilizing process there is a search for better efficiency processes, new energy sources, and increasingly refined development of production tools. From nomadism, to agriculture, to industry, to technology: White interprets these stages of human history as an evolutionary process parallel to that described by Darwin. In both cases, we are referring to material processes that evolve through adaptive strategies linked to the resources of the territory.

- 30 The physicalist conception of culture allows cultural processes to be arranged in absolute continuity with physical and biological processes – because cultural processes are physical processes: they are energy in the form of culture. Retrospectively, the stages of the civilizing process, as well as the logic of its internal development, can be

reconstructed. When the possible limit of exploiting a given resource is reached (e.g., in agriculture), the process halts. Something new must then emerge to resume progress (e.g., the discovery of the steam engine or the industrial revolution). It is this exploitation processes that dictate the pace of civilization, even from the social and cultural point of view. The history of energy exploitation is also the history of technological evolution. Technology serves as the interface for human energy needs. Thus, another key principle of culturology is defined: “Other things being equal, culture evolves as the productivity of human labor increases” (*ibid.*: 346)

- 31 To sum up, White presents a materialistic and tendentially Marxist conception of history and cultural processes. Social evolution is a consequence of technological evolution. Social changes are dictated by crises related to the shortage of energy supplies: “The key to the future, in any event, lies in the energy situation” (*ibid.*: 350).
- 32 Another point that White strongly supports concerns the line of continuity he perceives between his theses and those advanced in the recent past by Lewis Henry Morgan (1818-1881) and Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917). The reference to these authors is not accidental, for White deplores the success that other anthropological approaches have had in recent decades. In his view, these approaches have betrayed the distinctly ethnological and materialistic line advocated by Morgan and Tylor. The naturalization of culture represents, in White’s eyes, a goal only apparently shared by the American anthropological school. After a promising start, it regressed with the introduction of elements hardly compatible with a fully naturalized conception of the discipline. White has something to say about everyone and everything: his attacks target Margaret Mead and her extensive use of the doctrine of “free will,” as well as Franz Boas, Ruth Benedict, and Robert Harry Lowie, for emphasizing the autonomy of cultural phenomena through a heavy reliance on terms not causally reducible. He also attacks Bidney, who advocates a spiritualist conception of human beings (White 1949: 358-9). But in general, it is the “Boasian school” that is his main polemical target, because it has produced a false naturalization of culture, by ultimately breaking the parallelism between natural and cultural evolution. In their hands, culture and civilization have become scientifically incommensurable entities, completely autonomous and no longer relatable to quantifiable indicators such as those of energy exploitation or technological development (*ibid.*: 369-70).
- 33 It goes without saying that the accusation of anti-evolutionism was particularly damaging, and it is therefore not surprising that some of Boas’s best students responded to these arguments, either by defending the stance of a non-reductionist naturalism (Kroeber 1948), or by distinguishing between Darwin and the various possible interpretations of Darwinism (Lowie 1946). For the purposes of this paper, Alfred Louis Kroeber’s rebuttal is particularly interesting to analyze due to his peculiar reformulation of the placement issue.

4. Placing Culture in Nature: The Emergentist Stance

- 34 Referring to Kroeber simply as a “student of Boas” is unfair. Even White acknowledges his intellectual achievements, suggesting that Kroeber’s emergentist theory can, on the whole, be reconciled with a naturalized conception of cultural processes. Kroeber, in fact, was not only an anthropologist who conducted field work, but he was perhaps the pupil of Boas with the most pronounced philosophical aptitude. His reflections on the

concept of culture represent perhaps the pinnacle of the entire American anthropological school. His textbooks and monographs, such as *Anthropology* (1923), *Configurations of Culture Growth* (1944), *The Nature of Culture* (1952, with Clyde Kluckhohn) are widely acknowledged as fundamental landmarks in the discipline.

- 35 But beyond intellectual credits, what interests us here is the particular type of naturalism advocated by Kroeber. We have seen that the theme of placement is articulated through a plurality of alternative strategies, and that at its essence there are two rival options: 1) those who believe that the normative autonomy of cultural processes is integrable with biological principles and reducible to a physicalist perspective (position à la White); 2) those who emphasize the surplus of cultural heritage over the materiality of environmental conditions (a range of distinct positions, among which Boas and his school stand out).⁵
- 36 Kroeber's position is intriguing because in the early stages of his career he tended to emphasize the autonomy of cultural phenomena, adopting a strong emergentist stance that sought to separate the domain of nature from that of culture. However, in his later years, he transitioned to a position we might now term "liberal naturalism." While he continued to defend the autonomy of cultural processes, he moderated the extremes of his earlier stance and acknowledged the need for a stronger correlation between nature and culture. Of interest to our discussion is a 1948 paper in which Kroeber analytically discusses White's position and critically revisits his own youthful stance, explaining to the reader the reasons that drove him towards emergentism. Towards the end of this paper, Kroeber (1948: 413) writes:
- Looking back thirty years on my essay called "The Superorganic," I am struck by the sense that pervades it of a great need for freeing cultural phenomena from the oppression of biological thinking.
- 37 This reference to "the oppression of biological thinking" gives us a clear understanding of the cultural pressure that naturalism exerted on the social sciences in early 20th-century America. Sociologist William Fielding Ogburn, in his 1922 book *Social Change*, recounts how the publication of *On the Origin of Species* profoundly impressed American anthropologists and sociologists. The idea of explaining social processes through selection, inheritance, and adaptation had become, he says, a sort of collective scientific obsession. For years, there was a frantic search for the biological laws of society, resulting in numerous hypotheses regarding causal factors such as geographical location, climate, migration, group conflict, ethnic abilities, and the evolution of mental faculties. Ogburn concludes that for more than half a century there was a significant proliferation of such studies, only to recognize that the results obtained did not meet the expected standards.
- 38 It is against this obsession that Kroeber protests in 1917, denouncing the "sweeping applications of the principles of organic development to the facts of cultural growth" (Kroeber 1917: 164). While not criticizing Darwin, Kroeber openly opposes those who draw a close analogy between natural and cultural processes, conflating different etiological domains. From these premises, he derives a fundamental emergentist thesis: "Tradition is something superadded to the organisms that bear it, imposed upon them, external to them" (*ibid.*: 178).
- 39 Only in the human world is there history. Culture and civilization are specifically social processes, not reducible (or only partially reducible) to organic factors: genetic

inheritance does not transmit cultural traits. “Civilization and heredity are two things that operate in entirely separate ways” (*ibid.*: 184).

- 40 Kroeber, who was unaware of the theory of dual inheritance, takes issue with the clumsy attempts of a certain kind of social Darwinism. He argues for the necessity of breaking the link between nature and culture to avoid falling into the cauldron of eugenic movements of the time (which theorized the superiority of one race over another) or the trap of colonialism (which proclaimed the right of more developed countries to rule over less developed ones).
- 41 In 1948, however, after being criticized by both Boas and Benedict, he critically reworks his position. He does not suddenly become a physicalist or wholeheartedly embrace a biological account of cultural processes. Instead, he better articulates his pluralistic attitude through engagement with the physicalist program of culturology. Reductionism, he argues, fascinates by its epistemic simplicity, but in pursuing the dream of a unified theory, it necessarily neglects the problem of “irreducible residues” (Kroeber 1948: 406). At every level of the layered world events appear that, in principle, can be reduced to their causes, but the reduction of which does not yield epistemically satisfactory results.
- 42 Kroeber takes jealousy, an eminently psychological phenomenon, as an example. He notes that the outcome of a jealous attack can result in aggression towards the rival, aggression towards the loved one, or even none of these outcomes. It is only the complete psychological situation of the individual, his or her entire personal history (including the history of interpersonal and cultural factors), that provides the psychologist with an interpretive tool suitable for the situation (*ibid.*). It is not that physiological or biochemical reductionism does not work, but what matters to the psychologist is an interpretive approach that manages to account for those “irreducible residues” that the reduction process neglects.⁶ We know, says Kroeber in another passage, what determines sexual impulse, but we do not know why there are over 500 different forms of marriage, as well as countless forms of extramarital sexual behavior. For this reason, “our fullest understanding of the world may well continue to be in pluralistic terms” (Kroeber 1948: 407).
- 43 However, emergentism is no longer a good solution for Kroeber either (at least in its strongest versions), as it tends to produce a dualism of opposite sign. If one insists too much on considering some characteristics of the higher cultural level as non-functional, one unduly weakens the correlation with the natural world, and ends up construing parallel ontic domains. Kroeber acknowledges that he has being “ambiguous” on this point and that he was carried away by excessive zeal. “I would now say that culture was *primarily* intelligible in terms of itself, not *only* in terms of itself” (*ibid.*: 408).
- 44 The key point, he now argues, is to achieve a proper balance of explanatory factors: culture consists of an epistemic, *and not* ontic, domain; and it is *relatively*, not absolutely, autonomous. To analyze the reasons for cultural processes, one must proceed case by case, without disavowing physicalism, but establishing on a case-by-case basis which causal reductions are epistemically relevant, and which should be discarded. From this perspective, the question of placement should also be deflated, because if the issue of placing cultural events in the natural world becomes obsessive, one ends up getting entangled in a circuit of theoretically intriguing yet pragmatically irrelevant questions:

To the investigator of culture, as long as he remains merely such, it seems irrelevant for the time being where culture resides, or whether it exists autonomously or not, as long as he has genuinely cultural data to operate with and is free to operate upon them with the methods he finds most productive. The locus and reality of culture are irrelevant in the sense that they do not affect his specific cultural problem nor his specific method of dealing therewith. (*Ibid.*: 410)

45 Cultural phenomena such as marriage, patriarchy, taboos, or magical practices, must be accepted in their intrinsic manifestative character: this is their way of being.

46 Once again, Kroeber does not want to deny the validity of the reductionist principle, nor does he consider culture as a world apart. In this argumentative context, he makes an interesting move by proposing to reconsider Aristotle's doctrine of the four kinds of causes. When we talk about cultural processes, we can refer to the efficient cause (identifiable in individuals implementing actions), or to material causes (related to neurobiological dispositions), or even to *the forms* of cultural processes, namely to the manifest patterns of their configuration (*ibid.*: 411). The formal description of culture cannot be fully achieved solely by recourse to efficient or material causes, because what truly matters here is a type of description that establishes a correlation between distinct cultural facts, contexts, or values:

Every anthropologist or historian concerned with culture realizes that cultural situations make more sense, reveal more meaning, in proportion as we know more of their cultural antecedents, or, generically, more total cultural context. In other words, cultural forms or patterns gain in intelligibility as they are set in relation to other cultural patterns. This interrelating of forms is evidently like the consideration of Aristotelian formal causes. (*Ibid.*)

47 When it comes to forms, therefore, the primacy of the "pattern" as a relational principle of intelligibility must be accepted. It is not that the path of efficient causes is wrong, but in some contexts it is simply the poorest in information.

48 And so we come to the conclusion. What Kroeber hopes for is a resemantization of the concept of science in pluralistic terms. His idea is that the distinction between epistemic levels of scientific discourse should not count as a hierarchization of knowledge, but rather as "the concession of a difference" (*ibid.*: 412).

49 In many ways, Kroeber thus anticipates many of the characteristic theses of today's liberal naturalism and his intuitions align with many of the insights advanced by Dewey in the same period. Indeed, the idea that cultural norms and values, while emerging from natural processes, develop a contextual autonomy in shaping human experience and behavior is typically Deweyan – and it is unfortunate that Kroeber does not analytically discuss this concept. Equally Deweyan is the idea that this autonomy is not absolute or disconnected from nature, but rather represents a functional independence within the broader natural context. Culture, in this view, is neither purely material nor wholly autonomous, but an emergent phenomenon with its own level of complexity and normative force, while still being continuous with natural processes.⁷ Needless to say, both Kroeber and Dewey maintain that anthropologists are called to accept a naturalized horizon of discourse: the causal closure of the physical world, the validity of evolutionary principles, the very idea of a layered world and the reductionist principle itself. However, they do not believe that physicalism is always and necessarily the best approach to the matter, nor do they think that we should always opt for the path of ontological reduction. What truly matters is to stipulate that manifest events sometimes invoke different levels of explanation: this is the principle of epistemic

pluralism. And for this very reason, they lean towards a kind of pragmatic, pluralistic, and situated conception of knowledge.

- 50 The manifest image possesses reducible elements *and* normatively residual elements. Reductionism cannot become a dogma; it has to remain a heuristically useful epistemic tool. What pragmatically matters in the study of cultural processes is the quality of the principles that allow us to grasp the specific differences of the empirical facts and the situated variations of the analyzed phenomena – not the claim of some vaguely defined common denominators.

5. Conclusions

- 51 The American anthropological school flourished in a cultural climate dominated by naturalism. The naturalization of culture, i.e. the very idea of treating culture scientifically as if it were an empirical object, presupposed this dominant cultural climate. While there might have been divisions in the details of executing the project, or distinguishing various forms of naturalism, the continuity line between nature and culture was largely considered uncontroversial.
- 52 A final question could be the following: how does the “culture of naturalization” coexist with the specific project of “a naturalization of culture”? The issue of the relationship between a naturalized culture and the naturalization of culture, that is, the relationship between a contingently occurring historical event (the American naturalized culture of early twentieth century) and a theoretical project that aims to apply independently of historical contingency (the naturalization of culture), brings us to the heart of the issues analyzed so far.
- 53 From White’s perspective, culture and civilization are defined through an osmotic relationship with nature, as the forms of social interactions are ultimately related to the exploitation of environmental resources, the search for new forms of energy, the advancement of technology, and so forth. There is no doubt that, for White, the advent of a naturalized culture represents the last stage in the history of human civilizations. But can his analysis be reflexively applied to *the scientific core* of this culture? Can naturalism, regarded as a scientific-philosophical stance and not only as a cultural phenomenon, accept to be reflexively considered as a transitional stage in the grand scheme of things? In other words, are we really justified in considering the naturalization of culture only as the historical function of a naturalized culture, and thus as something that is destined to be overcome in the future stages of civilization?
- 54 This is a very difficult question to answer, mainly because of the ambiguities inherent in the very concept of “naturalism.” It goes without saying that if by “naturalism” we mean not only a specific epistemic position, but also a broader way of conceiving society, religion, politics, etc., then we cannot overlook the historical reasons that make it a situated and, at least partially, contingent event. Yet, naturalisms, in general, struggle to recognize themselves in this kind of situated image. And this is a principled difficulty. One of the paradoxes of naturalism, in fact, consists in having sponsored the expression “cultural relativism” (Ruth Benedict), while refusing to present itself as a relative culture – for naturalism presents itself more as an absolute philosophical position than a culturally situated model. A naturalism that relativized itself would lose its culturally distinctive traits.

- 55 But what about Kroeber? Arguably, his more markedly contingent and autonomous interpretation of cultures would give him some advantage. From his point of view, the attitude towards naturalization represents an event rooted in both the nature and the history of humankind. The advent of a naturalized culture and the project of naturalizing culture are events that slowly take root in the West. However, for Kroeber, cultures follow inherently non-linear dynamics. If we accept that the expression “culture of naturalization” makes sense, then this sense for Kroeber would be contingent, or to put it better, its intimate development will remain unpredictable. A Kroeberian line of response would thus emphasize not only the scientific, and quasi-metaphysical stance, but also the inherently historical and geographical features of naturalism, namely those manifest characteristics that made it, at least on Western soil, what it actually was. Kroeber would recognize that naturalism is *both* a philosophical-scientific position *and* a historically situated cultural event. He would have no trouble accepting the idea of further cultural developments, precisely for the sake of his pluralism.
- 56 This Kroeber-inspired idea of considering naturalism not only from the perspective of its philosophical self-narrative, but also from the point of view of its cultural positioning, seems to me particularly interesting and in line with the approach I have tried to adopt in this paper. Indeed, acknowledging the cultural dimension of naturalism does not seem to me to diminish its actual epistemic significance, but rather helps to deflate its quintessential rhetoric, as well as the sense of its metaphysical unavoidability.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BENEDICT Ruth, (1948), “Anthropology and the Humanities,” *American Anthropologist*, 50(4), 585-93. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/663755>.
- BIDNEY David, (1944), “On the Concept of Culture and Some Cultural Fallacies,” *American Anthropologist*, 46(1), 30-44. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/662925>.
- BIDNEY David, (1953), *Theoretical Anthropology*, New York, Columbia University Press.
- BOAS Franz, (1920), “The Methods of Ethnology,” *American Anthropologist*, 22(4), 311-21. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/660328>.
- DE CARO Mario & David MACARTHUR (eds), (2004), *Naturalism in Question*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.
- DE CARO Mario & David MACARTHUR (eds), (2010), *Naturalism and Normativity*, New York, Columbia University Press.
- DE CARO Mario & David MACARTHUR (eds), (2022), *The Routledge Handbook of Liberal Naturalism*, London and New York, Routledge.
- DEWEY John, (1925), *Experience and Nature*, Chicago and London, Open Court Publishing Company.

- DEWEY John, (1934), *Art as Experience*, New York, Minton, Balch & Company.
- GODFREY-SMITH Peter, (2012), "Darwinism and Cultural Change," *Philosophical Transaction of the Royal Society B*, 367, 2160-70. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23250493>.
- KING Charles, (2019), *Gods of the Upper Air: How a Circle of Renegade Anthropologists Reinvented Race, Sex, and Gender in the Twentieth Century*, New York, Doubleday.
- KROEBER Alfred Louis, (1917), "The Superorganic," *American Anthropologist*, 19(2), 163-213. Online: <https://evols.library.manoa.hawaii.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/1867ca10-28aa-4736-87b3-248d125393a5/content>.
- KROEBER Alfred Louis, (1923), *Anthropology*, New York, Harcourt-Brace.
- KROEBER Alfred Louis, (1944), *Configurations of Culture Growth*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press.
- KROEBER Alfred Louis, (1948), "White's View of Culture," *American Anthropologist*, 50(3), 405-15.
- KROEBER Alfred Louis, (1954), "The Place of Anthropology in Universities," *American Anthropologist*, 56(5), 764-7.
- KROEBER Alfred Louis & Clyde KLUCKHOHN, (1952), *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.
- LALAND Kevin N., (2017), *Darwin's Unfinished Symphony: How Culture Made the Human Mind*, Princeton & Oxford, Princeton University Press.
- LEWENS Tim, (2015), *Cultural Evolution: Conceptual Challenges*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- LOWIE Robert H., (1946), "Evolution in Cultural Anthropology: A Reply to Leslie White," *American Anthropologist*, 48(2), 223-33. Online: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5pk146vg>.
- MCDOWELL John, (1994), *Mind and World*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.
- MURDOCK George Peter, (1932), "The Science of Culture," *American Anthropologist*, 34(2), 200-15. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/661651>.
- OGBORN William Fielding, (1922), *Social Change with Respect to Culture and Original Nature*, New York, B. W. Huebsch Inc.
- ROUSE Joseph, (2016), "Toward a New Naturalism: Niche Construction, Conceptual Normativity, and Scientific Practice," in Mark Risjord (ed.), *Normativity and Nature in the Philosophy of Social Sciences*, New York, Routledge, 28-42.
- ROUSE Joseph, (2022), "Liberal or Radical Naturalism?," in Mario De Caro & David Macarthur (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Liberal Naturalism*, London and New York, Routledge, 177-89.
- ROUSE Joseph, (2023), *Social Practices as Biological Niche Construction*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press.
- SPERBER Dan, (1996), *Explaining Culture: A Naturalistic Approach*, Oxford and Malden, Mass., Blackwell.
- SELLARS Roy Wood, (1949), "Social Philosophy and the American Scene," in Roy Wood Sellars, Vivian J. McGill & Marvin Farber (eds), *Philosophy for the Future: The Quest of Modern Materialism*, New York, The MacMillan Company, 61-74.

WHITE Leslie Alvin, (1943), "Energy and the Evolution of Culture," *American Anthropologist*, 45(3), 335-56. Online: <https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/99636/aa.1943.45.3.02a00010.pdf>.

WHITE Leslie Alvin, (1949), "Ethnological Theory," in Roy Wood Sellars, Vivian J. McGill & Marvin Farber (eds), *Philosophy for the Future: The Quest of Modern Materialism*, New York, The MacMillan Company, 357-84.

NOTES

1. For a general overview of the American School of Anthropology, see King 2019. Alfred Kroeber devotes a paper to the issue of the disciplinary placement of anthropology. In one passage, he goes so far as to say: "The anthropological intent and approach are naturalistic even when applied to humanistic or subhumanistic data" (Kroeber 1954: 766). Within the framework of a naturalized discipline, then, the issue of "placement" of cultural phenomena assumes prominence. Other analyses related to the theme of the relationship between anthropology and social sciences, and between anthropology and the humanities can be found in Boas 1920, Murdoch 1932, Benedict 1948.
2. Bidney's paper was first published in the journal *American Anthropologist* (1944). It was then included, in revised and expanded form, in the 1953 monograph *Theoretical Anthropology*. Since there are some differences between the two versions, my analysis will refer to both editions (Bidney 1944, or Bidney 1953), specifying the reference from time to time.
3. For example, Kroeber and Kluckhohn lament the fact that Dewey does not take into account the work of Tylor, nor that of other anthropologists, in his philosophical reflections on culture (including Boas, who was also his colleague at Columbia), and in some way they contrast "philosophical" and "anthropological" definitions of culture. See Kroeber & Kluckhohn (1952: 56-62).
4. "Culture is an organization of phenomena – material objects, bodily acts, ideas, and sentiments – which consists of or is dependent upon the use of symbols" (White 1943: 335).
5. Of course, there is also the functionalist option, which, however, we will not consider here, partly for trivial reasons of space, partly because it is properly British in origin, and partly because it represents an option that is somewhat tangential to the core problem of the American debate considered here. This debate centers on whether there is a normative autonomy of second nature with respect to the shared paradigm of an evolutionary naturalism. I will also not consider the position of those who, like Bidney, insist on the non-reducibility of individual behavior to social interactions, because it seems to me the weakest position in the field.
6. A similar argument is found in Sperber (1996: 18-23). Sperber notes that the vocabulary of anthropology is an interpretive rather than a descriptive dictionary. Anthropologists work with the representations of the world of a given population; consequently, anthropological explanations are actually devoid of ontological assumptions. The word "marriage" and "myth" have no precise definition, but serve to interpret a certain set of representations and facts with which the anthropologist is confronted. In this sense, a physicalist translation is useless.
7. In *Art as Experience* (1934), Dewey claims that culture is "the product not of efforts of men put forth in a void or just upon themselves, but of prolonged and cumulative interaction with environment" (*ibid.*: 28). This view suggests that culture emerges from the continuous interaction between organisms and their environment, an idea that aligns with the concept of emergence, even though this concept is not explicitly mentioned.

ABSTRACTS

Focusing on early twentieth-century American anthropological discourse, this paper examines diverse epistemological approaches to integrating culture within a naturalistic framework. Leslie Alvin White's materialistic and energy-based "culturology" will be contrasted with Louis Kroeber's emergentist perspective. Through a detailed examination of some key epistemic stances, I will illustrate how American cultural anthropology grappled with the dual pressures of scientific naturalism and the epistemic autonomy of the cultural world. The conclusion argues for distinguishing between "naturalized culture" and "naturalization of culture," suggesting that within this distinction, naturalism reveals not merely as a philosophical stance, but as a historically contingent phenomenon.

INDEX

Keywords: Naturalism, Cultural Anthropology, Emergentism, Philosophy of Culture, Scientific Naturalism

AUTHOR

ANTONIO M. NUNZIANTE

Padova University

antonio.nunziante[at]unipd.it

John Dewey, Evolutionary Anthropology, and Comparative Jurisprudence

Trevor Pearce

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Author's Note

Thanks to Gordon Hull, Tullio Viola, two anonymous referees, and the audience at a lecture organized by Mathias Girel as part of the ENS-PSL “Actualités du Pragmatisme” research seminar series for helpful feedback on earlier versions of this paper.

1. Introduction

- ¹ John Dewey's interest in anthropology is well known. In the year before his death he declared, “were I to write (or rewrite) *Experience and Nature* [1925] today I would entitle the book *Culture and Nature*,” specifying that he was using “the name ‘culture’ in its anthropological [...] sense” (LW.1: 361-2; see also Edel 1985: 28-30; Goldman 2012; Zask 2015). Most scholarship to date on Dewey's relation to anthropology has focused on his years in Chicago and New York. During his time in Chicago, as Thomas Fallace has shown, Dewey's philosophy of education was closely engaged with the so-called culture-epoch theory, an account of human development linked to the stadial framework of enlightenment philosophers and evolutionary anthropologists (Rein 1893: 93-101; Dewey 1896/2015; Fallace 2011, chaps. 1-2; Stocking 1987). Dewey's relationship with Franz Boas at Columbia University has also been extensively discussed (Lamont 1959: 55-6; Lewis 2001; Torres Colón & Hobbs 2015, 2016; Harkin 2017). For example, Dewey and Boas taught a joint philosophy-anthropology graduate seminar for three consecutive academic years from 1913-1914 to 1915-1916, billed

initially as “an examination of the evolutionary and historical methods in the study of morals” (Columbia 1913: 9; see also Columbia 1914: 9, 18; Columbia 1915: 10, 19).¹

- 2 This paper goes back even further, to Dewey’s final years at the University of Michigan, when he began teaching two new courses for graduates and advanced undergraduates: “Political Philosophy: The Theory and Institutions of Social Organization” and an associated class on “Special Studies in the History of Political Philosophy” (Calendar 1893: 67; Calendar 1894: 68). The second of these featured Herbert Spencer’s *Principles of Sociology* (1877) as the last of three assigned textbooks. I will suggest in what follows that what I have called the “dynamic functionalism” of Dewey’s evolutionary approach to ethics – moral norms emerge to address specific problems but must be constantly readjusted to changing contexts – had its roots in this Michigan period, especially in the comparative jurisprudence of Sir Henry Sumner Maine and Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. (Pearce 2017: 54). This anthropological and legal context for the 1890s “turn” in Dewey’s thought reinforces and complements the Hegelian and Jamesian-Darwinian context emphasized by existing scholarship (Shook 2000: 18-20; Pearce 2020: 159-60, 298-9).
- 3 First, I will discuss the rise of the comparative sciences in the nineteenth century, part of the backdrop for the work of Maine and various evolutionary anthropologists. Next, I will examine Maine’s *Ancient Law* (1861), Edward Burnett Tylor’s *Primitive Culture* (1871), and Holmes’s *The Common Law* (1881), three related books that set up a dichotomy between existing custom and historical progress. Finally, I will show how this dichotomy was reflected in the dynamic functionalism of Dewey’s writing and teaching in the early 1890s, including “Anthropology and Law” (EW.4: 37-41).

2. The Comparative Sciences

- 4 The comparative approach was critical to the emergence of the modern *Geisteswissenschaften* in the nineteenth century (Evans-Pritchard 1963; Hoenigswald 1963; Foucault 1966; Girardot 2002; Adcock 2006; Molendijk 2016; Griffiths 2017). In this section, I will briefly introduce this approach as part of the context for the historical-comparative understanding of law and custom in Maine, Tylor, and Holmes.
- 5 The most venerable of the comparative sciences is comparative anatomy, which already in the early nineteenth century was seen as culminating in the work of Georges Cuvier (Lawrence 1819: 35). In his *Lessons on Comparative Anatomy*, Cuvier argued that the anatomist, to understand in their true generality the material underpinnings of physiological phenomena, has to examine them in all their combinations and modifications – that is, across all species of living things (Cuvier 1800, 1: iv).
- 6 The example of comparative anatomy was often cited by pioneers in the other comparative sciences. Friedrich Schlegel, who seems to have coined the term “comparative grammar” in his book *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians*, famously analogized the new science with its elder sibling:

The decisive point that will clarify everything here is the inner structure of languages or comparative grammar, which will give us completely new explanations of the genealogy of languages, just as comparative anatomy has shed light on higher natural history. (Schlegel 1808: 28)
- 7 Carl Ritter, in his *Study of the Earth in Relation to Nature and to Human History, or Universal Comparative Geography*, also made the connection: “It will be called comparative in the

sense that other disciplines have already worked out for this sort of teaching, above all for example comparative anatomy” (Ritter 1817-1818, 1: 21).²

- 8 In many cases, comparison promised to uncover not only basic shared features – as in Cuvier’s anatomy – but also historical relationships and causes. The object of comparative grammar, said one author, is the “comparison of the different [language] families, to see whether there be any real historical affinity; or merely a general and necessary resemblance” (Oriental Herald 1824: 491). In his *Comparative Grammar of Sanskrit, Zend, Greek, Latin, Lithuanian, Gothic, and German*, Franz Bopp wrote that the teacher of a language must – as the title indicates – “gather around him the testimonies of all members of the lineage, thus bringing life, order, and organic connection to the expanded linguistic material of the original language” (Bopp 1833: viii).
- 9 Philosophers were attentive to these developments. In *History of the Inductive Sciences*, William Whewell treated physiology and comparative anatomy under the heading of “organical sciences” because of the central role of notions like organization and function (Whewell 1837, 3: 377-8). Then in the last section of the book he introduced the new term “palaetiological sciences” to cover those areas of research that attempt to explain the present state of things by reference to historical causes (*ibid.*: 481-2). His primary example was geology, which included “the *Geography of Plants and of Animals*, and the *history of their change and diffusion*” (*ibid.*: 570). But he also said that anyone inquiring into the causal history of “works of art,” “institutions of society,” or “forms of language” was engaged in palaetiology (*ibid.*: 486). Since Whewell included even the origin of the solar system under this heading, it is fair to say that his new category picked out what philosophers today call “historical science” (Cleland 2002; see also Hodge 1991; Tanghe 2019; Quinn 2024; Dresow 2024).
- 10 A few years later, in *The Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences*, Whewell began describing at least some of the palaetiological sciences as “comparative.” Comparative philology, “cultivated with great zeal and success in modern times, compares the languages of different countries and nations, and by an examination of their materials and structure, endeavours to determine their descent from one another.” Comparative archaeology likewise examines “the progress of the Arts (Architecture and the like); how one stage of their culture produced another; and how far we can trace their maturest and most complete condition to their earliest form in various nations” (Whewell 1840, 2: 96-7; see also Quinn 2016; Gillin 2024).
- 11 At around the same time, in the third volume of his *Course of Positive Philosophy*, Auguste Comte made “comparison” and “the comparative method” his “third fundamental mode of rational exploration” after observation and experimentation:

The essential condition of this precious method consists in the existence of a sufficiently extensive sequence of analogous but distinct cases in which a common phenomenon modifies itself more and more, either by simplifications or by successive and almost continuous degradations. (Comte 1838: 30-1)
- 12 Since this condition is most perfectly satisfied by “vital phenomena,” said Comte, the comparative method is essential to the biological sciences (*ibid.*).
- 13 Comte also thought the method – with some modifications – could be employed in sociology. In one passage, describing what came to be called evolutionism in anthropology, he noted that the “various coexisting states of human society on different parts of the earth’s surface” could represent “various essential phases of human evolution,” with some peoples and populations seen as having achieved only an

“inferior degree” of humanity’s “general development” (Comte 1839: 442). But Comte saw this version of the comparative method as less important than and as dependent upon what he called the proper “historical method” of sociology, that is, “the historical comparison of the various consecutive states of humanity.” Comte declared that this historical study of “social development” or “social evolution” would be “the principal scientific tool of the new political philosophy” (*ibid.*: 450-1).

- 14 As the above discussions indicate, there was already a close relationship between so-called comparative approaches and so-called historical or evolutionary approaches in the first half of the nineteenth century. It was Jean-Baptiste Lamarck’s work on the comparative anatomy of invertebrate groups that led him to the view that the classification of animals should correspond to “the order followed by nature in giving successive existence to her living products” (Lamarck 1809, 1: 269). Comparative philology likewise examined the details of languages “to determine their descent from one another” (Whewell 1840, 2: 96). In what follows I will thus refer to “the comparative-historical method” for convenience. I will also follow Comte – and later Dewey – in treating “historical” and “evolutionary” as synonyms when applied to human ideas and institutions.³
- 15 Although Whewell and Comte both rejected biological evolution, by the 1850s the comparative-historical method was being applied not only to social progress but also to the history of life (Carpenter 1854: 106-17; Spencer 1855: 366-487). New subfields were appearing: Friedrich Max Müller, who had studied with Bopp, declared in an influential essay that “the mythology of the *Veda* is to comparative mythology what Sanskrit has been to comparative grammar,” predicting that “the science of comparative mythology will soon rise to the same importance as comparative philology” (Müller 1856: 47, 86; Nicholls 2015; Davis & Nicholls 2016). By this time, August Schleicher had already illustrated the relationships of the Indo-European languages using “the image of a branching tree,” which he appended to a short article (Schleicher 1853: 787; see also Schleicher 1860: 28, 81; Koerner 1989: 355-7).
- 16 By the mid-nineteenth century, the comparative approach was thus well established across the historical sciences, with comparative philology being especially prominent. When Dewey entered college in the 1870s, Müller’s lectures on the science of language were still recommended reading, and he checked them out of the library as a junior in March 1878 (Müller 1861-1864; Catalogue 1875: 18; Feuer 1958: 418).

3. Comparative Jurisprudence

- 17 I have offered the brief historical overview in the previous section primarily as background to Maine’s work in comparative jurisprudence. But the comparative method was part of Dewey’s educational context as well. At Johns Hopkins University as a graduate student in 1882-1884, one of Dewey’s primary professors was the historian Herbert Baxter Adams, who brought comparative institutional history from Europe to America (Adcock 2006: 126-7). Dewey attended Adams’s seminary on Institutional History every Friday evening in all four of his semesters at Hopkins; he also took Adams’s classes on Sources of English History, Comparative Constitutional History, and International Law (Enumeration 1882; Enumeration 1883a; Enumeration 1883b; Enumeration 1884).

- 18 History at Johns Hopkins was explicitly comparative. In the very first number of the Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, a series that began under Adams's editorship while Dewey was a graduate student, Edward Augustus Freeman advocated "the comparative method" as the proper "scientific view" of history:

To say that a certain custom exists in Massachusetts now and to say that a certain custom existed at Athens ages ago are both of them pieces of knowledge which, if they go no further, are of no great value or interest. But, if you can bring the Massachusetts custom and the Athenian custom into some kind of relation towards one another – if you can show that, among much of unlikeness in detail, the likeness of a general leading idea runs through both – if you can show that the likeness is not the work of mere chance but that it can be explained by common derivation from a common source – if again you can show that the points of unlikeness are not mere chance either, but that they can be explained by differences in time, place, and circumstance – if you can do all this, you have indeed done something for the scientific study of Comparative Politics. (Freeman 1882: 14)

- 19 Adams himself praised the method during Dewey's time at Hopkins:

A great impulse was given to the historical sciences by the introduction of the comparative method into the study of philology, mythology, religion, law, and institutions. It seemed as though the horizon of all of these fields suddenly widened, and as if the world of human thought and research were expanding into new realms. Through comparative philology the kinship of the Indo-European family of nations was made known to History, and upon the basis of this one great fact, comparative mythology, comparative religion, comparative jurisprudence and comparative politics have been raised into independent sciences. (Adams 1884: 36)

- 20 Many of the talks at Adams's Friday evening seminary were comparative and anthropological. In February 1884, for example, Dewey would have heard Elijah Haines "draw at some length a parallel between the political constitution of certain Indian nations, especially the Iroquois, and our Anglo-Saxon local institutions," as well as John Wesley Powell discussing "the political organization and social polity of the early North American tribes" (Gettleman 1987: 51, 55). Thus Dewey certainly encountered the comparative approach as a student, and this was probably also when he first became interested in the work of Maine, who was a standard reference for his teacher Adams (e.g., Adams 1882; citing Maine 1871, 1875).
- 21 In this section, I will examine the work of Maine, Tylor, and Holmes, who all adopted the comparative-historical approach and highlighted the tension between static custom and dynamic history. Existing work on the relationship between Dewey and Maine has analyzed Dewey's criticisms of Maine on democracy and sovereignty (EW.1: 227-49; EW.4: 70-90; Rogers 2011, 2016; Chun 2021). I will instead highlight Maine's method, which had a positive influence on Tylor, Holmes, and Dewey himself.
- 22 What was this method? In the opening pages of *Village-Communities in the East and West*, Maine wrote that "the chief function of Comparative Jurisprudence is to facilitate legislation and the practical improvement of law" (Maine 1871: 4). Since lawmakers of different communities frequently pursue the same end by different means, "the examination and comparison of laws" can reveal "valuable materials [...] for legal improvement" (*ibid.*: 5). But although such improvement was the ultimate aim, Maine said that his own approach could "only be said to belong to Comparative Jurisprudence, if the word 'comparative' be used as it is used in such expressions as 'Comparative Philology' and 'Comparative Mythology'" (*ibid.*: 6). In these areas, said Maine, "the

Comparative Method [...] is not distinguishable in some of its applications from the Historical Method.” That is, “the past form of [...] facts, ideas, and customs” is inferred “not only from historical records of that past form but from examples of it which have not yet died out of the world” (*ibid.*: 6-7).

- 23 Ten years earlier in *Ancient Law*, Maine had attempted to reconstruct the evolution of law prior to its written codes. He drew an analogy with one of the most successful historical sciences:

If by any means we can determine the early forms of jural conceptions, they will be invaluable to us. These rudimentary ideas are to the jurist what the primary crusts of the earth are to the geologist. They contain, potentially, all the forms in which law has subsequently exhibited itself. (Maine 1861: 3)

- 24 Prior to written legal codes, according to Maine, there was a “spontaneous development” from (i) the epoch in which a divinely inspired ruler would make possibly habitual but individually isolated commands or judgments to (ii) “the epoch of Customary Law,” in which customs “exist as a substantive aggregate, and are assumed to be precisely known to the aristocratic order or caste” (Maine 1861: 5, 12, 21).

- 25 Maine gave a more detailed account of the progress of law after the emergence of written codes, since at this point “legal modification” could begin to be attributed to “the conscious desire of improvement” (*ibid.*: 21). He opened with an orientalist distinction, perhaps inspired by François Guizot, between the progressive societies of the West and the stationary societies of the East (Maine 1861: 23; cf. Guizot 1838: 16, 31-40). Then, looking especially at the history of Roman jurisprudence, Maine diagnosed a constant tension between static law and dynamic society:

With respect to [progressive societies] it may be laid down that social necessities and social opinion are always more or less in advance of Law. We may come indefinitely near to the closing of the gap between them, but it has a perpetual tendency to reopen. Law is stable; the societies we are speaking of are progressive. The greater or less happiness of a people depends on the degree of promptitude with which the gulf is narrowed. (Maine 1861: 24)

- 26 Maine argued that in addition to new legislation there were two other ways to close this law-society gap. First, with “Legal Fictions,” an assumption is made that “conceals, or affects to conceal, the fact that a rule of law has undergone alteration, its letter remaining unchanged, its operation being modified” (*ibid.*: 26). Second, with “Equity,” there emerges a “body of rules existing by the side of the original civil law, founded on distinct principles and claiming incidentally to supersede the civil law in virtue of a superior sanctity inherent in those principles” (*ibid.*: 28; see Daston 2022: 248-55).

- 27 It is this dynamic and historical picture of the relationship between changing laws and changing society that I believe helped Dewey set up his own dynamic and evolutionary account of ethics and politics in the 1890s and early 1900s. More generally, Maine’s account of the deliberate development of law represented an early and influential version of the mismatch and readjustment framing that was used by a variety of reformist intellectuals in the late nineteenth century, from Alexander Crummell and W.E.B. Du Bois to Jane Addams and George Herbert Mead (see Pearce 2020: 268-75).

- 28 Maine’s ideas reached Dewey both directly and indirectly, since they were reinforced and extended by the later works of Tylor and Holmes. Tylor was strongly influenced by Müller’s comparative approach (Tylor 1865, 1866, 1868). In his book *Primitive Culture*, he also praised Comte’s historical method:

They who wish to understand their own lives ought to know the stages through which their opinions and habits have become what they are. Auguste Comte scarcely overstated the necessity of this study of development, when he declared at the beginning of his "Positive Philosophy" that "no conception can be understood except through its history," and his phrase will bear extension to culture. (Tylor 1871, 1: 17-8; quoting Comte 1830: 3)

- 29 Tylor emphasized in particular "the risks that philosophers run in detaching any phenomenon of civilization from its hold on past events, and treating it as an isolated fact," commenting, "to ingenious attempts at explaining by the light of reason things which want the light of history to show their meaning, much of the learned nonsense of the world has indeed been due." He then gave an example from Maine's *Ancient Law* to show what proper historical explanation looked like (Tylor 1871, 1: 18-9).
- 30 *Primitive Culture* popularized the idea of survivals, which Tylor defined as "processes, customs, opinions, and so forth, which have been carried on by force of habit into a new state of society different from that in which they had their original home." These survivals, said Tylor, "remain as proofs and examples of an older condition of culture out of which a newer has been evolved" (*ibid.*: 15). He even suggested that all cultural norms without an obvious function were likely to be survivals:

It seems scarcely too much to assert, once for all, that meaningless customs must be survivals, that they had a practical, or at least ceremonial, intention when and where they first arose, but are now fallen into absurdity from having been carried on into a new state of society, where their original sense has been discarded. (*ibid.*: 85)
- 31 Tylor's idea gained currency beyond anthropology, with quite a few uses by philosophers during Dewey's years at the University of Michigan (Wundt 1886: 94; Hodgson 1886: 54; Bax 1886: 255; Ritchie 1891: 133; Muirhead 1892: 13).
- 32 The earliest publications of Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., culminating in *The Common Law* (1881), were directly engaged with evolution, anthropology, survivals, and the historical-comparative method (Parker 2003; Rabban 2013, chap. 7; Vannatta 2014, chap. 7; Kellogg 2018, chap. 3). Holmes read Maine's *Ancient Law* two separate times in the 1860s, along with Whewell's *History of the Inductive Sciences* and a series of works by Spencer (Little 1954: 169-70, 178). Inspired by these and other authors, Holmes drew a distinction between evolutionary-historical and logical-analytical approaches in law and philosophy:

It has always seemed to us a singular anomaly that believers in the theory of evolution and in the natural development of institutions by successive adaptations to the environment, should be found laying down a theory of government intended to establish its limits once for all by a logical deduction from axioms. (Holmes 1873: 583)
- 33 At this point, Holmes had already appealed to anthropological work on marriage and succession in a discussion of the origin of privacy (Holmes 1872: 50; citing Maine 1861, chap. 7; McLennan 1865, chap. 9). Then after reading Tylor's *Primitive Culture* in 1874, Holmes wrote an article on "Primitive Notions in Modern Law" that examined the development of law away from the ancient idea that "liability attache[s] directly to the thing doing the damage" rather than to the thing's owner (Holmes 1876: 423).
- 34 Holmes's approach was comparative: he presented examples of this "primitive notion" in Roman law, Greek law, Jewish law, Salic law, and Anglo-Saxon law, concluding, "the universality of the notion we are discussing must have struck the reader as surprising."

Why, asked Holmes, was it found “in the institutions of so many independent tribes and nations?” He answered with “a passage from Mr. Tylor’s great work”:

First and foremost among the causes which transfigure into myths the facts of daily experience, is the belief in the animation of all nature, rising at its highest pitch to personification. This, no occasional or hypothetical action of the mind, is inextricably bound in with that primitive mental state where man recognizes in every detail of his world the operation of personal life and will. (Tylor 1871, 1: 258; quoted in Holmes 1876: 428)

35 Thus Holmes appealed to what Tylor called animism to explain “the universal tendency of the human mind [...] to hold a material object, which is the proximate cause of loss, in some sense answerable for it” (*ibid.*: 430). Although he did not use Tylor’s term, Holmes argued that key aspects of modern maritime law were survivals of this mostly abandoned animism. For example, he claimed that when a lien is placed on a ship that has damaged another even when its owner is “free from any personal liability,” this rule does not stem from practical policy considerations but rather from the ancient animist desire for “vengeance on the offending thing” (*ibid.*: 433, 437).

36 Holmes was soon explicitly describing many features of the law as survivals: “There is no adequate and complete explanation of the modern law,” he wrote, “except by the survival in practice of rules which [have] lost their true meaning” (Holmes 1878: 710). A year later, he defended the thesis that “the responsibility of common carriers” in modern law “is a survival of the general obligation of all bailees” in medieval Germanic law (Holmes 1879: 610). Holmes concluded this 1879 article with a reflection on why logical – as opposed to historical – approaches to the law are inadequate:

The official theory is that each new decision follows syllogistically from existing precedents. But as precedents survive like the clavicle in the cat, long after the use they once served is at an end, and the reason for them has been forgotten, the result of following them must often be failure and confusion from the merely logical point of view. (*Ibid.*: 630)

37 In other words, legal precedents are often like Tylor’s cultural survivals or the vestigial collarbone of felids: they persist despite no longer having any function.

38 With his final lines, Holmes echoed Maine’s contrast between dynamic social progress and static legal precedent:

Law hitherto has been, and it would seem by the necessity of its being is always approaching and never reaching consistency. It is for ever adopting new principles from life at one end, and it always retains old ones from history at the other which have not yet been absorbed or sloughed off. It will become entirely consistent only when it ceases to grow. (*Ibid.*: 631)

39 Moreover, because “the law is administered by able and experienced men, who know too much to sacrifice good sense to a syllogism,” rules that have lost their original function are gradually transformed, eventually assuming a new and more policy-relevant function. Once this process is understood, said Holmes, judges are “at liberty to consider the question of policy with a freedom that was not possible before” (*ibid.*).⁴

40 Thus, both Maine and Holmes endorsed a historical-evolutionary-anthropological approach to the law, according to which its change and growth reflects lawgivers’ continual attempt to resolve the ever-renewed tension between code and precedent on the one hand and social life and experience on the other.

4. Dynamic Functionalism

- 41 Dewey engaged directly with all of this material in the early 1890s. In April 1893, he published a short essay in the *Inlander* – a magazine edited by the students of the University of Michigan – that amounted to a review of the first chapter of Holmes’s *The Common Law*, which Dewey described as “worthy in all respects to be put side by side with anything in the way of historic interpretation produced by Sir Henry Maine” (EW. 4: 37).⁵ The stated goal of Dewey’s essay was comparative: to illustrate, using “some facts in the development of law,” the truth that diverse streams of ideas can often be followed back to a single common source. More specifically, he presented Holmes’s claim that “some of the most highly developed legal ideas and practices of to-day can be traced to a beginning in the crude psychological structure of primitive man” (EW.4: 37).
- 42 After reviewing Holmes’s argument, Dewey concluded that modern legal rules are often evolutionary modifications of ancient customs in which a new function with practical utility in a later context supersedes the original function:
- The rules are [...] the historic children of the old customs, preserved and modified through the agency of natural selection. The instances given illustrate, indeed, the law of historical development of all institutional forms. Every new institution is, like the organ of an animal, an old one modified. Continuity is never broken; the old is never annihilated at a stroke, the new never a creation *ab initio*. It is simply a question of morphology. But what controls the modification in the historic continuity is the practical usefulness of the institution or organ in question. (*Ibid.*: 40-1)
- 43 Unlike the cat’s clavicle, which is a mere vestige, most modern laws are exaptations: i.e., “characters, evolved for other uses,” that are “later ‘co-opted’ for their current role” (Gould & Vrba 1982: 6; cf. Parravicini 2019: §4.2).⁶
- 44 As Dewey’s analogy between institutions and organs suggests, he was at this time espousing the view that we should think of society as an organism. In *The Principles of Sociology*, which Dewey recommended and assigned to his students at Michigan, Spencer had famously argued in favor of this analogy, since both organisms and societies grow and have parts that are differentiated from but mutually dependent upon one another (Spencer 1877: 480; see Dewey 1892-93/2010: 107; 1893-1894/2010: 246; Calendar 1893: 67; Calendar 1894: 68). A similar view was – apparently independently – expressed by Johann Caspar Bluntschli in *Theory of the Modern State*, the textbook for Dewey’s Comparative Constitutional History class with Adams at Hopkins (Bluntschli 1875-1876, 1: 18-9; “Historical and Political Science” 1883: 135).
- 45 Dewey’s early 1890s classes in political philosophy thus began with the assumption that “Society is an Organism” and that “the fundamental traits both of social structure and social development flow from and must be referred to this fact” (Dewey 1892-93/2010: 108). Although he initially described it as an assumption to be verified, Dewey was ultimately even more enthused about the analogy than Spencer, who had noted two key differences: first, there is no direct physical connection between the parts of the social organism; second, there is no specific part of the social organism where consciousness resides (Spencer 1877: 475-80). After quoting Spencer on these points, Dewey argued that they were not as important as they seemed (Dewey 1892-93/2010: 122-3). Rather than simply denying the existence of a “social sensorium,” as Spencer

had done, Dewey suggested that it was something that emerged as society developed, effectively measuring how far “the individual [is] conscious of his own activity as an expression of the whole organism” or how far “the activity of the whole organism come[s] home to every individual so that it has value for him” (Dewey 1892-93/2010: 128-9). Expanding on Spencer’s idea that language performs “the inter-nuncial function” in the social organism, Dewey also claimed that “the development of the social sensorium is the development of language as an institution” (Spencer 1877: 478; Dewey 1892-93/2010: 130).

- 46 As Dewey’s repeated use of the term “development” indicates, his account of social dynamics was indebted to the evolutionary-historical approach of Maine, Spencer, and Holmes. Maine’s ideas were invoked and alluded to throughout Dewey’s lectures, from the notion of the village community – “a state of society in which [...] there is no strict line of demarcation between [government, family, industry, etc.]” – to the famous claim that “the progress of society so far has been but *Status* and *Contract*,” or in Maine’s words, “the movement of the progressive societies has hitherto been a movement *from Status to Contract*” (Dewey 1892-93/2010: 102, 127; Maine 1861: 170; Maine 1875). Dewey also gave a succinct overview of the broader historical account of *Ancient Law* (1861):

It is now generally recognized that laws had their origin in custom that grew up more or less spontaneously [...] – not as an overt utterance of particular power. Power originally declared custom. Express law-making a comparatively late fact [...]. Only two periods of great legislative activity – Roman Empire and nineteenth century. Former the dealing with many communities. Latter the rise of new conditions of life and unfitness of old laws to meet them. (Dewey 1893-94/2010: 261)

- 47 As the last sentence shows, Dewey was aware of the idea of a mismatch between historically inherited laws and new social developments – a mismatch that could only be resolved by evolution and growth, as emphasized by both Maine and Holmes.
- 48 Dewey’s discussion of sovereignty, arguably the central topic of his political philosophy lectures at the time, was grounded in exactly this tension between existing legal structures and progressive ideals. He contrasted John Austin’s definition of sovereignty as “the power to command obedience without limitation” with Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s definition of it as “the supremacy of the common over the particular end” (Dewey 1892-93/2010: 110; see Austin 1832: 268; Rousseau 1762: 21-2; Chun 2021: 365-6). According to Dewey, whereas Austin “gives the legal, *de facto* side” of sovereignty, Rousseau “gives the ethical, *de jure* side. The one tells you who is the sovereign; the other points out who *ought to be*” (Dewey 1892-93/2010: 110-1). Dewey then described the legal and the ethical as two “phases” of Rousseau’s *volonté générale*: “The actual sovereign represents the common will in its past attainments; the ideal element is the striving or tendency for future developments” (*ibid.*: 111-2).
- 49 Dewey’s presentation of the “friction” and “constant conflict” between the legal and the ethical – as inseparable elements of sovereignty and as phases of the common will – was strikingly similar to Maine and Holmes’s account of the evolution of law:

The common will has secured and has followed certain modes of organization. This gives the *de facto* sovereignty. Now as new needs come to demand new activities the old organs become less rigid; they yield with more or less reluctance to the new demands [...]. The Fundamental Problem of Social Organization is to secure organs of activity which have recognized validity. This is the root of all political and social life [...]. The ideal organization is that when organs are not weak but at the same time are capable and ready to yield to the new, changing conditions. (*ibid.*: 112)

- 50 For Dewey, social evolution is driven by the conflict between static laws on the one hand and dynamic ideals on the other.
- 51 Dewey framed all of this in terms of the organic analogy, with Austin cast as anatomist and Rousseau as physiologist:
- The *de facto* side of sovereignty, the legal, positive side, is found in the existing organs considered in their structure; *de jure*, ethical, ideal side, in their functions, the relations of one organ to another. The static and the dynamic are sides of the same activity. (Dewey 1893-94/2010: 257)
- 52 For Dewey, “institutions are the habits of the social organism” (*ibid.*: 248). The conflict between the two aspects of sovereignty is thus also a conflict between (i) these habits, “all of which represent something that has been necessary in the past,” and (ii) those changing social needs that cannot be met when habits “become so mechanical as not to be capable of being put to new uses when new occasions arise” (*ibid.*: 249).
- 53 The tricky normative question is how to justify or criticize the institutions of a particular state. Although the ethical, ideal side of sovereignty implies a normative standard of some kind, in the second version of the course Dewey made this more explicit, asking the “*practical* question as to where we will find that moral standard and how bring it into operation” (*ibid.*: 257). Dewey’s preferred answer was that criticism had to proceed by way of functional analysis: the “moral standard is simply the complete function of the existing organization” and “particular laws and institutions” are evaluated “with reference to their place or function” within this larger organization (*ibid.*: 258; cf. Cummins 1975: 762-3). According to Dewey, because this moral standard was the result of objective functional analysis, it was also a scientific standard:
- The question here of effectively criticising positive laws and institutions is simply a question of *the development of science – how far we understand the social organism*. If we do understand it we do have a definite positive standard for determining what part a given law should play in the whole. We have no definite knowledge of social mechanism at present. (Dewey 1893-94/2010: 258)
- 54 This link between science and criticism explains why Dewey was so invested throughout his career in connections between moral and political philosophy on the one hand and the social sciences and “social arts” on the other (MW.4: 45).

5. Conclusion

- 55 The dynamic functionalism that Dewey developed in his early 1890s political philosophy classes, in conversation with the ideas of Maine, Holmes, and Spencer, is interesting in its own right. But it is also important as part of the backdrop for his methodological discussions of ethics in the early twentieth century, discussions which William James among others deeply admired (James 1904: 2; James 1905: 113 n. 2).
- 56 In “The Evolutionary Method as Applied to Morality” (1902), for example, Dewey contrasted his own evolutionary-historical-genetic method with both empiricism and intuitionism in ethics. Dewey thought that a key advantage of his method was that moral norms were situated historically and anthropologically, treated “as embedded in the life of the people, historically knit together with its whole body of memories and traditions” (MW.2: 37). In other words, Dewey wanted to approach ethics as Tylor had approached culture and as Maine and Holmes had approached law:

History, as viewed from the evolutionary standpoint, [...] is a process that reveals to us the conditions under which moral practices and ideas have originated. This enables us to place, to relate them. In seeing where they came from, in what situations they arose, we see their significance. (*ibid.*: 9)

57 That is, Dewey's method assumed that "norms and ideals, as well as unreflective customs, arose out of certain situations, in response to the demands of those situations," and that their relative success in meeting those demands could "be determined by study of the concrete case" (*ibid.*: 23).

58 As in the early-1890s political philosophy lectures, justification and criticism of present norms would proceed in functional terms. But why then is history needed at all? Theodore de Laguna, responding directly to Dewey's article, suggested that functionalism in ethics might be better off without it, since "in the process as it now operates we have a well-nigh infinitely richer field for observation than in all the records of the past" (De Laguna 1904: 334-5). But Dewey agreed with Holmes: just as judges, understanding the historical development of the law, are "at liberty to consider the question of policy with a freedom that was not possible before," philosophers taking an evolutionary approach to ethics can apply everything "learned from a study of the past [...] in the analysis of the present" (Holmes 1879: 631; MW.2: 38). Dewey summarized the results of such analysis in his concluding remarks on "the genetic method":

It becomes an instrument of inquiry, of interpretation, of criticism as regards our present assumptions and aspirations [...]. It eliminates surds, mere survivals, emotional reactions, and rationalizes, so far as that is possible at any given time, the attitudes we take, the ideals we form. (MW.2: 38)

59 That is, knowledge of the original function of particular moral norms leads to the right questions today: Did those norms meet the demands for which they were introduced? Do those demands still exist? Are there other ways of meeting those demands? Sometimes the answers to these questions show that particular norms are Tylorian survivals with no present function. Other times they reveal malfunction and the need for transformation. Thus for Dewey the historical-evolutionary and technical-functional approaches work hand in hand, since "the logic of the moral idea is like the logic of an invention," introduced to meet unmet needs but also creating new ones, prompting further progress (MW.2: 34; see also EW.3: 156-7, 369; Kitcher 2011: 218-21).

60 I have argued in this paper that the historical-comparative method, especially as employed by Maine and Holmes, was an important resource for Dewey as he developed his mature philosophy in the 1890s at the University of Michigan. Both of these jurists set up a contrast between unchanging custom – as enshrined for example in legal codes – and emerging social needs, leading to a picture in which historical progress is driven by a tension between a devotion to past wisdom and the need for readjustment to new developments. Although this picture of progress also of course displays the influence of Hegelian-dialectical and evolutionary-biological frameworks, I have tried to show here that Dewey scholars should not neglect the emerging sciences of sociology, anthropology, and comparative jurisprudence.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ADAMS Herbert B., (1882), "The Germanic Origin of New England Towns," *Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science*, 1(2), Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University. Online: <https://archive.org/search.php?query=external-identifier%3A%22urn%3Aoclc%3Arecord%3A1045584299%22>.
- ADAMS Herbert B., (1884), "Methods of Historical Study," *Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science*, 2(1-2), Baltimore, MD, N. Murray. Online: <https://archive.org/details/methodsofhistori02adamuoft/page/n7/mode/2up>.
- ADCOCK Robert, (2006), "The Emigration of the 'Comparative Method': Transatlantic Exchange and the Birth of American Political Science," *European Political Science*, 5(2), 124-36.
- AUSTIN John, (1832), *The Province of Jurisprudence Determined*, London, John Murray.
- BAX Ernest Belfort, (1886), *A Handbook of the History of Philosophy for the Use of Students*, London, George Bell and Sons.
- BLUNTSCHLI Johann Caspar, (1875-1876), *Lehre vom modernen Stat*, 3 vol., Stuttgart, J. G. Cotta.
- BOPP Franz, (1833), *Vergleichende Grammatik des Sanskrit, Zend, Griechischen, Lateinischen, Litthauischen, Gothischen und Deutschen*, vol. 1, Berlin, Ferdinand Dümmler.
- CALENDAR, (1892), *Calendar of the University of Michigan for 1891-1892*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan. Online: <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hnaa19>.
- CALENDAR, (1893), *Calendar of the University of Michigan for 1892-1893*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan. Online: <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hnaa19>.
- CALENDAR, (1894), *Calendar of the University of Michigan for 1893-1894*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan. Online: <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hnaa19>.
- CARPENTER William B., (1854), *Principles of Comparative Physiology*, 4th ed., London, John Churchill.
- CATALOGUE, (1875), *Catalogue of the Officers and Students of the University of Vermont and State Agricultural College, Burlington, Vt., with a Statement of the Several Courses of Instruction, 1875-1876*, Burlington, Free Press.
- CHUN Michelle, (2021), "The Anti-Democratic Origins of Analytical Jurisprudence," *Jurisprudence*, 12(3), 361-90. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1080/20403313.2021.1872256>.
- CLELAND Carol E., (2002), "Methodological and Epistemic Differences Between Historical Science and Experimental Science," *Philosophy of Science*, 69(3), 474-96. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/342455>.
- COLUMBIA, (1913), *Columbia University Bulletin of Information: Division of Philosophy, Psychology, and Anthropology: Announcement, 1913-1914*, New York, Columbia University.
- COLUMBIA, (1914), *Columbia University Bulletin of Information: Division of Philosophy, Psychology, and Anthropology: Announcement, 1914-1915*, New York, Columbia University.
- COLUMBIA, (1915), *Columbia University Bulletin of Information: Division of Philosophy, Psychology, and Anthropology: Announcement, 1915-1916*, New York, Columbia University.

COMTE Auguste, (1830), *Cours de philosophie positive*, vol. 1, *Les préliminaires généraux et la philosophie mathématique*, Paris, Bachelier.

COMTE Auguste, (1838), *Cours de philosophie positive*, vol. 3, *La philosophie chimique et la philosophie biologique*, Paris, Bachelier.

COMTE Auguste, (1839), *Cours de philosophie positive*, vol. 4, *La partie dogmatique de la philosophie sociale*, Paris, Bachelier.

CUMMINS Robert, (1975), "Functional Analysis," *Journal of Philosophy*, 72(20), 741-65. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2024640>.

CUVIER Georges, (1800), *Leçons d'anatomie comparée*, 2 vol., Paris, Badouin.

DASTON Lorraine, (2022), *Rules: A Short History of What We Live by*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press.

DAVIS John R. & Angus NICHOLLS, (2016), "Friedrich Max Müller: The Career and Intellectual Trajectory of a German Philologist in Victorian Britain," *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, 85(2-3), 67-97. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09593683.2016.1224493>.

DE LAGUNA Theodore, (1904), "Evolutionary Method in Ethical Research," *Philosophical Review*, 13(3), 328-37. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2176285>.

DEWEY John, (1892-1893/2010), "Political Philosophy," in *The Class Lectures of John Dewey*, ed. by Donald F. Koch, vol. 1, Charlottesville, VA, IntelLex, 100-220.

DEWEY John, (1893-1894/2010), "Political Philosophy," in *The Class Lectures of John Dewey*, ed. by Donald F. Koch, vol. 1, Charlottesville, VA, IntelLex, 245-324.

DEWEY John, (1896/2015), "Philosophy of Education," in *The Class Lectures of John Dewey*, edited by Donald F. Koch, vol. 2, Charlottesville, VA, IntelLex, 74-208.

DEWEY John, (2003), *The Early Works, 1882-1898*, 5 vol., electronic edition, Charlottesville, VA, IntelLex. [EW].

DEWEY John, (2003), *The Middle Works, 1899-1924*, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, 15 vol., electronic edition, Charlottesville, VA, IntelLex. [MW].

DEWEY John, (2003), *The Later Works, 1925-1953*, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, 17 vol., electronic edition, Charlottesville, VA, IntelLex. [LW].

DRESOW Max, (2024), "Whewell on the Palaetiological Sciences," in Lukas M. Verburgt (ed.), *William Whewell: Victorian Polymath*, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 183-95.

EDEL Abraham, (1985), "A Missing Dimension in Rorty's Use of Pragmatism," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 21(1), 21-37.

ENUMERATION, (1882), "Enumeration of Classes, First Half-Year, 1882-1883," *Johns Hopkins University Circulars*, 2(19), 15-8. Online: <http://jhir.library.jhu.edu/handle/1774.2/32847>.

ENUMERATION, (1883a), "Enumeration of Classes, Second Half-Year, 1882-1883," *Johns Hopkins University Circulars*, 2(22), 90-3. Online: <http://jhir.library.jhu.edu/handle/1774.2/32850>.

ENUMERATION, (1883b), "Enumeration of Classes, First Half-Year, 1883-1884," *Johns Hopkins University Circulars*, 3(27), 23-7. Online: <http://jhir.library.jhu.edu/handle/1774.2/32855>.

ENUMERATION, (1884), "Enumeration of Classes, Second Half-Year, 1883-1884," *Johns Hopkins University Circulars*, 3(29), 65-9. Online: <http://jhir.library.jhu.edu/handle/1774.2/32857>.

- EVANS-PRITCHARD Edward Evan, (1963), *The Comparative Method in Social Anthropology*, London, Athlone.
- FALLACE Thomas D., (2011), *Dewey and the Dilemma of Race: An Intellectual History, 1895-1922*, New York, Teachers College Press.
- FEUER Lewis S., (1958), "John Dewey's Reading at College," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 19(3), 415-21. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2708046>.
- FOUCAULT Michel, (1966), *Les Mots et les choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines*, Paris, Gallimard.
- FREEMAN Edward A., (1882), "An Introduction to American Institutional History," *Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science*, 1(1), Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University. Online: <https://archive.org/details/introductiontoam00freerich/page/n5/mode/2up>.
- GETTLEMAN Marvin E. (ed.), (1987), "Seminary Records, December, 1877-May, 1886," in *The Johns Hopkins University Seminary of History and Politics: The Records of an American Educational Institution, 1877-1912*, New York, Garland.
- GILLIN Edward, (2024), "Whewell and Architecture," in Lukas M. Verburgt (ed.), *William Whewell: Victorian Polymath*, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 61-80.
- GIRARDOT Norman J., (2002), "Max Müller's *Sacred Books* and the Nineteenth-Century Production of the Comparative Science of Religions," *History of Religions*, 41(3), 213-50. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1086/463683>.
- GOLDMAN Loren, (2012), "Dewey's Pragmatism from an Anthropological Point of View," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 48(1), 1-30.
- GOULD Stephen Jay & Elisabeth S. VRBA, (1982), "Exaptation – A Missing Term in the Science of Form," *Paleobiology*, 8(1), 4-15. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2400563>.
- GRIFFITHS Devin, (2017), "The Comparative Method and the History of the Modern Humanities," *History of Humanities*, 2(2), 473-505. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1086/693325>.
- GUIZOT François, (1838), *General History of Civilisation in Europe, from the Fall of the Roman Empire to the French Revolution*, Oxford, D. A. Talboys.
- HARKIN Michael E., (2017), "'We are Also One in Our Concept of Freedom': The Dewey-Boas Correspondence and the Invention of Postmodern Bourgeois Liberalism," in Regna Darnell & Frederic W. Gleach (eds), *Historicizing Theories, Identities, and Nations*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 27-60.
- "Historical and Political Science," 1883, *Johns Hopkins University Circulars*, 2(24), 133-5. Online: <http://jhir.library.jhu.edu/handle/1774.2/32852>.
- HODGE M. Jon S., (1991), "The History of the Earth, Life, and Man: Whewell and Palaetiological Science," in Menachem Fisch & Simon Schaffer (eds), *William Whewell: A Composite Portrait*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 255-88.
- HODGSON Shadworth H., (1886), *The Re-Organisation of Philosophy: An Address Delivered Before the Aristotelian Society*, London, Williams and Norgate.
- HOENIGSWALD Henry M., (1963), "On the History of the Comparative Method," *Anthropological Linguistics*, 5(1), 1-11. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30028244>.
- HOLMES Oliver Wendell Jr., (1872), "The Arrangement of the Law: Privity," *American Law Review*, 7(1), 46-66.

- HOLMES Oliver Wendell Jr., (1873), "The Gas-Stokers' Strike," *American Law Review*, 7(3), 582-4.
- HOLMES Oliver Wendell Jr., (1876), "Primitive Notions in Modern Law," Pt. 1, *American Law Review*, 10(3), 422-39.
- HOLMES Oliver Wendell Jr., (1878), "Possession," *American Law Review*, 12(4), 688-720.
- HOLMES Oliver Wendell Jr., (1879), "Common Carriers and the Common Law," *American Law Review*, 13(4), 609-31.
- HOLMES Oliver Wendell Jr., (1881), *The Common Law*, Boston, Little, Brown.
- JAMES William, (1904), "The Chicago School," *Psychological Bulletin*, 1(1), 1-5.
- JAMES William, (1905), "The Essence of Humanism," *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, 2(5), 113-8. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2012206>.
- KELLOGG Frederic R., (2018), *Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. and Legal Logic*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.
- KITCHER Philip, (2011), *The Ethical Project*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.
- KOERNER Konrad, (1989), "August Schleicher and Linguistic Science in the Second Half of the 19th Century," in *Practicing Linguistic Historiography: Selected Essays*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 325-75.
- LAMARCK Jean-Baptiste, (1809), *Philosophie zoologique, ou Exposition des considérations relatives à l'histoire naturelle des animaux*, 2 vol., Paris, Dentu.
- LAMONT Corliss (ed.), (1959), *Dialogue on John Dewey*, New York, Horizon.
- LAWRENCE William, (1819), *Lectures on Physiology, Zoology, and the Natural History of Man*, London, J. Callow.
- LEWIS Herbert S., (2001), "Boas, Darwin, Science, and Anthropology," *Current Anthropology*, 42(3), 381-406. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/320474>.
- LITTLE Eleanor N., (1954), "The Early Reading of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes," *Harvard Library Bulletin*, 8(2), 163-203.
- MAINE Henry Sumner, (1861), *Ancient Law: Its Connection with the Early History of Society, and Its Relation to Modern Ideas*, London, John Murray.
- MAINE Henry Sumner, (1871), *Village-Communities in the East and West: Six Lectures Delivered at Oxford*, London, John Murray.
- MAINE Henry Sumner, (1875), *Lectures on the Early History of Institutions*, London, John Murray.
- MCLENNAN John F., (1865), *Primitive Marriage: An Inquiry into the Origin of the Form of Capture in Marriage Ceremonies*, Edinburgh, Adam and Charles Black.
- MOLENDIJK Arie L., (2016), "Forgotten Bibles: Friedrich Max Müller's Edition of the Sacred Books of the East," *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, 85(2-3), 159-69. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09593683.2016.1224507>.
- MUIRHEAD John Henry, (1892), *The Elements of Ethics: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons.
- MÜLLER Max, (1856), "Comparative Mythology," in *Oxford Essays*, London, John W. Parker, 1-87.

MÜLLER Max, (1861-1864), *Lectures on the Science of Language, Delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain*, 2 vol., London, Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts.

NICHOLLS Angus, (2015), "Max Müller and the Comparative Method," *Comparative Critical Studies*, 12(2), 213-34. Online: <https://doi.org/10.3366/ccs.2015.0168>.

ORIENTAL HERALD, (1824), "On the Affinity of the Sanscrit, the Ancient Language of India, to the Greek, the Latin, and Other Ancient Languages of Europe," *Oriental Herald*, 3 (December), 482-92.

PARKER Kunal, (2003), "The History of Experience: On the Historical Imagination of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.," *PoLAR*, 26(2), 60-85.

PARRAVICINI Andrea, (2019), "Pragmatism and Emergentism in Chauncey Wright's Evolutionary Philosophy," *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, 11(2). Online: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejpap.1623>.

PEARCE Trevor, (2017), "American Pragmatism, Evolution, and Ethics," in Michael Ruse & Robert J. Richards (eds), *The Cambridge Handbook of Evolutionary Ethics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 43-57.

PEARCE Trevor, (2020), *Pragmatism's Evolution: Organism and Environment in American Philosophy*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.

QUINN Aleta, (2016), "William Whewell's Philosophy of Architecture and the Historicization of Biology," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, 59, 11-9. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.shpsc.2016.05.004>.

QUINN Aleta, (2024), "Whewell and Scientific Classification," in Lukas M. Verburgt (ed.), *William Whewell: Victorian Polymath*, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 196-207.

RABBAN David M., (2013), *Law's History: American Legal Thought and the Transatlantic Turn to History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

REIN Wilhelm, (1893), *Outlines of Pedagogics*, trans. by Charles C. Van Liew and Ida J. Van Liew, London, Swan Sonnenschein.

RITCHIE David George, (1891), *Darwinism and Politics*, 2nd ed., London, Swan Sonnenschein.

RITTER Carl, (1817-1818), *Die Erdkunde im Verhältniss zur Natur und zur Geschichte des Menschen, oder allgemeine, vergleichende Geographie, als sichere Grundlage des Studiums und Unterrichts in Physikalischen und historischen Wissenschaften*, 2 vol., Berlin, G. Reimer.

ROGERS Melvin L., (2011), "The Fact of Sacrifice and Necessity of Faith: Dewey and the Ethics of Democracy," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 47(3), 274-300.

ROGERS Melvin L., (2016), "Introduction," in John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems: An Essay in Political Inquiry*, Athens, OH, Swallow, 1-43.

ROUSSEAU Jean-Jacques, (1762), *Du contrat social, ou Principes du droit politique*, Amsterdam, Marc-Michel Rey.

SCHLEGEL Friedrich, (1808), *Ueber die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier: Ein Beitrag zur Begründung der Alterthumskunde*, Heidelberg, Mohr und Zimmer.

SCHLEICHER August, (1853), "Die ersten Spaltungen des indogermanischen Urvolkes," *Allgemeine Monatschrift für Wissenschaft und Literatur*, 786-87. Online: <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hnz6m4>.

SCHLEICHER August, (1860), *Die Deutsche Sprache*, Stuttgart, J. G. Cotta.

- SHOOK John R., (2000), *Dewey's Empirical Theory of Knowledge and Reality*, Nashville, TN, Vanderbilt University Press.
- SPENCER Herbert, (1855), *The Principles of Psychology*, London, Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans.
- SPENCER Herbert, (1877), *The Principles of Sociology*, vol. 1, London, Williams and Norgate.
- STOCKING George W. Jr., (1987), *Victorian Anthropology*, New York, Free Press.
- TANGHE Koen B., (2019), "The Fate of William Whewell's Four Palætiological Domains: A Comparative Study," *Perspectives on Science*, 27(6), 810-38. Online: https://doi.org/10.1162/posc_a_00326.
- TORRES COLÓN Gabriel Alejandro & Charles A. HOBBS, (2015), "The Intertwining of Culture and Nature: Franz Boas, John Dewey, and Deweyan Strands of American Anthropology," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 76(1), 139-62.
- TORRES COLÓN Gabriel Alejandro & Charles A. HOBBS, (2016), "Toward a Pragmatist Anthropology of Race," *Pluralist*, 11(1), 126-35. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/pluralist.11.1.0126>.
- TYLOR Edward B., (1865), *Researches into the Early History of Mankind and the Development of Civilization*, London, John Murray.
- TYLOR Edward B., (1866), "The Science of Language," *Quarterly Review*, 119, 394-435.
- TYLOR Edward B., (1868), "Review of *Chips from a German Workshop*, by Max Müller," *Fortnightly Review*, 9 (February 1), 225-8.
- TYLOR Edward B., (1871), *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom*, 2 vol., London, John Murray.
- VANNATTA Seth, (2014), *Conservatism and Pragmatism: In Law, Politics, and Ethics*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan.
- VILLENEUVE Matthew, (2021), "Instrumental Indians: John Dewey and the Problem of the Frontier for Democracy in Indian Education, 1884-1959," PhD diss., University of Michigan. Online: <https://dx.doi.org/10.7302/2968>.
- WHEWELL William, (1837), *History of the Inductive Sciences, from the Earliest to the Present Times*, 3 vol., London, John W. Parker.
- WHEWELL William, (1840), *The Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences, Founded Upon Their History*, 2 vol., London, John W. Parker.
- WUNDT Wilhelm, (1886), *Ethik: Eine Untersuchung der Thatsachen und Gesetze des sittlichen Lebens*, Stuttgart, Ferdinand Enke.
- ZASK Joëlle, (2015), "Individualité et culture, de Boas à Dewey: À propos des liens entre pragmatisme et anthropologie culturelle," *SociologieS* ("Pragmatisme et sciences sociales: explorations, enquêtes, expérimentations"). Online: <https://doi.org/10.4000/sociologies.4966>.

NOTES

1. The joint seminar, listed in the university *Catalogue* and the faculty *Bulletin* for all three academic years, was offered as a full-year course in 1913-1914 and 1914-1915 and as a half-year spring course in 1915-1916. The word "morals" in the description was replaced by "the intellect"

after the first year. This information corrects that given in Dewey (LW.7: xv) and in Torres Colón & Hobbs (2016: 133-4).

2. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

3. Dewey taught a Masterpieces of Modern Philosophy class at Michigan in 1891-1892 that was focused on Comte's Positive Philosophy (Calendar 1892: 61).

4. On the importance of discretion in the history of rule interpretation, see Daston (2022: 35-40).

5. Holmes's first chapter recycled key ideas from the 1870s articles discussed above: for example, Holmes (1881: 35-6) reproduced the closing paragraphs of Holmes 1879 on the cat's clavicle, etc.

6. For more on Dewey's "Anthropology and Law" essay, especially his use of "one of the Chippewa Indian legends," see Villeneuve (2021: 603-10) as well as Villeneuve's forthcoming monograph with the University of Pennsylvania Press.

ABSTRACTS

In this paper I argue that the "dynamic functionalism" of Dewey's evolutionary approach to ethics – moral norms emerge to address specific problems but must be constantly readjusted to changing contexts – had its roots in the comparative jurisprudence of Sir Henry Sumner Maine and Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. First, I will discuss the rise of the comparative sciences in the nineteenth century, part of the backdrop for the work of Maine and various evolutionary anthropologists. Next, I will examine Maine's *Ancient Law* (1861), Edward Burnett Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871), and Holmes's *The Common Law* (1881), three related books that set up a dichotomy between existing custom and historical progress. Finally, I will show how this dichotomy was reflected in Dewey's writing and teaching at the University of Michigan in the early 1890s, including "Anthropology and Law" (1893) and several courses in political philosophy.

INDEX

Keywords: John Dewey, Henry Sumner Maine, Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., Edward Burnett Tylor, Comparative Jurisprudence

AUTHOR

TREVOR PEARCE

University of North Carolina at Charlotte
 trevorpearce[at]charlotte.edu

William James's Inquiry into Modes of Existence

Christian Frigerio

1. Introduction: Anthropology, Modes of Existence, and William James

- 1 One of the most distinctive and controversial features of much contemporary anthropology is that it is gone *ontological*. The basic insight behind the “ontological turn” is that each “culture” should be studied in the terms of its “cosmology,” i.e. the kinds of beings to which it is committed. The ethnocentric idea of a uniform “Nature” as the background to cultural differences is abandoned: “multiculturalism” is replaced by “multinaturalism” (Viveiros de Castro 1996), the assumption that there are as many different natures as there are cultures.
- 2 However, the “Neo-Copernican claim that other people’s worlds do not revolve around ours” (Bessire & Bond 2014: 440) leaves the meaning of the adjective “ontological” obscure. If this adjective is to have any meaning, then anthropology must look beyond human ways of “being-in-the-world”; but for anthropology to remain such, ontology must remain internally related to such being-in-the-world, and this is why most anthropologists are unwilling to engage with ontology in the traditional philosophical sense (Heywood 2012; Maniglier 2014). Among the proposals for clarifying what ontology means for anthropologists, arguably the most robust has been Bruno Latour’s framing of ontology in terms of “modes of existence.” Latour did not see the ontological turn as a significant issue because, for him, anthropology has *always* been about ontology (Latour 2014, 2015). In *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* (2012/2013), the “work which goes furthest in blurring the boundary between philosophy and anthropology” (Charbonnier, Salmon & Skafish 2017: 17), Latour defines modes of existence – a concept taken from the French philosophers Étienne Souriau (1943) and Gilbert Simondon (1958/2017) – not as different “domains,” but as ways in which “actors” *move* or *pass through*, relate to and affect each other. Through this concept, he conveys the idea that being is not univocal, and that once we are done with Nature, the

ground is cleared for new and unprecedented kinds of entities. In particular, Latour is concerned with providing the *pars construens* of *We have never been modern* (Latour 1991). While in that work he attacked the category of Modernity, i.e. the belief that practices such as Science draw a distinction in kind between “our” collective and “amodern” collectives, the *Inquiry* provides an alternative “anthropology of the Moderns” (this is the subtitle of the book) by distinguishing *fifteen* modes of existence that should allow the (former) Moderns to give an account of their practices that, unlike the one based on univocal Nature, enables them to engage in a *diplomatic activity* with other collectives.

- 3 The “modes-of-existence account” of what ontology means allows the adjective “ontological” to be taken seriously without obliterating the heterogeneity of the ways of worldmaking, which is why it has become standard in the wake of Latour’s *Inquiry* and has been endorsed by figures such as Philippe Descola (2014a) and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2016). The central idea is that “the roots of human diversity must be sought at [the level] of the differences between the basic inferences humans draw about the kinds of beings that populate the world and the way these beings are linked to one another” (Descola 2014b/2024: 111). Thus

[...] by revealing the many ways of worldmaking, the ontological turn forces us to accept the reality of ontological pluralism, of pluralities of premises and practices, and the need to allow different ways of being, different modes of existence, the right to formulate *in their own terms* how they might interact with others. (Gille 2017: 322)

- 4 However, it is still not clear how this view of ontology relates to the properly *anthropological* concerns of those interested in it. Markus Gabriel has noted that philosophers of modes of existence “do not dedicate much attention to the concept of a ‘mode of existence’ itself” (Gabriel 2015: 172). This is all the more true for anthropologists. Latour’s definition of modes of existence does not explain what it means for a collective to be committed to certain kinds of entities. What is the relationship between a “cosmology” and the practices that characterize a collective? How can modes of existence be distinguished from one another? Can we erase the social, sexual, economic differences within a collective, in order to define a general “ontology” that characterizes it?
- 5 In short, the very concept of “mode of existence” that should have clarified the meaning of ontological talk is not at all clear when used by anthropologists. Formal reflection on the meaning of modes of existence is needed, and anthropology should engage in ontological debates about what this concept means if it is to make its stakes explicit. This is the general claim that underlies this paper. While making a significant contribution to these debates is well beyond our scope, this paper also defends a more specific claim: that William James is a key figure if one is to get a better understanding of what it means that there are modes of existence, and that a rediscovery of some of his insights could contribute to an anthropological understanding of ontology.
- 6 While James lacked the anthropological sensibility that would become popular in the twentieth century, no one insisted more strongly on some ideas that have become part of the toolkit of contemporary anthropology. Latour came to know James through the work of Isabelle Stengers and David Lapoujade, and in time came to identify himself as a pragmatist and to see pragmatism’s attention to experience as anticipating the ontological turn.¹ In fact, his *Inquiry* is “the most deeply Jamesian of Latour’s books” (Hennion 2018: 9). Not only are two of Latour’s modes – *reference* and *habit* – explicitly

derived from James,² but there are at least three Jamesian insights that Latour makes central to it. First, his *pluralistic universe*. Against the monistic view of the world as an absolute unity, James appeals to “the legitimacy of the notion of *some*: each part of the world is in some way connected, in some other ways not connected with its other parts, and the ways can be discriminated” (James 1910: 36). Second, *radical empiricism*, which asserts that “an empiricism must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced” and that, in contrast to classical empiricism, relations are directly experienced (James 1912: 42). Latour conveys this “second empiricism” with the motto “nothing but experience, but *nothing less* than experience” (Latour 2012: xxv), meaning that everything we experience must be given a proper mode of existence.

- 7 Finally, the form taken by experienced relations is a *conjunctive* or *prepositional* form: “We ought to say a feeling of *and*, a feeling of *if*, a feeling of *but*, and a feeling of *by*, quite as readily as we say a feeling of *blue* or a feeling of *cold*” (James 1890a: 245-6). The relevance of prepositions characterizes many speculative thinkers of this kind. Souriau (1943: 174) takes up James’s idea to develop a genuine “grammar of existence,” and another of Latour’s heroes, Michel Serres (2003), has sketched out the project of a comprehensive prepositional metaphysics: the world is relationally constituted, and prepositions are the grammatical rendering of these relations. Latour takes this idea with the utmost seriousness by making “preposition” a mode of existence and modelling his “regimes of enunciation” on James’s insistence on the *conjunctive* nature of being. Prepositions exist in themselves as a kind of “meta-mode” that accounts for the difference between all other modes by dictating the “trajectories” they must follow.
- 8 “From James to Latour, we find the same critical diagnosis of the categories of modern thought, the same vision of a reduction of the plurality of worlds to a single abstract sphere, and the same need to provide a critical evaluation” (Debaise 2023: 410-1). James, however, has much more to contribute to our understanding of what “mode of existence” means than the dictation of this general tone of the *Inquiry*. Our choice of James, rather than other key figures such as Souriau or Alfred N. Whitehead,³ stems from the fact that James has been quite influential in contemporary anthropology,⁴ and that unleashing the potentialities to be found in a familiar author seems a promising strategy if one wants to push anthropology to be more reflective about the use of “ontology” and “modes of existence.” In particular, this paper focuses on “The Perception of Reality,” the twenty-first chapter of the second volume of the *Principles of Psychology* (1890)⁵ and the most explicitly philosophical of the whole work. While books such as *A Pluralistic Universe* or the *Essays in Radical Empiricism* are often cited, the way in which the *Principles* anticipated many insights about modes of existence remains unrecognized.⁶ Some of the insights that James develops there – for example, the discussion of Kant’s view that existence is not a predicate, which James endorses and modifies according to the position that being is plural – were genuine metaphysical breakthroughs. This will be the occasion to do justice to a text that has much to contribute to our philosophical understanding of “what there is.” But it is from an anthropological point of view that “The Perception of Reality” bears the most relevant potentialities, since it seeks to account for the solidarity between the human ways of being-in-the-world and the way the world itself is divided into many modes. In short, James maintains an internal relationship between his disciplinary field, psychology, and philosophy, and from this point of view he is in a situation similar to that of ontological anthropologists. The fact that he moves from psychology to philosophy

through the plurivocity of being shows that the concept of “mode of existence” needs to be clarified in this passage.

- 9 More specifically, there are *three* insights into the relationship between ontology and human being-in-the-world that James develops in “The Perception of Reality.” First, modes of existence are made dependent on *belief*. The importance of this concept is demonstrated by the fact that “The Perception of Reality” was first published in 1889 as “The Psychology of Belief.” The change of title is revealing. James could have chosen a simpler title such as *Belief*, which would have also been more in keeping with the other chapters of the *Principles*. Instead, the reference to “reality” shows that he is consciously moving from psychology to ontology, with a metaphysical attentiveness from which contemporary anthropology has much to learn.
- 10 The second is James’s insistence on the *genetic differentiation* of modes of existence. “The Perception of Reality” can be seen as a kind of pragmatist rewriting of the beginning of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, a thought experiment explaining how our sense of what is real gradually emerges from an initially undifferentiated ground. The result is an understanding of “ontology” that is much more dynamic than the classical one, and that might defuse protests against talking about ontology in anthropology.
- 11 Finally, James’s account of modes of existence is based on *individual* belief. This is due to his interest in psychology, but it also reflects the ethical and political insights that he will develop in his mature philosophical works. On the one hand, this puts him at odds with the anthropological use of modes of existence to denote the way in which *collectives* relate to the world. On the other hand, it should make it possible to compensate for one of the main problems of ontological anthropology: the danger of erasing the internal differences of the collective. No collective is so homogeneous that it can be spoken of as if it were a single person. Many differences that affect the political impact of anthropology are ignored. If the concept of mode of existence is to be consistent, “endo-pluralism” and intra-collective differences must be taken into account alongside “exo-pluralism” and inter-collective differences.
- 12 If anthropology is to become ontological, it has much to learn from this text in psychology from one hundred and thirty years ago. This paper summarizes the content of “The Perception of Reality” and mentions the subsequent development of James’s pluralism of modes of existence. It then assesses some of the problems raised by the decision to ground the sense of reality in belief. The confrontation with possible criticisms coming from both philosophers and anthropologists shows that, once a definition of modes of existence is found, it can be debated and confronted with alternatives in order to seek cooperative improvement. Anthropology should not be afraid to engage in metaphysical debates, especially if it wishes to maintain its specificity, rather than being absorbed into pure metaphysics.
- 13 Finally, the paper reassesses that “The Perception of Reality” remains necessary for understanding James’s pluralism of modes of existence and his possible contribution to ontological anthropology, although James himself did not consider its upshots definitive. Formally, James shows that the transition from psychology to metaphysics cannot be made without clarifying the concept of “mode of existence.” Materially, the key difference between psychological and anthropological accounts of modes of existence – the former grounding ontology in individual beliefs, the latter in collective “cosmologies” – can also serve to prevent ontological anthropology from repeating domination and colonization by obscuring socially and politically relevant differences.

2. “The Perception of Reality”: A Psychologist’s Breakthrough in Metaphysics

- 14 The chapter on “The Perception of Reality” in the *Principles of Psychology* is actually about *belief*, a fundamental concept in pragmatism. James defines belief as “the sense of reality” (PP2: 286), the “psychic attitude” we reserve for things we hold to be real. As a rule, however, our belief attaches itself to any idea that comes to our mind: “we believe as much as we can. We would believe everything if we only could” (PP2: 298). If our attention is absorbed by a candle, then we cannot help taking that candle as “absolutely” real; the content of the dream is the absolute reality while we are asleep. Only a different, stronger belief can dispel this instinctive belief: “The sense that anything we think of is unreal can only come, then, when that thing is contradicted by some other thing of which we think. *Any object which remains uncontradicted is ipso facto believed and posited as absolute reality*” (PP2: 288-9).
- 15 This does not mean that everything exists in some kind of flat, undifferentiated reality. James guards against “category mistakes” by raising sensitivity to modal differences: “A dream-candle has existence true enough; but not the same existence (existence for itself, namely, or *extra mentem meam*) which the candles of waking perception have. A dream-horse has wings; but then neither horse nor wings are the same with any horses or wings known to memory” (PP2: 290). The fact that the ultimate reality of some objects excludes that of others, without the disbelieved things disappearing, leads to a pluralism of modes of existence in which the things that remain in the background still exist, but *in a different way* from what we take to be actual: they “still have existence, though not the same existence, as the real things. As objects of fancy, as errors, as occupants of dreamland, etc., they are in their way as indefeasible parts of life, as undeniable features of the Universe, as the realities are in their way” (PP2: 291).
- 16 “The total world of which the philosophers must take account is thus composed of the realities *plus* the fancies and illusions” (*ibid.*). There are many “sub-universes” within the world, and James lists the most important ones: the world of sense, that of science, that of ideal relations, the “supernatural” world of myth and art, the worlds of individual and collective error, of abstract or ideal reality, of opinion and of sheer madness. Every idea has an object that is real in one of these worlds: “Every object we think of gets at last referred to one world or another of this or of some similar list. [...] Propositions concerning the different worlds are made from ‘different points of view’ [...] *Each world whilst it is attended to is real after its own fashion*” (PP2: 293; italics added).
- 17 Because of the connection between the concept of belief and that of reality, the subject is enabled to make an active contribution to the definition of “what there is.” James’s enrichment of ontology is rooted in individuality: “*reality means simply relation to our emotional and active life [...]* *The fons et origo of all reality, whether form the absolute or the practical point of view, is thus subjective, is ourselves*” (PP2: 296). The self is the “hook,” the “supporting branch” (PP2: 311) on which all reality hangs, transmitting its reality to all that relates to it. The following passage deserves to be quoted at length:
- Reality, starting from our Ego, thus sheds itself from point to point – first, upon all objects which have an immediate sting of interest for our Ego in them, and next, upon the objects most continuously related with these. It only fails when the connecting thread is lost. A whole system may be real, if it only hang to our Ego by

one immediately *stinging* term. But what contradicts any such stinging term, even though it be another stinging term itself, is either not believed, or only believed after settlement of the dispute. We thus reach the important conclusion that *our own reality, that sense of our own life which we at every moment possess, is the ultimate of ultimates for our belief* [...] The world of living realities as contrasted with unrealities is thus anchored in the Ego, considered as an active and emotional term. That is the hook from which the rest dangles, the absolute support. And as from a painted hook it has been said the one can only hang a painted chin, so conversely, from a real hook only a real chain can properly be hung. *Whatever things have intimate and continuous connection with my life are things of whose reality I cannot doubt.* Whatever things fail to establish this connection are things which are practically no better for me than if they existed not at all. (PP2: 297-8)

- 18 At first sight, this subjectivism runs the risk of depriving the idea of “reality” of any specificity: “in the strict and ultimate sense of the word existence, everything which can be thought of at all exists as some sort of object, whether mythical object, individual thinker’s object, or object in outer space and for intelligence at large” (PP2: 294). But the point is that because being is not univocal, the attribution of reality as such is quite irrelevant: *we need to specify which mode of reality we are talking about.* James’s point becomes clearer if we think of it in genetic terms, as an account of the progressive differentiation of modes of existence from an initially “unmodalized *Urdoxa*”:

If I have no experience at all, the very first experience must have the character of reality for me because I have no reason to doubt. [...] What would be the point of doubting the reality of the candle? Here, where there is no experience yet, seeing must coincide with “believing,” with accepting the candle as reality. (Linschoten 1961: 189)

- 19 As soon as “reductives” appear that contradict the objects of our beliefs, our commitment to them must be relativized: “the real things are [...] the reductive of the things judged unreal” (PP2: 291), meaning that the more modes are considered, the more they tend to form some “system,” the more our sense of reality becomes sophisticated and differentiated. “Unreal” things do not really fall out of reality, but this does not contradict James’s commitment to a form of realism. *Modes of existence are defined in their relations to each other*, and they are ultimately arranged in a world of many worlds that is disclosed in the long run.
- 20 “The perception of reality” provides a basis for the pluralism of modes of existence that is at once psychological, epistemological and ontological. James came to see the aim of philosophy itself in the study of intermodal relations:

The popular mind conceived of all these sub-worlds more or less disconnectedly; and when dealing with one of them, forgets for the time being its relations to the rest. The complete philosopher is he who seeks not only to assign to every given object of his thought its right place in one or other of these sub-worlds, but he also seeks to determine the relation of each sub-world to the others in the total world which is. (*Ibid.*)

- 21 It is no exaggeration to say that, for James, modes of existence are the primary object of philosophy. The fact that in the final chapter of the *Principles*, “Necessary Truths and the Effects of Experience,” James uses the results of “The Perception of Reality” to develop an elaborate system of modes of existence that has little to envy those found in Souriau, Simondon or Latour is a striking demonstration of this. From the “paramount” reality, the world of sense, many worlds branch out: there is the world of science, which does not contradict the concrete relations of experience even if it does not

reproduce them (PP2: 641, 667, 668); the world of ideal and immutable relations, which emerges from the world of sense as independent of it (PP2: 661); the worlds of aesthetic, ethics and of metaphysical postulates, which have a “normative” function, pushing the perceiver towards the performative realization of their “utopias” (PP2: 639, 670-1, 677).

- 22 James will never be as confident about the possibility of developing a true “system” of modes as he is in the *Principles*, but the idea that being comes in many flavors is repeated throughout his philosophical work. To take just two cases from his last books, in *Some problems of philosophy* and in the *Essays in radical empiricism*, he writes that:

Philosophy must thus recognize many realms of reality which mutually interpenetrate. The conceptual systems of mathematics, logic, aesthetics, ethics, are such realms, each strung upon some peculiar form of relation, and each differing from perceptual reality in that in no one of them is history or happening displayed. Perceptual reality involves and contains all these ideal systems, and vastly more besides. (James 1911: 101-2)

[T]here is no general stuff of which experience at large is made. There are as many stuffs as there are “natures” in the things experienced. If you ask what any one bit of pure experience is made of, the answer is always the same: “It is made of *that*, of just what appears, of space, of intensity, of flatness, brownness, heaviness, or what not” [...] Experience is only a collective name for all these sensible natures, and save for time and space (and, if you like, for “being”) there appears no universal element of which all things are made. (James 1912: 26-7)

- 23 “The perception of reality” was a metaphysical breakthrough, the results of which remained central to James’s mature philosophical outlook. Through its genetic ontology and its grounding of modes of existence in human ways of being-in-the-world, it points to many ways in which anthropology could clarify its understanding of ontology. However, this account is not without its own problems. Before returning to anthropology, let us address some of these to show how metaphysical debates are needed if anthropology is to clarify its ontological stakes.

3. Is it Belief that brings Universes Into Being?

- 24 James presents his concept of belief as a reworking of Brentano’s concept of judgement (Kerstner 1969). This is important from a historical point of view, because contemporary philosophies of modes of existence began when Edmund Husserl and Alexius Meinong took up their master Franz Brentano’s characterization of mental acts in terms of intentionality to ground their view that being has many modes: Husserl’s “regional ontology” and Meinong’s “object theory” begin with the recognition that there must be as many kinds of being as there are ways of (intentionally) relating to it (Schmidgen 2016). Modes of existence entered philosophical discourse because of a “referential constraint” that forced all kinds of thought to have some kind of intentional object. “The Perception of Reality” anticipated both Husserl and Meinong by giving a pragmatist account of the grounding of the differentiation of modes of existence in the intentional relation between the subject and the world.⁷ Moreover, by reducing psychic life to “belief,” James made the link between intentionality and ontology even more explicit, since belief implies commitment to what it refers to.
- 25 The coupling between the univocity of belief and the multifariousness of reality is the most characteristic and potentially problematic point of James’s account. Despite his

work on Aristotle, Brentano was a radical defender of the univocity of being. He was angered by Husserl and Meinong's pluralizing use of intentionality and sought to reformulate it in order to reassess univocity,⁸ and he would probably have reacted in the same way to James. It is no coincidence that another of his students, Anton Marty (1892), reviewed *The Principles of Psychology* by laying great stress on the "tangle of equivocations" of "The Perception of Reality," on the "sheer chaos" caused by its generalization of belief, and on the need to return to a form of univocity of being. This is not the place to explore Marty's reading in detail, but we can state his central claim as follows: by making all intentional acts univocal on the model of belief, James is forced to account for the diversity of phenomena by postulating that this diversity lies *in things themselves*, i.e. that there are different modes of existence.

- 26 Indeed, this is a good way of conveying what anthropologists seem to mean when they talk about the "ontological turn." Differences are not merely in our mental states, nor are they merely "cultural differences," but they are to be found in things themselves. Ontological anthropology affirms the internal relation between the constitution of the world and the way the *anthropos* relates to it, which Marty criticizes in James's account because of his Brentanian endorsement of univocity.
- 27 However, some anthropologists have also stressed that ontological commitment cannot be taken as univocal, or rather that human beings are not necessarily "committed" in an ontological sense to what they include in their cosmology. Even if we admit that belief is a viable route to the heterogeneity of things, can we also take it as a route to the *reality* of that heterogeneity? In real life, people often act according to something they do not, strictly speaking, hold to be real. Commitment may only be a "pretension," and the "existence" to which it is bound may be an "as if" existence (Walton 1990). "Fictionalist" accounts based on a distinction between true belief and mere "acceptance," the latter being compatible with agnosticism or even positive unbelief, have a remarkable genealogy in Western philosophy, from Pyrrhonism through Kant, Nietzsche, Vaihinger, and some forms of pragmatism itself. If belief does not bind us to what is believed, then James's foundation for the pluralism of modes of existence seems to fall.
- 28 Let us take two examples. In a brilliant study of myth as a regime of enunciation, Paul Veyne (1983), drawing on Michel Foucault and Alfred Schütz (who was directly influenced by "The Perception of Reality"), argues that the Greeks did not, strictly speaking, believe in their myths, which did not prevent them from behaving as if their world were populated by Olympian gods: "How is it possible to half-believe, or believe in contradictory things? Children believe that Santa Claus comes down the chimney, bringing them toys, and at the same time believe that these toys are put there by their parents" (Veyne 1983: xi). David Graeber, in an important paper drawing on a considerable body of anthropological material, has similarly argued that it is actually the *value* we place on certain sub-universes of reality that brings them into being:

Whether anyone *believes* in the reality of these universes is usually inconsequential. This, in turn, is what makes it so easy, in contexts characterized by complex and overlapping arenas of values, for so many actors to simply stroll back and forth between one universe and another without feeling any profound sense of contradiction or even unease [...] ordinarily, we assume that for those who embrace these cosmic systems, all this is the very definition of reality. But while this is clearly true in some cases, it does not necessarily have to be. (Graeber 2013: 231-2)

- 29 Myths are often intended as a kind of “cosmic play” rather than as true cosmologies. As a result, Graeber adds polemically, “the anthropological fascination with ‘cosmologies,’ like the later fascination with ‘ontologies’ that largely grew out of it, might seem to entirely miss the mark” (*ibid.*).
- 30 It is difficult to see how James’s univocal view of intentionality as belief can admit that *some* beliefs do not imply ontological commitment without forcing one to postulate that *no* beliefs imply commitment. The point, however, is that Veyne’s and Graeber’s accounts imply a *demarcating* conception of existence: either the gods exist or they don’t; either cosmologies are believed to be real or they are “cosmic plays.” On the contrary, in the light of subsequent philosophy and of ontological anthropology, we can say that James’s point is precisely that *existence is always modally qualified*. Pretense implies commitment to a mode of existence *other than* the actual – in James’s terms, pretense is a subclass of belief, and “as if” existence is a mode of existence in its own right. The Greeks did not believe that their gods actually existed; Zeus and Aphrodite nevertheless existed in a different, “mythical” mode. The same is true of the collectives Graeber examines: in order to counter an ontological anthropology that would allow “amodern” collectives to express their cosmologies in their own idiom, Graeber superimposes on them the typically modern dualism between commitment and pretense.
- 31 A defender of a Jamesian account of belief should insist that fictional or agnostic commitments do shape the way we relate to the world in ways that modernism and “mononaturalism” have blinded us to. Ontological commitment should never be thought of exclusively in terms of the mode of actuality; it should be multifarious, as the world is. James’s univocal view of belief is meant to allow the heterogeneity of the real to proliferate without being ruptured by essentialist differences between what there is and what we merely believe in: in Latour’s words, “differentiation” begins when “demarcations” are abandoned. In this way, the pragmatist concept of belief can also be saved from criticism coming from the opposite direction: in particular, Latour (1996) attacked the concept of belief used by the Moderns to denote the *mere* beliefs of other collectives as opposed to the real, univocal Nature defined by Science. Belief is needed when reality is nowhere to be found. For Latour, in order to allow non-modern cosmologies to contribute to the definition of “what there is,” we have to stop believing in belief.⁹ James’s distinctly “amodern” use of belief allows the pragmatist vocabulary to be retained while acknowledging the legitimacy of Latour’s concerns.

4. Conclusion: James and Contemporary Anthropology

- 32 The fact that his psychological grounding of modes of existence did not present insoluble problems did not lead James to embrace it dogmatically. When his interest in pure psychology began to wane, he felt the need to give up psychological accounts in order to move directly to metaphysics. The abandonment of the idea that modes of existence are grounded in intentionality is best seen in the conferences “The Function of Cognition” (1884) and “The Tigers in India” (1895), both printed in *The Meaning of Truth* (1909). The influence of Brentano is evident in statements about the “*intentional inexistence* of the tigers in our mind” and the possibility of “mentally *pointing* towards them as we sit here” (James 1909: 853). However, James’s dissatisfaction with this intentional basis is evident both in the coda he added to “The Function of Cognition”

for publication and in “The Tigers in India” as a whole. The crucial point is that James *rejects any transcendence of the object of thought*. This is what James wrote in 1995, five years after “The Perception of Reality”:

The pointing of our thought to the tigers is known simply and solely as a procession of mental associates and motor consequences that follow on the thought, and that would lead harmoniously, if followed out, into some ideal or real context, or even into the immediate presence, of the tigers. [...] In all this there is no self-transcendancy in our mental images *taken by themselves*. They are one phenomenal fact; the tigers are another; and their pointing to the tigers is a perfectly commonplace intra-experiential relation, *if you once grant a connecting world to be there*. In short, the ideas and the tigers are in themselves as loose and separate, to use Hume’s language, as any two things can be; and pointing means here an operation as external and adventitious as any that nature yields. [...] in representative knowledge there is no special inner mystery, but only an outer chain of physical or mental intermediaries connecting thought and thing. *To know an object is here to lead to it through a context which the world supplies.* (James 1909: 853-4)

- 33 James calls this understanding of knowledge “ambulatory,” as opposed to “saltatory,” a view that Latour (2007a) will adopt to ground his view of “reference” as a mode of existence. Thought does not “point” to something that transcends it, because it emerges with its objects from what James will later call the world of “pure experience.” This is the “connective world” that this understanding of knowledge requires. The transcendental subject is fused on the plane of pure experience as one part of experience among others, and verification takes place *within* the field of experience. The plurality of modes of existence is now encountered directly in this world, and belief becomes an unnecessary mediation.
- 34 Intentionality was needed to introduce James to the pluralism of modes of existence but proved unnecessary once his concerns became exclusively metaphysical. It is precisely for this reason that a discipline like anthropology cannot overlook what James did in “The Perception of Reality,” the text which first elaborated the idea that the multiplicity of human ways of relating to the world must correlate with the multifariousness of the world itself. James’s attempt to build a bridge from psychology to ontology was underpinned by an awareness of the need for a consistent understanding of modes of existence as a foundation. His belief-centered account of modes remains only one option among others, and anthropologists need not necessarily adopt it. However, “The Perception of Reality” is a reminder that anthropology cannot avoid ontological debates if it is to appropriate the ontological vocabulary, and one of the best examples of how this can be done without abandoning a disciplinary framework centered on our being-in-the-world.
- 35 There is another lesson that anthropology can learn from a psychology textbook from a hundred and thirty years ago. It seems that accounts of modes of existence as grounded in human relations to the world can be divided into two groups: either the differentiation of modes is grounded in individual or collective intentionality.¹⁰ James and ontological anthropology are at opposite ends of this spectrum: for the former, the source of the differentiation of modes is individual belief, whereas for the authors of the ontological turn modes of existence are relative to some “collective.” A middle ground between their accounts could be sought, for example, through the mature James’s concerns about solipsism, or through concepts such as Simondon’s “transindividual.”¹¹ However, given the scope of this paper, a better use of the little

space we have left is to ask if and how James's individualism can contribute to the ontological turn.

- 36 One of the most common criticisms of ontological anthropology is that, by flattening the "Others" into a single static "cosmology," it renews colonialism and masks the exclusion of those who, for various reasons, cannot be integrated into the collective (Ramos 2012; Fortun 2014; Watson 2014; Todd 2016; Gamberi 2019). This applies to the modern collective itself, of which Latour in particular has an unrealistically homogeneous view (Elam 1999; Mallavarapu & Amit 2006). By highlighting the psychological mechanisms at the root of any systematization of modes of existence, "The Perception of Reality" can serve as a critical constraint on this claim of ontological anthropology. It is almost trivial to stress that individual belief is always filtered through social and cultural conditioning. But James's account reminds us that individual belief is something *through which* a cosmology must always pass in order to be reproduced. This reassesses one of Latour's lessons, that what we call "social" has no intrinsic inertia, that it must pass through each of its mediations again and again in order to be maintained. In this process, the exclusion of those who cannot be made to share the collective cosmology can become apparent. James's account draws attention to those fragile beings that cannot reach beyond a single mind, but that are nevertheless parts of what some would call their cosmology.¹² Ontological anthropology must always keep the risk of violence and colonization as one of its criticalities. Returning to belief before moving on to cosmology might allow the excluded back into anthropological theory.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BELLA Michela & Thibaud TROCHU, (2022), "William James: lectures européennes," *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger*, 147(4), 447-54.
- BESSIRE Lucas & David BOND, (2014), "Ontological Anthropology and the Deferral of Critique," *American Ethnologist*, 41(3), 440-56. Online: https://www.bennington.edu/sites/default/files/sources/docs/Bond_David-Bessire_Lucas-Ontological_Anthropology_and_the_Deferral_of_Critique_2014_AE.pdf.
- CHARBONNIER Pierre, SALMON Gildas & Peter SKAFISH (eds), (2017), *Comparative Metaphysics: Ontology after Anthropology*, London, Rowman & Littlefield.
- CEFAÏ Daniel, (2023), "Le public selon Bruno Latour," *Pragmata. Revue d'études pragmatistes*, 6, 583-696. Online: <https://revuepragmata.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/pragmata-2023-n6-19-daniel-cefai.pdf>.
- DE LA CADENA Marisol & Mario BLASER (eds), (2018), *A World of Many Worlds*, Durham, Duke University Press.
- DEBAISE Didier, (2023), "La terre des modernes: le sens du pragmatisme de Bruno Latour," *Pragmata. Revue d'études pragmatistes*, 6, 408-24. Online: <https://revuepragmata.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/pragmata-2023-n6-13-didier-debaise.pdf>.

- DESCOLA Philippe, (2014a), "Modes of Being and Forms of Predication," *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 4(1), 271-80. Online: <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdfplus/10.14318/hau4.1.012>.
- DESCOLA Philippe, (2014b/2024), *The Composition of Worlds: Interviews with Pierre Charbonnier*, Cambridge Polity.
- EDIE James, (1987), *William James and Phenomenology*, Indianapolis, Indiana University Press.
- ELAM Mark, (1999), "Living Dangerously with Bruno Latour in a Hybrid World," *Theory, Culture & Society*, 16(4), 1-24.
- ESCOBAR Arturo, (2020), *Pluriversal Politics: The Real and the Possible*, Durham, Duke University Press.
- FORTUN Kim, (2014) "From Latour to Late Industrialism," *Hau: Journal of Anthropological Theory*, 4(1), 309-29. Online: <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.14318/hau4.1.017>.
- FRIGERIO Christian, (2024), "The Flywheel of the Collective: Bruno Latour on Aesthetic Habits and the Practice of Sensibility," *Aisthesis*, 17(1), 93-109. Online: <https://mimesisjournals.com/ojs/index.php/aisthesis/article/view/4208/3307>.
- GABRIEL Markus, (2015), *Fields of Sense: A New Realist Ontology*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press.
- GALLAGHER Shaun, (2009), "Delusional Realities," in Matthew R. Broome & Lisa Bortolotti (eds), *Psychiatry as Cognitive Neuroscience: Philosophical Perspectives*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 245-66.
- GAMBERI Valentina, (2019), "Metamorfosi: decolonizzazione vera o apparente?," in Roberto Brigati & Valentina Gamberi (eds), *Metamorfosi: la svolta ontologica in antropologia*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 11-52.
- GILLE Baptiste, (2017), "Ordering What is: The Political Implications of Ontological Knowledge," in Pierre Charbonnier, Gildas Salmon & Peter Skafish (eds), *Comparative Metaphysics: Ontology after Anthropology*, London, Rowman & Littlefield, 301-26.
- GRAEBER David, (2013), "It is Value that Brings Universes Into Being," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 3(2), 219-43. Online: <https://www.haujournal.org/index.php/hau/article/view/hau3.2.012>.
- HENNION Antoine, (2018), "Préface," in François Thoreau & Ariane D'Hoop (eds), *L'Appel des entités fragile: enquêter avec les modes d'existence de Bruno Latour*, Liège, Presse universitaires de Liège, 7-12.
- HENNION Antoine, (2023), "Introduction," *Pragmata. Revue d'études pragmatistes*, 6, 296-340. Online: <https://revuepragmata.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/pragmata-2023-n6-9-antoine-hennion.pdf>.
- HEYWOOD Paolo, (2012), "Anthropology and What There is: Reflections on 'Ontology'," *Cambridge Anthropology*, 30(1), 143-51.
- JAMES William, (1889), "The Psychology of Belief," *Mind*, 14(55), 321-52. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2247316.pdf>.
- JAMES William, (1890a/2019), *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. I, New York, Dover.
- JAMES William, (1890b/2019), *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. II, New York, Dover.
- JAMES William, (1909), *The Meaning of Truth: A Sequel to Pragmatism*, New York, Longmans.
- JAMES William, (1910/2009), *A Pluralistic Universe*, Rockville, Arc Manor.

- JAMES William, (1911), *Some Problems of Philosophy*, New York, Longmans.
- JAMES William, (1912), *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, New York, Longmans.
- KERSTEN Fred, (1969), "Franz Brentano and William James," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 7(2), 177-91. Online: <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/229468/pdf>.
- LATOUR Bruno, (1996/2010), *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods*, Durham, Duke University Press.
- LATOUR Bruno, (2005), *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- LATOUR Bruno, (2007a), "A Textbook Case Revisited: Knowledge as Mode of Existence," in Edward J. Hackett (ed.), *The Handbook of Science and Technology Studies*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 83-112.
- LATOUR Bruno, (2007b), "Turning Around Politics: A Note on Gerard de Vries' Paper," *Social Studies of Science*, 37(5), 811-20. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25474548>.
- LATOUR Bruno, (2011), "Love your Monsters," in Ted Nordhaus & Michael Shellenberger (eds), *Love your Monsters: Postenvironmentalism and the Anthropocene*, New York, Breakthrough, 17-25.
- LATOUR Bruno, (2012/2013), *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.
- LATOUR Bruno, (2014), "Another Way to Compose the Common World," *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 4(1), 301-7. Online: <https://www.haujournal.org/index.php/hau/article/view/hau4.1.016>.
- LATOUR Bruno, (2015), "Waking Up From 'Conjecture' As Well As From 'Dream' – A Presentation of AIME," *Tsantsa*, 20, 34-40. Online: <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/133-GAD-TSANTSA-2015pdf.pdf>.
- LATOUR Bruno & Christophe LECLERCQ (eds), (2016), *Reset Modernity!*, Cambridge, The MIT Press.
- LINSCHOTEN Johannes, (1961), *Auf dem Wege zu einer Phänomenologischen Psychologie: Die Psychologie von William James*, Berlin, De Gruyter.
- MALLAVARAPU Srikanth & Prasad AMIT, (2006), "Facts, Fetishes, and the Parliament of Thing: Is there Any Space for Critique?," *Social Epistemology*, 20(2), 185-99. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02691720600784782>.
- MANIGLIER Patrice, (2014), "A Metaphysical Turn? Bruno Latour's *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*," *Radical Philosophy*, 187, 37-40.
- MARTY Anton, (1892), "Anzeige von William James' Werk 'Principles of Psychology'," in Anton Marty, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. I/1, *Mit einem Lebensabriss und einem Bildnis*, Niemeyer, Halle, 105-56.
- MULLIGAN Kevin, (2019), "Modes of Being and the Mind," in Miroslaw Szatkowski (ed.), *Quo Vadis, Metaphysics? Essays in Honor of Peter van Inwagen*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 183-202.
- QUEREJAZU Amaya, (2016), "Encountering the Pluriverse: Looking for Alternatives in other Worlds," *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional*, 59(2). Online: <https://www.scielo.br/j/rbpi/a/3pnFKpXVxnqS4vs5jBPwJXv/?lang=en>.
- RAMOS Alcida, (2012), "The Politics of Perspectivism," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 41, 481-94.
- SALINAS Francisco, (2014), "Bruno Latour's Pragmatic Realism: An Ontological Inquiry," *Global Discourse*, 1-14. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23269995.2014.992597>.

- SCHMIDGEN Henning, (2016), “*Mode d’existence: Memoir of a Concept*,” in Bruno Latour & Christophe Leclercq (eds), *Reset Modernity!*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 320-7.
- SERRES Michel, (2003), “The Science of Relations: An Interview,” *Angelaki*, 8(2), 227-38.
- SHEEHY Bonnie, (2019), “Methodologies of Travel: William James and the Ambulatory Pragmatism of Bruno Latour,” *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 33(4), 571-89.
- SIMONDON Gilbert, (1958/2017), *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, Minneapolis, Univocal.
- SOURIAU Étienne, (1943/2015), *The Different Modes of Existence*, Minneapolis, Univocal.
- TODD Zoe, (2016), “An Indigenous Feminist’s Take on the Ontological Turn: ‘Ontology’ is just Another Word for Colonialism,” *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 29(1), 4-22.
- VEYNE Paul, (1983), *Did the Greeks believe in their Myths?*, Chicago, The Chicago University Press.
- VIVEIROS DE CASTRO Eduardo, (1996/2014), *Cannibal Metaphysics: For a Post-Structural Anthropology*, Minneapolis, Univocal.
- VIVEIROS DE CASTRO Eduardo, (2016), “On the Modes of Existence of the Extramoderns,” in Bruno Latour & Christophe Leclercq (eds), *Reset Modernity!*, Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 491-6.
- WALTON Kendall, (1990), “Existence as Metaphor?,” in Anthony Everett & Thomas Hofweber (eds), *Empty Names, Fiction, and the Puzzles of Non-Existence*, Stanford, CSLI Publications, 69-94.
- WATSON Matthew, (2014), “Derrida, Stengers, Latour, and Subalternist Cosmopolitics,” *Theory, Culture & Society*, 31(1), 75-98.
- WEBER Tomas, (2016), “Metaphysics of the Common World: Whitehead, Latour, and the Modes of Existence,” *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 30(4), 515-33.
- WILDE Jessica, (2013), “Mit Bruno Latour auf der Spur zu einer pragmatistischen Sozialtheorie,” *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 38, 215-39.

NOTES

1. Against the “rather enucleated” version of pragmatism proposed by Rorty and Putnam, Latour urges a revival of the classical pragmatism of James, John Dewey and, more surprisingly, Walter Lippman, who were able to make politics and thought turn around *things* – *pragmata* in Greek (Latour 2007b, 2011). He traces a pragmatist genealogy of his work as follows: “There is clearly a vast distance between the experience moderns *have* and what they are *supposed* to experience – as if they could never get what is happening to them. Yes, as if moderns were constantly distracted, unable to give attention to their attachments [...] Pragmatism as a philosophical school had attempted to direct our attention to experience [...] Indeed, pragmatism also tried to reset the modernist project as it had developed from Kant onward through the industrial revolution and colonization, but it failed to build any middle ground. Today, largely because of ecological mutations, moderns are trying to escape from the pseudo-problems they have multiplied to avoid being of this earth. So, in a sense, pragmatism comes to fruition a century late when the ‘earth’ begins to replace ‘the globe’” (Latour & Leclercq 2016: 408). On Latour’s pragmatism, see also Wilde 2013, Salinas 2014, Debaise 2023, Hennion 2023.
2. The derivation of “reference” from James’s “deambulatory knowledge” is explicit in Latour 2007a; see also Sheehy 2019. Latour’s definition of habit is evidently Jamesian in character: see Frigerio 2024.

3. Whitehead is important for Latour's *Inquiry*, particularly for his attack on the modern "bifurcation of nature": see Weber 2016.
4. The credit goes in particular to Isabelle Stengers. Although James is not always mentioned, his concept of the "pluriverse" has become standard in anthropology: see Querejazu 2016, de la Cadena & Blaser 2018, Escobar 2020.
5. The second volume of the *Principles of Psychology* (James 1890b/2019) is henceforth referred to as PP2, followed by the page number.
6. The only exception, to my knowledge, is Kevin Mulligan 2019. The reason for this neglect is probably the notoriously convoluted influence of the *Principles of Psychology* (Bella & Trochu 2022) and in particular of "The Perception of Reality." Souriau was familiar with the *Principles*, but he never refers to "The Perception of Reality." On the other hand, Alfred Schütz's work was influenced by "The Perception of Reality," and Schütz's influence on Harold Garfinkel's ethnomethodology provides a link to the ontological turn, since ethnomethodology is the tradition to which Latour returns to follow the modes of existence defined by modern practices (see especially Latour 2005).
7. It is no coincidence that phenomenology was strongly influenced by "The Perception of Reality": see Edie 1987.
8. See Oskar Kraus's introduction to the 1924 reprint of Brentano's *Psychologie*, which is entirely devoted to defending univocity against the equivocations of Husserl and Meinong.
9. Veyne is among those accused by Latour (1996: 127, fn 5) of believing too much in belief.
10. This difference can be seen in Simondon's *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* (1958/2017). Henning Schmidgen has noted how, in the third part of this book, Simondon abandons the phenomenological analysis of technics in order to incorporate it into a comprehensive philosophy of culture: "the concept of the mode of being is not limited to a phenomenological or ontological characterization of a specific type of object, but rather turns into a consideration – grounded, ultimately, in sociology and/or history – of how the object is embedded in particular modes of thought and action." In this way, the framing of the problem of modes of existence based on intentionality – Schmidgen mentions Husserl, but James should be included – "is itself revealed to be a problem. What it has always lacked is a critical understanding of the fact that objects' modes of existence cannot be separated from societies' historically specific modes of production and reproduction" (Schmidgen 2016: 326).
11. "Transindividual" means, roughly, that relations are prior to both individuals and the "whole" they form, and that modes therefore *emerge along with* the subjects attached to them.
12. This is why "The Perception of Reality" has been used to interpret phenomena such as schizophrenic delusion (Gallagher 2009).

ABSTRACTS

The ontological turn is one of the most debated issues in contemporary anthropology, but what it means for anthropology to become ontological is rarely made clear. Bruno Latour's suggestion that anthropology should revolve around "modes of existence" is arguably the most robust proposal to date, but the connection between modes of existence and properly anthropological concerns remains obscure. This paper argues that William James is a key figure for getting a better understanding of what ontology and modes of existence mean, and that in particular "The Perception of Reality" – chapter XXI of the second volume of the *Principles of Psychology* – offers

many possibilities for linking a framework centered on human being-in-the-world, such as anthropology, with properly metaphysical concerns. In this paper, the content of “The Perception of Reality” is summarized, and James’s proposal to ground modes of existence on belief is discussed, to show how, once we are clear about what we mean by “ontology,” anthropology can (and should) engage in metaphysical debates in order to make its stakes explicit. The conclusion suggests that James’s grounding of modes of existence on individual belief can compensate for ontological anthropology’s tendency to erase the internal differences of a collective in order to speak of a supposedly unified and homogeneous “cosmology.”

INDEX

Keywords: William James, Bruno Latour, Pragmatism, Anthropology, Ontological Turn

AUTHOR

CHRISTIAN FRIGERIO

University of Milan

christian.frigerio1[at]unimi.it

Symposia

Luigi Perissinotto (dir.)

On Anna Boncompagni's *Wittgenstein on Forms of Life*

Gesturing Towards The Contingent

Lars Hertzberg

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I wish to thank David Cockburn for comments on this text.

- 1 1. Anna Boncompagni has written a thorough, lucid and persuasive account of Wittgenstein's use of the expression "form of life," of its historical background and of the debate surrounding the concept. I am very largely in agreement with her argument, in particular I think her central contention that the concept of a form of life has a methodological rather than a substantive role in Wittgenstein's thinking is insightful and important. I also think she is right in the connected claim that Wittgenstein's use of the concept is not unified but multiform (even if, she argues, a certain development in Wittgenstein's use of the expression can be discerned). A form of life – as an aspect of human behaviour – may be local or universal, it may be specific or general. In this connection it is important to realize, as Boncompagni points out, that the expression "form of life," in Wittgenstein's work, is not to be thought of as a specialized term of art; in using it Wittgenstein was actually falling back on a turn of phrase which was in common use at the time (as it still is today).
- 2 Furthermore, Boncompagni steers clear of taking sides in the debate on whether form of life is primarily to be understood as a biological or a cultural notion. Again, this point is closely connected with her claim that the concept of form of life is not substantive. In fact, it could be argued that the biology/culture issue is spurious, since biology and culture are interdependent: on the one hand, the way our natural needs and propensities will manifest themselves depends on our cultural environment – and thus will vary from one society to another – and on the other hand any human culture must accommodate our natural needs and propensities – hence there are limits to the possible variations. I would argue that the attempt to designate some feature of our life as either rooted in biology or as culturally conditioned makes sense only against the background of the other variable being held constant.

- 3 2. It may be noted that the emphasis in Wittgenstein's discussion of forms of life is cognitive rather than evaluative. Rather than being concerned with the things people cherish or strive for, it is intended to throw light on our shared ways of describing, classifying or investigating things, as brought out in what Boncompagni calls the second and third cluster of remarks on forms of life. (This distinction, of course, is not a sharp one: we should keep in mind that our descriptions and classifications are themselves a reflection of what matters to us.)
- 4 I would suggest that the role of the invocation of forms of life – as presented by Boncompagni – can be characterized as that of “gesturing towards the contingent.” I talk of *gesturing* because the appeal to forms of life is not an exhortation to delve into the details of this or that specific way of living but rather to recognize the role common ways of acting have for our shared language. Boncompagni speaks of “the fundamentality and inescapability of forms of life as the level at which philosophical analysis must stop” (Boncompagni 2022: 56).
- 5 The concept of form of life, I would suggest, shares this character of being a gesture with the concept of language-game as employed by Wittgenstein. Apart from the builders' game at the beginning of the *Philosophical Investigations*, which is used as a means of introducing the notion of language-game, Wittgenstein's references to language-games are mostly generic. Little attempt is made to characterize the specific language-games referred to, nor would it serve his purpose to do so. The reader is left to fill in the details where needed.
- 6 The reason one might say that the gesture points toward the *contingent*, on the other hand, is that there are no a priori restrictions on the shape that our ways of judging and categorizing may take. This is a point on which Wittgenstein deviates strongly from traditional Western philosophy, in which a search for the a priori, for necessary truth, whether in the empiricist or the rationalist tradition, has been a pervasive theme.
- 7 Thus (on p. 25-8), Boncompagni discusses Wittgenstein's remark: “What has to be accepted, the given, is – one might say – forms of life” (PPF: §345). She argues that Wittgenstein is here countering the empiricist idea that the given is “specific experiences”; on that conception, what it means for speakers of a language to have a shared understanding of a word, say, a colour word, is for them to connect it with one and the same experience. However, this would presuppose that all it would take to *define* colour words – to delimit their area of application – would be to concentrate on specific experiences in one's mind. But this does not make sense – for one thing, there would be no room for discussing whether two experiences were to count as the same (cp PI: §258). Wittgenstein, according to lecture notes, puts it as follows:
- The specific is something that has to be *shown* publicly. What *can* be shown publicly and are specific are certain phenomena of life... Take any such phenomenon as comparing colours, measuring time, comparing lengths, playing games. These are specific. (Wittgenstein 1988, quoted by Boncompagni 2022: 27-8)
- 8 In other words, the meanings of colour words are a matter of their role in various shared activities: apart from comparing colours for particular purposes, we try to achieve a certain hue by mixing colours, we try to judge the condition of a fruit by its colour, we recognize objects based on their colour, we judge whether two colours go well together in getting dressed or in decorating a room, etc. The way these activities will be carried out is not predetermined by the specific colour experiences individuals

have, rather the activities are given their shape in the context of the form of life to which they belong. It is in that context that the question “same experience or different?” has a life.

- 9 As Wittgenstein puts it in RPP I §630 (quoted by Boncompagni on p. 26), in a formulation presaging that of PPF §345:

Instead of the unanalysable, specific, indefinable: the fact that we act in such- and- such ways, e.g. punish certain actions, establish the state of affair thus and so, give orders, render accounts, describe colours, take an interest in others’ feelings. What has to be accepted, the given – it might be said – are facts of living.

- 10 By adding the phrase “it might be said” [“*könnte man sagen*”], Wittgenstein indicates that the term “the given” is here being used in a sense that deviates from the customary one. (The person who has to do the accepting here, it should be pointed out, is the philosopher reflecting on what it means to share a language.)

- 11 Now the notion of the contingency of forms of life is also counterpoised to the idea that our reasoning is somehow set to proceed in a preordained way. Wittgenstein challenges this idea in his discussion of rule-following, for instance when it comes to continuing a number series. The fact that “doing the same thing” in continuing the series “2, 4, 6 ...” would mean writing “1002” rather than “1004” after “1000” is not based on an *interpretation* of the beginning of the series, since there is no single way in which that beginning is to be interpreted, except with regard to our actual practice – and this might have been different. Boncompagni quotes a Wittgenstein manuscript on this point, in a remark that presages *Philosophical Investigations* §241:

“How is the application of a rule fixed?” – Do you mean, “logically” fixed? Either through other rules, or nothing at all. – Or do you mean: how is it, that we all apply it in agreement [*übereinstimmend*] in this way and not otherwise? By training, discipline, and the forms of our life [*die Formen unsres Lebens*]. It is not a consent [*Consens*] of opinion, but of forms of life [*Lebensformen*]. (MS 160: 26r-26v; quoted by Boncompagni 2022: 20; translation by her)

- 12 The fact, say, that mathematicians normally agree on how to proceed in their proofs and calculations does not mean that the correct way of proceeding is somehow laid down in the structure of human reason, but is simply a matter of the ways in which they have been taught to proceed in being introduced to “the mathematical form of life,” which includes taking up an attitude towards disagreement as something to be shunned.

- 13 In short, in drawing attention to the contingency of forms of life, Wittgenstein is providing an antidote to the temptations both of empiricism and of rationalism.

- 14 3. There are some points of nuance or emphasis to which I should like to draw attention. Thus, consider Wittgenstein’s use of the word “agreement” as it occurs in the above quotation as well as in *Philosophical Investigations* §241:

“So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?” – What is true or false is what human beings say; and it is in their *language* that human beings agree. This is not agreement in opinions, but rather in form of life.

- 15 In fact, what is here called agreement in language may actually be brought out in a case in which two individuals *disagree in their opinions*. Two car mechanics may disagree on the reason a car will not start: one of them thinks it is a problem with the fuel supply, while the other is convinced there is something the matter with the ignition. They may still agree in language, as shown, for instance, by the fact that they agree on the

method by which the matter is to be settled. Of course, they may also have some disagreement on that level, but sooner or later they must find a way of coming together on the issue, or at least agree on how the problem ought ideally to be solved. If no such level of agreement is reached, we might conclude that they do not agree in their language.

- 16 Similarly, for two individuals to agree on the application on a set of rules may not consist in their acting in the *same* way. For a simple example, consider two individuals harvesting apples: one of them climbs a ladder to get at the apples, then throws them onto a sheet held by the other, while the other tries to catch them in the sheet. Their actions, we might say, though different, are in alignment with one another.
- 17 For a more complex relation, consider the actions of the pitcher and the batsman in a baseball game. The pitcher throws the ball in the direction of the batsman, who in turn tries to swing at the ball with his bat. On the one hand, the ball must be thrown within reach of the batsman, but on the other hand the pitcher will try to thwart the batsman's attempt to hit it by throwing it with a speed and a spin which will make it difficult to hit. If the pitcher throws the ball wide of the mark, the throw violates the rules of the game. But if he purposely makes it easy to hit the ball, he is not really playing the game.
- 18 In order to judge whether or not people's actions or language are in alignment it is not enough to attend to what they say or do; we have to take into account the role of their actions or words within the practice or the language-game.
- 19 We might ask whether "agreement" is the best translation of "*Übereinstimmung*" here. I would not claim that the translation is wrong, but for clarity it might be better to speak of people's actions, or their use of words, being *in alignment* (or: in tune?) with one another. The words "agreement" or "disagreement" only come into play when there is debate on whether or not someone has been following the rules. In this way agreement in applying rules and agreement in language differ from the "agreement in judgments" to which Wittgenstein refers in the next remark of the *Philosophical Investigations*. (I shall get back to that remark in a while.)
- 20 4. Next, I wish to discuss the idea that forms of life are foundational or fundamental. To get at the relevant sense of these terms, we need, first of all, to distinguish it from a use which is brought up by Boncompagni but which is not, I believe, relevant to the discussion of forms of life. This use occurs in a passage in which Boncompagni quotes Wittgenstein's remarks on cause and effect (Wittgenstein 1993: 397):
[...] We have an idea of which ways of living [*Lebensformen*] are primitive, and which could only have developed out of these. We believe that the simplest plough existed before the complicated one.
The simple form (and that is the prototype [*Urform*]) of the cause-effect game is determining the cause, not doubting.
- 21 She then goes on to say:
Here, Wittgenstein is concerned with the "game" of identifying the causes of phenomena, a reflection stimulated by Bertrand Russell's paper "The Limits of Empiricism" (1935-1936). In this context, he speaks of foundations, bases, primitive forms, simple forms, and prototypes (Goethe resonates here): a way of living plays a foundational, grounding role for the development of language and of language games. (Boncompagni 2022: 17)

- 22 We might speak of this as a “developmental use” of the concept of foundations. We can depict the evolution of a practice, a symbolism or forms of expression in terms of a succession of stages. Thus, we may think of the development of a barter economy into one where cash is used, and from there on into one where bank credit and credit cards take the place of cash transactions. Or a child’s speech may be seen as proceeding from learning the names of objects to learning to ask “What is the name of ...?” to being able to say “I know / I don’t know the name of ...” (Cp OC: §535-47). Or in mathematics we can think of the adding of fractions, negative numbers, irrational numbers, imaginary numbers, etc., to the basic notion of positive integers.
- 23 The idea here seems to be that we can give a perspicuous representation of the character of a practice (or a mode of expression, etc.) by making it apparent how a form of the practice may have evolved from an earlier one. The evolutionary process in question may but need to be thought of as extended in time; it may but need not be thought to have actually taken place. Nor will the development necessarily have a point of origin, rather our focus may be simply on the relation between two or more stages in the process.
- 24 This is a form of thinking that greatly interests Wittgenstein but is not, I think, central to an understanding of the role of forms of life. I mention it here in order to set it aside.
- 25 Now, the notion of the fundamental or the foundational in philosophy has been understood in two different ways: on the one hand, the fundamental may be that which *has no foundation*, and on the other hand, it is that which *provides a foundation*. I would argue that the latter is more common in the philosophical tradition; however, the former is that which is relevant in a discussion of Wittgenstein’s concept of forms of life, and it is also central to Boncompagni’s text. (However, she once hints in the direction of the latter notion – as does Wittgenstein too, as I shall argue – this, however, actually runs counter to the central idea of forms of life.)
- 26 The relevant sense is well brought out, for instance, in the following passage:
- The concern is with the depth of agreement and yet its “conventional” nature in the peculiar sense of “conventional” that Wittgenstein accustoms us to: a sense in which agreement on forms of life is not to be equated with agreement in opinion, with something that can be stipulated and withdrawn arbitrarily. The depth of human beings’ agreement has the *fundamentality of language* and the normativity of rules; at the same time, *it is not a foundation as traditional foundationalism would have it*. It is a bedrock of action and habit brought about by training and discipline, the sort of discipline with which we learn to calculate, measure, speak, draw inferences, and follow rules the way our community does. (Boncompagni 2022: 55; my italics)
- 27 Thus, the fact that in calculating with pen and paper we trust the paper and ink not to change in uncontrollable ways is not based on any tests we have made (cp PPF: §343-5). This is simply the way we act.
- 28 Suppose certain judgments were held to be dependent for their justification on certain facts holding. If so, that justificatory relation would *itself* be a feature of the form of life. Accordingly, the idea that our adhering to a form of life might be logically dependent for its justification on certain conditions external to it is incoherent. (This concerns the issue of logical dependence. A form of life may of course be contingent on external conditions in an empirical sense. Thus, to the extent that the form of life of a native American tribe was dependent on hunting for buffalo, it would have to change once it was realized that there were no longer any buffalo to hunt for.)

29 In *Philosophical Investigations* §217 Wittgenstein writes, on this theme:

Once I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: "This is simply what I do."

(The aptness of this metaphor, by the way, could be questioned. The idea of a bedrock suggests that I may be surprised by some external obstacle that hampers my attempts to proceed. But the point, rather, is that I have no thought of going on investigating, and would not even understand what it would mean to do so.)

30 Now, at one point Boncompagni talks about

[...] the line of reasoning that [Wittgenstein] wanted to stimulate in the reader of the *Investigations*: from the absence of disputes on rule following among mathematicians to the question about human agreement and *the clarification of agreement in definitions and in judgments*, which is more broadly a clarification of *the relationship between logic and its applications*. (Boncompagni 2022: 20; my italics)

31 To talk about logic and its applications is to suggest that language has a hierarchical structure: as if it were constituted by a relation between logic on the one hand and its applications – our ways of arguing and judging – on the other hand. Yet surely, what is involved in the notion of a form of life is that its logic is given *in* the way we speak and act. Of course one may also speak about "logic" as a system of rules that may be extracted from our ways of speaking, but this system is then derived from our linguistic practices, it does not in any sense precede or regulate them.

32 Similar remarks can be made about the formulation "clarification of agreement in definitions and in judgments." It contains an allusion to *Philosophical Investigations* §242:

It is not only agreement in definitions, but also (odd as it may sound) agreement in judgements that is required for communication by means of language. This seems to abolish logic, but does not do so.

33 It is unclear what Wittgenstein has in mind in talking about agreement in definitions. Is he thinking about explicit formulations? Here it seems as if he accepted the conventional idea that definitions is what keeps our use of words on the rails. However, when it comes to most words of our common language (rather than terms introduced for special purposes), we have hardly ever heard them defined, and we might be hard put to formulate a definition ourselves – besides, in the case of a great many words, it would probably be difficult to find *any* definition that would fit the variety of their actual use (apart, at best, from synonymous expressions that do not as such advance our understanding of the word). Wittgenstein might, on the other hand, be thought to be referring to an agreement in definitions as something implicit that shows itself in our actual use of words – but in that case the idea of a contrast between agreement in definitions and in judgments becomes void.

34 This observation does not matter greatly in the context of Boncompagni's argument. But it is, I think, important to recognize that the notion of language having a hierarchical structure is at odds with a conception of language as seen in the light of the concept of forms of life.

35 5. Boncompagni has managed to make use of the scant references to forms of life in Wittgenstein's work as a starting point for providing a well-rounded picture of key elements of his later thought, while avoiding committing herself to any restricted conception of what the concept involves. What I have brought up here are points of nuance, in the hope that they will contribute to a deepened understanding of

Wittgenstein's remarks. My criticisms do not diminish the over-all value of Boncompagni's study.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BONCOMPAGNI Anna, (2022), *Wittgenstein on Forms of Life*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press ("Cambridge Elements").

WITTGENSTEIN Ludwig, (1980), *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, vol. I Oxford, Basil Blackwell. [RPP I].

WITTGENSTEIN Ludwig, (1988), *Wittgenstein's Lectures on Philosophical Psychology 1946-1947*, ed. by Peter Thomas Geach, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press. [Quoted by Boncompagni 2022: 27-8.]

WITTGENSTEIN Ludwig, (1993), *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951*, ed. by James Klagge & Alfred Nordmann, Cambridge, Hackett.

WITTGENSTEIN Ludwig, (2009), *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th revised edition, trans. by Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe, Peter Michael Stephan Hacker & Joachim Schulte, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell. [PI]. Including *Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment*. [PPF].

AUTHOR

LARS HERTZBERG

Åbo Akademi University

[lars.hertzberg\[at\]abo.fi](mailto:lars.hertzberg[at]abo.fi)

Whether and How the Wittgensteinian Notion of Form of Life Should Matter to Us

Luigi Perissinotto

- 1 This slim volume by Anna Boncompagni (part of the Cambridge University Press “Elements” series) is certainly (and primarily) a very useful tool for anyone, scholar or student, who wants to engage with the Wittgensteinian notion of form (or forms) of life and the ways in which it has been understood and interpreted over the decades.
- 2 Here I would like to propose some thoughts that were stimulated by reading Anna’s book, without trying to give them an orderly or even systematic form. They are little more than reading notes with which I try to respond to Anna’s book and to shed some light, first and foremost within myself, on this notion (*Lebensform*), which by now has a long and complex critical-interpretive tradition behind it. I would also like to point out at the outset that I agree with much of what Anna writes and, above all, with the approach she adopts in this work. The differences between her reading and mine are often a matter of nuance and detail. But one should never forget that it is often in the nuances and details that the most important things are hidden.
- 3 1. The first thing I would like to point out is a perplexity that I often experience when I come across works that deal with the notion of *Lebensform*. Almost all scholars have noted something similar in letter and spirit to what Boncompagni writes in the very first lines of her work, namely that “[t]he question of what Ludwig Wittgenstein meant by ‘form of life’ or ‘forms of life’ has attracted a great deal of attention, although it is an expression that Wittgenstein himself employed only on a relatively small number of occasions” (Boncompagni 2022: 1). Implicit in this observation is the question to which the various interpreters seek an answer: How is it possible that this notion, which seems to be “at the core” (*ibid.*) of Wittgenstein’s philosophy (or at least of his later philosophy), should have made so few and scattered appearances in his manuscripts and typescripts? My perplexity stems from the fact that one of the possible answers is not considered by many, namely that it is not as important and central as everyone or almost everyone has assumed. Moreover, it is an answer that may seem more plausible

than the one the author suggests at the beginning and end of her book (*ibid.*: 1, 54), namely that Wittgenstein did not need to clarify it explicitly because it was already variously in use in the culture of his time. Here, however, I do not wish to dispute the importance of the notion of form(s) of life and the questions it raises and to which it refers. Rather, I would like to highlight how the tendency to see great relevance in this or that notion (“form of life,” but also, and above all, “language game”) may perhaps stem from the desire to find in Wittgenstein’s thought some fixed points or points of condensation that mitigate its magmatic nature. After all, concentrating on certain notions is a way of making Wittgenstein a more traditional and “manageable” philosopher than he is generally said to be. From this point of view, it is not necessary to declare, as Anna recalls Hacker does, that the notion of form of life “in itself is of no great moment” (*ibid.*: 57); rather, it should be emphasised that if it is, as Anna believes and argues, and if it is a useful tool (*ibid.*: 57-64), one must at the same time guard against the temptation to make it a universal tool, suitable for all purposes and uses. But I will return to the idea that the notion of form of life is a methodological tool later.

- 4 2. This general perplexity is reinforced by reading section 3 (*ibid.*: 32-51) of the book, in which Anna very clearly and effectively draws a reasoned map of the different interpretations that have been given in the literature to the notion of form(s) of life, highlighting the different interpretative options. In particular, as Anna shows well, there are at least three issues on which interpreters have been divided: (a) whether the notion is to be understood in a cultural or natural (biological or organic) sense; (b) whether it has a transcendental or an empirical function; (c) whether Wittgenstein’s discourse is formulated in the singular (there is only one form of life) or in the plural (there are multiple forms of life); and, in the case of the latter option, whether Wittgenstein is interested in emphasising the multiplicity of human forms of life or whether he would rather distinguish the human form of life from the animal form(s).
- 5 What is immediately striking is that it is very difficult to point to passages in which Wittgenstein would, at least implicitly, ask such questions. With regard to (c), for example, we can see that there are many passages in which Wittgenstein highlights the differences between humans and animals. For example, he observes that while we seem to have no problem saying of a dog that he “believes his master is at the door,” we certainly avoid saying that a dog “believes that his master will come the day after tomorrow” (PPF: §1). And if we ask ourselves the reasons for this difference, one answer might be that “[o]nly those who have mastered the use of a language” (*ibid.*) can hope, projecting themselves into the future, as it were. We could also say that hope only finds a place in that “complicated form of life” that is human life, of which the mastery of language is an essential part. What is clear is that Wittgenstein is interested here in clarifying our concept of hope, and one way of doing this is to ask why, while we can imagine “an animal angry, fearful, sad, joyful, startled,” we cannot (where this “we cannot” does not simply indicate our empirical-psychological inability) imagine it “hopeful” (*ibid.*). All this seems clear enough to me. But it is also clear that this does not mean that Wittgenstein’s problem here is to draw attention to the general difference between the human form of life and the animal form. This was not a problem to which Wittgenstein was interested in finding an answer, even if he thought it could have a general answer.
- 6 Moreover, it should not be forgotten that there are several passages in which Wittgenstein draws attention to what unites humans and animals rather than what

distinguishes them. For example, in the *Brown Book*, after observing that “[t]he child learns this language [i.e. that language which serves the ‘communication between a builder A and his man B’ which reappears in the famous §2 of the *Philosophical Investigations*] from the grown-ups by being trained to its use,” Wittgenstein specifies that he uses “the word ‘trained’ [in German Wittgenstein uses the participle *abgerichtet* and the noun *Abrichtung*] in a way strictly analogous to that in which we talk of an animal being trained to do certain things. It is done by means of example, reward, punishment, and suchlike” (BrB: 77). Nor should it be forgotten that one of the methodological maxims that Wittgenstein expounds in *On Certainty* is to regard the human being as an animal: “I want to regard man here as an animal; as a primitive being to which one grants instinct but not ratiocination (*Raisonnement*). As a creature in a primitive state. [...] Language did not emerge from some kind of ratiocination” (OC: §475). It deserves to be pointed out that in an earlier set of annotations, Wittgenstein, after observing that he would like to regard the confidence with which someone, for example, recognises that this in front of him is a chair “not as something akin to hastiness or superficiality, but as (a) form of life,” adds that this, even if “badly expressed and probably badly thought as well,” means that he wants to conceive of this confidence “as something animal,” that is, “as something that lies beyond being justified or unjustified” (OC: §358-9).

- 7 Something very similar can be said about point (a). There is nothing to suggest that Wittgenstein is interested in drawing any kind of line between nature and culture. Nor is there anything to suggest that when he speaks of “form of life” he is concerned with placing it on the side of culture or on the side of nature. Here again we find in the literature a problem that was not such for Wittgenstein. For example, there is a continuity and overlap between what Wittgenstein calls the “very general facts of nature” (PPF: §365) and what he calls the “facts of living” (PPF I: §630; as Anna reminds us (2022: 26), these “facts of living” become “forms of life” in PPF: §345). For example, one of these facts of living is that we “take an interest in others’ feelings” (RPP I: §630), but the way in which this interest manifests itself or takes shape is in turn related to the fact that human beings, unlike stones or chairs, cry, laugh, grimace in pain, and so on. It is, in short, a fact of nature that human beings cry, even if the reasons, the circumstances and the ways in which people cry may vary – let us say for the sake of brevity – according to the customs in force and the different cultural traditions, but also according to the different individual sensitivities. For some, holding back tears is a sign of dignity and courage, while for others it can be a sign of cynicism and indifference.
- 8 In short, I suspect that the way in which the notion of form of life has mostly been understood and treated has ended up making Wittgenstein a philosopher preoccupied with a set of problems (e.g. whether there is more nature or culture in human life) that were in many ways foreign or indifferent to him. It seems to me that Anna is suggesting something very similar when she insists on the methodological character or significance of the notion of form of life. At the same time, it seems to me that Anna falls a little into this trap when, in section 4.3, she reconstructs a three-stage line of development of the notion of form of life from its first appearance in the years 1936-1937 to its appearance in *On Certainty*, with the section of the *Philosophical Investigations* about “following a rule in between.” Now, in all that Anna writes (but it should not be forgotten that these are very few pages in a small book), there is not much that seems to justify this division into three phases, let alone allow one to speak

of an internal development in Wittgenstein's thought. In particular, despite my love of *On Certainty*, I have many doubts about the idea, which Anna seems to adhere to, that a third Wittgenstein appears in these late annotations. But this is not the main point. Rather, what I want to point out is that, despite her preference for the methodological reading over any substantive one, in her reconstruction Anna ends up attributing much of the substantive reading to Wittgenstein. For instance, it does not sound very methodological to state, as Anna does on page 56, that in the remarks written after the Second World War what emerges is "the fundamentality and inescapability of forms of life as the level at which philosophical analysis must stop." Those who read passages such as these can easily be led to think that the form(s) of life are the object of philosophical analysis, what the analysis encounters when it reaches its end or conclusion.

- 9 3. There is also another point I would like to make here. As Anna clearly shows (2022: 12-3), in the *Brown Book* Wittgenstein, who is writing in English, uses the word "culture" in contexts in which he would later use the expression "form of life." The crucial moment is the partial and soon abandoned German translation of the *Brown Book*. Having to translate the point where it is suggested that to imagine a language is to imagine a culture (this is the identification that will be sanctioned in one of the most famous passages of the *Philosophical Investigations* [PI I: §19]), Wittgenstein at a certain point chooses to translate "culture" as *Lebensform* or, alternatively, *Form des Lebens*. I think it is interesting to point out the problem that Wittgenstein faces here. In the context of the *Brown Book*, "culture" easily evokes the anthropological concept of culture, which has its origins precisely in the field of English anthropology. After all, what Wittgenstein is inviting us to imagine is a language (a culture) that, unlike our language (our culture), "establishes a chasm between dark red and light red" (MS 115: 239), and to ask ourselves what consequences this might have in the lives of those who use that language (or are born into that culture). Now, translating "culture" as *Kultur* would probably have meant resorting to a philosophically challenging word. As Anna points out on page 13, in the German-speaking world of those years (much more so than in the English-speaking philosophical world of the 1930s), *Kultur* was indeed associated with Oswald Spengler and his famous distinction between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*. Wittgenstein knew this very well, since he had explicitly referred to this distinction in the so-called "Sketch for a Foreword," now collected in *Culture and Value*. Here he had declared that his was "a time without culture" (*Zeit der Unkultur*) if, following Spengler, culture was understood as "a great organization which assigns to each of its members its place, at which he can work in the spirit of the whole, and his strength can with a certain justice be measured by his success as understood within that whole" (CV: 8-9). If those who read Wittgenstein in German had detected a Spenglerian echo in the word *Kultur*, they would certainly have been misled. For if it is true that Wittgenstein wondered how to live and philosophise in a time without culture, or, as he says in the Preface to the *Philosophical Investigations*, in a time marked by "poverty" and "darkness" (Boncompagni 2022: 4), it is also true that these references to his own poor and dark time, which is that of "the prevailing European and American civilization" (CV: 8), remain in the background, relegated to prefaces or forewords, and do not become part of Wittgenstein's actual philosophical work, although it is intriguing, as Wittgenstein himself seems to suggest, to link this reference to the darkness of his own time with the idea that pervades his life and philosophising, that clarity is not a means, but "an end in itself" (CV: 9).

- 10 These considerations can be used to take a position on the age-old question of whether or not Wittgenstein is a conservative thinker. In my view, it is misplaced to both pose this question and to look for an answer in the body of Wittgenstein's philosophical work. For example, when Wittgenstein states that "[w]hat has to be accepted, the given, is – one might say – *forms of life*" (PPF: §345), "are facts of living" (RPP I: §630), he is not suggesting that we should not try to change our lives or the society in which we find ourselves living. And why should he suggest this to us or be interested in doing so? In short, that "accepting," as Anna (2022: 25-88) suggests, has no ethical or political connotation, even if some of the facts of living listed by Wittgenstein have or may have ethical or political relevance, for instance the fact that we "*punish* certain actions" or "*give orders*" (RFF I: §630). Although we cannot develop the point here, it seems to me useful to note that accepting here is not simply opposed to rejecting, or even to modifying, but rather to explaining, especially if explaining means reducing these alleged facts to more basic facts (e.g. physical or biological). Although Anna does not quite put it this way, it seems to me that much of what she says is along these lines.
- 11 This does not completely remove the question of Wittgenstein's conservatism. As I have already said, the texts containing Wittgenstein's concrete and detailed philosophical work are not the most appropriate place to look for a possible answer. Perhaps it would be more interesting to reflect on some of the things that Wittgenstein says in the margins of his philosophical work (in prefaces, for example, or in conversations with friends and pupils). As we know, in many of these places Wittgenstein declares that the "constructive" spirit of his time is alien and uncongenial to him (CV: 8). However, there is nothing in what he says and writes to suggest that he was politically conservative or reactionary, backward-looking, but neither is there anything to suggest that he recognised himself in the socialist ideals and programmes for the revolutionary transformation of society, despite the idea he once expressed at one point of living in the Soviet Union as a worker. Above all, this lack of evidence speaks against the idea that Wittgenstein thought it was incumbent on a philosopher to take a stand on these or similar political issues. In short, what Wittgenstein notes in brackets in a passage from *Zettel* also applies here, namely that "[t]he philosopher is not a citizen of any community of ideas (*Denkgemeinde*). That is what makes him into a philosopher" (Z: §455).
- 12 4. As mentioned several times, Anna's volume often recalls and culminates, so to speak, in the thesis that there is no substantive notion of form of life in Wittgenstein, that it is an essentially methodological notion, an instrument of that grammatical inquiry (PI I: §190) which, according to Wittgenstein himself, constitutes the whole of (his) philosophising. As anticipated, I find this methodological reading convincing in many respects and in line with much of what Wittgenstein writes about philosophy and the way he practices it. However, I would first like to ask what a substantive notion would actually be. If I understand it correctly, it would at least be a notion that should interest us as such, in the same sense that the notion of culture should interest an anthropologist. We should therefore decide on the various alternatives that have marked the history of its interpretations: is there one form of human life (as distinct from animal life) or does human life, like animal life (there is no doubt that there are many different things that separate a mosquito from a horse), have many forms? Is it an essentially natural (i.e. organic, biological) notion, or does its cultural meaning prevail? Or could we not put it this way: should we recognise that life, although

biologically one, can take (culturally) different and contrasting forms? To give an example: humans feel pain (and this is part of their nature, their physiology), but this suffering takes different, culturally mediated forms. There is a sense in which the pain felt by those who see it as a test sent to them by God is not the same as the pain felt by those who see in it as merely the effect of the illness they have been diagnosed with, although there is a sense in which it is exactly the same.

- 13 Now, if a substantive notion is supposed to tell us what a form of life is and what, so to speak, it is made of (nature or culture?), what would it mean to treat it as a methodological tool? We can immediately note that, from a certain point of view, most of the concepts or notions used in the sciences (e.g. in anthropology) could be said to be methodological tools, or, as Wittgenstein also says, objects of comparison, a kind of yardstick (PI I: §131), even if, in the sciences as in philosophy, the (dogmatic) tendency to predicate “of the thing what lies in the mode of representation” (PI I: §104) is just as widespread. It is also worth noting that the question one usually asks about a tool is whether it is suitable for the purpose one wants to use it for. For example, a screwdriver is a tool that is suitable for screwing or unscrewing a screw, but not for slicing salami. But what is the purpose of this tool, which would be the notion of a life form? Anna does not tell us much about this, perhaps assuming that the answer is quite obvious: it is used to solve philosophical problems, which, unlike the problems of science, “are solved, not by coming up with new discoveries, but by assembling what we have long been familiar with” (PI I: §109). For example, let’s say we are faced with a philosophical problem such as “How can we ever know what the other feels, given that his or her feelings are, like ours, private,” a problem that seems unsolvable if the privacy of feelings is treated metaphysically as a kind of superprivacy (and this happens when by “privacy” is meant not “nobody can know them [my feelings] unless I show them,” but rather “if I don’t want to, I needn’t give any sign of my feeling but even if I want to I can only show a sign and not the feeling” [NPL: 447]). In this case, Wittgenstein might observe that the idea of superprivacy is the way in which the metaphysician refuses to accept what is a fact of living, namely that we see the other person’s joy or suffering (and not merely his or her signs of it) in his or her face, even though it is also a fact of living that in certain circumstances we suspect that the other person is pretending or lying to us (or even to him- or herself). Now, if this is what it means that form of life has a methodological function, perhaps Wittgenstein would have done better to dispense with the expression and resort, as he does when using English, to more neutral, less demanding expressions, such as “a way of living” (Boncompagni 2022: 17), since “form of life,” as the history of its interpretations recounted by Anna documents, easily runs the risk of leading us to believe that Wittgenstein had at some point made the important discovery that there are forms of life.
- 14 I would also like to note that the distinction between substantive and methodological leaves somewhat in the background, or at least leaves open, an issue that has greatly divided interpreters in recent decades. In short, we could ask Anna whether, in her opinion, “methodological” is equivalent to “therapeutic,” or whether the therapeutic purpose is only part of a more extensive philosophical work of clarification, as her final pages (*ibid.*: 62-4) on the possible political “uses” of Wittgenstein’s thought would suggest.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BONCOMPAGNI Anna, (2022), *Wittgenstein on Forms of Life*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge Elements).

WITTGENSTEIN Ludwig, (1967), *Zettel*, ed. by Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe & Georg Henrik von Wright; trans. by Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe, Oxford, Blackwell. [Z].

WITTGENSTEIN Ludwig, (1969), *On Certainty*, ed. by Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe & Georg Henrik von Wright, trans. by Denis Paul & Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe, Oxford, Blackwell. [OC].

WITTGENSTEIN Ludwig, (1980), *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, vol. I, ed. by Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe & Georg Henrik von Wright; trans. by Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe, Oxford, Basil Blackwell. [RPP I].

WITTGENSTEIN Ludwig, (1993), *Notes for the "Philosophical Lecture,"* in *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951*, ed. by James C. Klagge & Alfred Nordman, Indianapolis, Cambridge, Hackett, 445-558. [NPL].

WITTGENSTEIN Ludwig, (1998), *Culture and Value*, ed. by Georg Henrik von Wright & Heikki Nyman, revised edition by Alois Pichler, trans. by Peter Winch, Oxford, Blackwell. [CV].

WITTGENSTEIN Ludwig, (2009), *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. by Peter Michael Stephan Hacker & Joachim Schulte, trans. by Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe, Peter Michael Stephan Hacker & Joachim Schulte, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell. [PI].

WITTGENSTEIN Ludwig, (2009), *Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment*, in Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 180-246. [PPF].

AUTHOR

LUIGI PERISSINOTTO

Ca' Foscari University of Venice

lperissi[at]unive.it

Forms of Life: What Use Should We Make of Them?

Elena Valeri

- 1 Anna Boncompagni's book *Wittgenstein on Forms of Life* (2022) – published in the CUP series “Elements in the Philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein” – can be divided into two main parts: the first part, consisting of the Introduction and Sections 2 and 3, has a primarily critical-exegetical purpose; the second part coincides with Section 4, in which the author elaborates and briefly defends her own interpretative proposal on Wittgenstein's use of the notion of forms of life, the *pars destruens* of which consists in the assertion that “throughout his whole body of work, Wittgenstein never seems interested in a substantive notion of forms of life” (*ibid.*: 57), while the *pars construens* consists in the assertion that “[u]ltimately, [...] for Wittgenstein, the notion of forms of life is a methodological tool” (*ibid.*). The book is very interesting to me from many points of view, both internal to Wittgenstein's philosophy and external, in the direction of its use and development, and it is certainly a valuable tool both for students approaching the subject for the first time and for scholars already familiar with Wittgenstein's texts and the related critical literature. It is also to the author's credit that she always combines philological care with her own well-documented interpretations.
- 2 Much of what Boncompagni writes and argues I agree with and would not hesitate to endorse. Here I will dwell on a few points on which I am less convinced and immediately in agreement, leaving aside the many things with which I agree. This may make what I write here seem more critical than it is or is intended to be. But, as we know, when discussing a book we tend to focus on the passages that seem most controversial to us, and not for the sake of criticism but out of a desire to understand.
- 3 1. There is no doubt that “form(s) of life” is an expression that belongs to the second phase of Wittgenstein's philosophy. Indeed, as Boncompagni (*ibid.*: 12) recalls, it first appears in the mid-1930s in the context of the attempted German translation of the *Brown Book*. It is therefore not surprising, indeed understandable, that Boncompagni devotes very little space in her book to the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and the so-called “early” Wittgenstein. Nevertheless, it seems to me that there would have been

something that could have been said or that would have been interesting to say about Wittgenstein's first book and "the thoughts that are [t]here communicated" (TLP, Preface: 4). There are at least two propositions in the *Tractatus* in which Wittgenstein seems to allude to themes and problems reminiscent of those that would later gather around the notion of form of life. I refer first to proposition 4.002, and in particular to its second paragraph, which states that "[e]veryday language is a part of the human organism and is no less complicated than it" (TLP: 4.002b). I think this is an important remark to recall here, both because it brings into play the idea that the human organism plays a certain role, as Boncompagni (2022: 3-7) shows, in certain ways of understanding the notion of form of life, and because it is closely related to the way Wittgenstein understands the origin of philosophical problems and confusions. According to Wittgenstein, it is precisely because language is part of the human organism, and just as complicated as the human organism, that "[i]t is not humanly possible to gather immediately from it what the logic of language is" (TLP: 4.002c). Incidentally, I would like to point out that the second paragraph of proposition 4.002 might recall the phrase "this complicated form of life" (PPF: i, §1) which Wittgenstein will use much later. I also find possible links with proposition 6.372, in which the opposition between those who recognise that explanations have "a clear and acknowledged terminus" and those who (illusorily) assume that "*everything* [is] explained" (TLP: 6.372b) sets up a distinction that will return later, when Wittgenstein speaks of the forms of life as "[w]hat has to be accepted, the given" (PPF: xi, §345).

- 4 I would also add one last thing here. The word "form," which appears in the compound word "Lebensform," is certainly an important word for philosophy in general and for the *Tractatus* in particular, where the notion of logical form and other related notions (such as those of pictorial form or representational form) play a fundamental role. Of course, it can be argued that it would be a waste of time to look for a link between these two different occurrences of the word "form." But to those who argue this, I would say that it would be worth wasting some time, if only to rule out any link between the two. To reiterate, we can easily stop this search for a link at the outset and say that there is no point in trying to find a similarity between two completely different notions simply because they both have the word "form" in common; but it seems to me that, on a closer reading, we can see that these notions are not so different and that, if there is any similarity at all, it is related precisely to the fact that the notions of form of life and logical form both have to do with something that we cannot but accept. We can then say that the attitude that informs the two notions is the same, because in both cases we are dealing with something that cannot receive any deeper foundation: just as for the *Tractatus* it would be impossible to go further than logical form, since it is given with the very giving of language, so form of life indicates the place where every foundational (reductive) project founders. A fundamental idea of the *Tractatus* is that the logical form is "mirrored" (TLP: 4.121a) in the propositions of our language. This is why, in contrast to what Russell maintains in his Introduction to the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein rules out any attempt at or claim of "constructing a logically perfect language" (TLP, Russell's Introduction: xxii), and states that "all the propositions of our everyday language, just as they stand, are in perfect logical order" (TLP: 5.5563a). This would show that the impulse which led Wittgenstein to introduce the notion of form of life – albeit, if Boncompagni is right, in a methodological sense – was already present at the time of his first work. Moreover, it is not far-fetched to also ask of the notion of logical

form what Boncompagni asks of the notion of form of life, namely whether it is a substantive or a methodological notion.

- 5 Of course, the preceding remarks are not meant as a criticism of Boncompagni's work, but as an indication of its development or integration.
- 6 2. As mentioned at the beginning, Boncompagni repeatedly argues that the notion of form(s) of life in relation to Wittgenstein is to be understood not in a substantive but in a methodological sense. The first question that comes to my mind is the following: is Boncompagni suggesting that in the critical literature on Wittgenstein and forms of life, which she reconstructs so well in Section 3 (2022: 32-51), a basically substantive reading of form of life has prevailed, or are there instead traces of a methodological reading on which she relies or to which she refers in offering her interpretative proposal? The question is of some interest, because if we were to conclude that the interpretations given so far are substantive, and if, as it seems, the methodological reading is more in keeping with Wittgenstein's way of understanding and practising philosophy, we would have to conclude that it is precisely around the notion of form of life that one of the most obvious betrayals of Wittgenstein's philosophy took place. I ask this question because I have the impression that Boncompagni's reconstruction of the most relevant readings of Wittgenstein's notion of form of life suggests the first hypothesis, namely the prevalence of a substantive reading. If this is not the case, and if this impression is false, who, if any, would be the forerunners of the reading Boncompagni calls "methodological"? The question also arises from the fact that Boncompagni, in the part devoted to the reconstruction of the various interpretative positions on the notion of form of life, does not take the distinction between the substantive and the methodological as an explicit criterion of classification.
- 7 Another question concerns the very meaning of the adjective "methodological." I realise, of course, that to say anything really significant about this is to question what philosophizing meant to Wittgenstein, so I will limit myself here to a few general considerations. The first thing I would like to ask (although this is not the most important question to ask) is whether this distinction between the substantive and the methodological has anything to do with the debate carried out in the recent decades provoked by the emergence of the so-called "neo-Wittgensteinian" reading. To give just one example I could recall the opposition between Danièle Moyal-Sharrock's reading of *On Certainty* (e.g. Moyal-Sharrock 2016) and James Conant's (e.g. Conant 1998). It seems quite clear to me that, if we use the substantive/methodological distinction, Moyal-Sharrock's is a substantive reading, while Conant's is a methodological reading. It is no coincidence that the former reading has even given rise to a new epistemology, the so-called "hinge epistemology," while the latter is radically inimical to any positive use of Wittgenstein's philosophy. Is this what Boncompagni has in mind when she distinguishes the substantive from the methodological?
- 8 But there is more. Those who insist on the methodological character of Wittgensteinian notions can do so in two ways. On the one hand, there are those – the neo-Wittgensteinians – who combine this insistence with the idea that the only task Wittgenstein assigns to philosophy is a therapeutic one. Alice Crary makes this clear from the outset in her Introduction to the volume *The New Wittgenstein*, by presenting the common assumption of all (but one) of the collected papers: "without regard to the period (or periods) of his work with which they are concerned, they agree in suggesting that Wittgenstein's primary aim in philosophy is – to use a word he himself employs in

characterizing his later philosophical procedures – a *therapeutic* one” (Crary & Read 2000: 1). On the other hand, there are those whom the neo-Wittgensteinians call (with some contempt) “standard” or, worse still, “irresolute” readers, who believe that therapy is only one side of the philosophical coin, and identify the other side with the task of (conceptual) clarification of which Wittgenstein already speaks in the *Tractatus*. For both of these groups, the non-theoretical character and the therapeutic commitment of Wittgenstein’s philosophy are well established, but the “standard” readers, unlike the neo-Wittgensteinians, believe that philosophical therapy is only a part or a moment of Wittgenstein’s philosophical work of clarification. This latter position seems particularly justified in the case of the later writings, for example those on the philosophy of psychology, in which Wittgenstein is engaged in elaborating a “[p]lan for the treatment of psychological concepts” (RPP II: §63), or those devoted to the concepts of knowledge, certainty and doubt collected together in *On Certainty*.

- 9 It is not entirely clear to me whether Boncompagni is leaning towards the first or the second meaning of “methodological.” Some of what she says in the very last pages of her book would seem to favour the second, although it is true that in those pages she is not talking about Wittgenstein as such, but about a possible development of his methodology. My impression is that Boncompagni, at least with regard to the notion of form of life, is inclined towards the second meaning of “methodological,” but refrains from making her preference explicit for fear that it might slip back into a substantive reading of this notion. I would ask, however, what is wrong with a substantive notion, if by that is meant a notion that is capable of positively illuminating or clarifying certain features or aspects of our lives, particularly our conceptual lives. For instance, once we have freed ourselves from the metaphysical influence of the internal/external paradigm on our psychological concepts and the philosophical problems it raises (e.g. those related to the scepticism of other minds), is there really nothing left to say about our psychological concepts or the various psychological judgements we make in all the different circumstances of our individual and collective lives? After all, if we do philosophy, is it not also to understand all this – although in this case understanding does not necessarily mean, as naturalists and reductionists of various schools believe, explaining, founding or, in general, constructing scientific theories? Our understanding of our (conceptual) life is something that must not yield to (metaphysical) foundations or the infinite regress of (scientific) explanations, but neither must it shy away from a clarifying description of how things in our lives are. Wittgenstein is telling us precisely this when, in a passage from his *Remarks on Frazer’s “Golden Bough,”* he writes: “Here one can only *describe* and say: this is what human life is like” (RGB: 121).
- 10 It is clear that what Wittgenstein wants to warn us against are the paradoxes, puzzles and confusions that the impulse to explain (scientifically) or to found (metaphysically) produces. To illustrate this point, we can use a simile that Wittgenstein will use some years later, in 1941 to be precise: “People who are constantly asking ‘why’ are like tourists, who stand in front of a building, reading Baedeker, and through reading about the history of the building’s construction etc. etc. are prevented from *seeing* it” (CV: 46). However, this simile should not be read too one-sidedly. Once the tourist has been persuaded to lift her eyes from the Baedeker, much remains to be done if she is to see the building in front of her, since she can look at it without actually seeing it. In this sense, for Wittgenstein, as for the phenomenological tradition in a way, philosophising is the practice or exercise of seeing, and this practice or exercise is far from easy, even if the difficulties encountered in it are different from those encountered in science,

both in working out theories and in conducting experiments in the laboratory. Using the simile of the tourist and her Baedeker, we could then ask whether, for Boncompagni, the purpose of Wittgenstein's methodology is simply to make us throw away the Baedeker, or whether it is also to help us see or notice what we are "unable to notice [...]" – because it is always before one's eyes" (PI: §129).

- 11 All these perplexities are, first and foremost, perplexities that I myself feel as a reader and scholar of Wittgenstein. One of the merits of Boncompagni's book, which derives not only from the author's profound knowledge of Wittgenstein, but also from the clarity of her exposition and argumentation, is that it forces readers to go beyond the easy formulae and interpretative loopholes to come to terms with these "knots" in Wittgenstein's thought. After all, one might say that the above-mentioned oscillation between the purely therapeutic and the clarifying returns in the critical literature because it is already to be found in Wittgenstein's works.
- 12 3. There are, of course, many other aspects of Boncompagni's book that deserve to be addressed and discussed, although it is not possible to do so here. I am referring, in particular, to the few but dense pages (2022: 40-4) in which Boncompagni addresses two questions that have long preoccupied interpreters. On the one hand, the question of whether Wittgenstein was a relativist, and on the other, the question of whether he was a conservative, both in philosophy and in politics. In both cases I find Boncompagni's approach largely convincing, although it perhaps needs further investigation. Beyond her specific considerations, it seems to me that the lesson to be drawn from her pages, and from her general methodological approach to Wittgenstein's notions, might be the following: Wittgenstein was not interested in establishing whether relativism (or conservatism) was a correct or plausible position, but rather in asking why one might be tempted, for instance, to read his appeal to the facts (or forms) of our lives in a relativistic sense. In short, for Wittgenstein, this temptation stems from a failure to recognize that there is no point in seeking a foundation for what does not need a foundation at all. For Wittgenstein, "without foundation" is not the same as "unfounded." That is why the facts of our lives are never like clothes that can be worn or discarded at will.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BONCOMPAGNI Anna, (2022), *Wittgenstein on Forms of Life*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge Elements).

CONANT James, (1998), "Wittgenstein on Meaning and Use," *Philosophical Investigations*, 21(3), 222-50.

CRARY Alice & Rupert READ (eds), (2000), *The New Wittgenstein*, London-New York, Routledge.

MOYAL-SHARROCK Danièle, (2016), "The Animal in Epistemology: Wittgenstein's Enactivist Solution to the Problem of Regress," *International Journal for the Study of Skepticism*, 6(2-3), 97-119.

WITTGENSTEIN Ludwig, (1980), *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology. Volume II*, German-English parallel texts, ed. by Georg Henrik von Wright & Heikki Nyman, English translation by C. Grant Luckhardt & Maximillian A. E. Aue, Oxford, Basil Blackwell. [RPP II].

WITTGENSTEIN Ludwig, (1993), "Remarks on Frazer's 'Golden Bough'," German-English parallel texts, English translation by John Beversluis, in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Occasions, 1912-1951*, ed. by James Carl Klagge & Alfred Nordmann, Indianapolis-Cambridge, Hackett Publishing Company, 115-55. [RGB].

WITTGENSTEIN Ludwig, (1998), *Culture and Value*, German-English parallel texts, ed. by Georg Henrik von Wright in collaboration with Heikki Nyman, revised edition by Alois Pichler, English translation by Peter Winch, Oxford, Blackwell. [CV].

WITTGENSTEIN Ludwig, (2009), *Philosophical Investigations*, German text with an English translation by Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe, Peter Michael Stephan Hacker & Joachim Schulte, revised 4th edition by Peter Michael Stephan Hacker & Joachim Schulte, Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell. 1-181 [PI]; 182-244 [PPF].

WITTGENSTEIN Ludwig, (2014), *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, with an introduction by Bertrand Russell, and with a new foreword by Ray Monk, trans. by David F. Pears & Brian F. McGuinness, London-New York, Routledge. [TLP].

AUTHOR

ELENA VALERI

Ca' Foscari University of Venice
elena.valeri[at]unive.it

The Human Form of Life

The Problem of the Unity of Animality and the Cultural

Meredith Williams

- 1 Anna Boncompagni's *Wittgenstein on Forms of Life*, written for the Cambridge Elements of The Philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein, is an excellent overview of the topic and does exactly what such an Elements book should do. Most importantly, it provides a map of the leading philosophical interpretations of Wittgenstein's use of the phrase "form of life," and so debates of how it is best to be understood. The map consists of three interpretive axes of dispute: natural vs. cultural, one vs. many, and empirical vs. transcendental. Much of the debate is directed towards the Problem of the Unity of Animality and the Cultural. I express the problem this way because there is no doubt that Wittgenstein is concerned to understand the role of our animality within our language-games, assuming that language itself is a cultural phenomenon. How can meaningful, normatively guided language unite with our animal behavior? Whatever the solution is, we work with very few passages that contain the phrase "the form of life" and equally few references to our animality. Yet it is clear that both are important to Wittgenstein's conception of language. How then are they to be united? That is the fundamental problem of the natural vs. the cultural. The final axis bears on this in so far as focuses on the form of life as the given: does it supply the conditions for the possibility of meaning; or does it invite empirical investigation of actual cultures?

1. Boncompagni's Alternative: A Methodological Role for Form of Life

- 2 Boncompagni introduces her interpretation of "form of life" by saying that "Wittgenstein never seems interested in a substantive notion of forms of life. He never defines it..." (2022: 57). Rather he tends to use it as a kind of flashlight to highlight, not the substantive object – the form of life – but "[...] the embeddedness of our linguistic activities in wider praxeological surroundings." So the methodological role of "form of life" is to highlight what we say in a wider behavioral context, without its actually meaning that that context is the object, the form of life itself, and without "form of

life” having a definition. But it must mean something if it is to play this highlighting methodological role. Consider the following simple language-game PI: 1. When the grocer reads “apples” on the order sheet, he looks to the bin labeled “apples” and takes five out. He shows his understanding of the word “apples” by performing these nonreflective actions. In this way, he realizes the unity of culture (language) and physiological response (perceptually based reaching and grasping). In this instance, what is the unity of speaking the word “apples” while reaching and grasping apples? Isn’t this unity an instance of our form of life? What makes the appeal to the form of life instantiated by the grocer and his customer a methodological use rather a substantive attribute by means of which the unity is not mere conjunction but a single activity, expressive of our form of life? The question I am raising is why is the action of the grocer does not involve an animal-like behavior in service of an intentional end, expressed and experience through language? And so, a form of life: “to imagine a language-game is to imagine a form of life” (PI: 19).

- 3 Boncompagni gives a second way to characterize the methodological role or use of “form of life” in which she emphasizes the transcendental interpretation, showing how, it too, takes the methodological role for a substantive object. “As a methodological tool, it is an essential pointer that guides the philosopher’s gaze in the right direction and a reminder of the scope and limits of a philosophical investigation” (2022: 58). Here “form of life” is a “blind” pointer, that is, an indexical word that has no meaning but nonetheless can orient the philosopher to “the interconnectedness between our speaking a language and our being the particular animals that we are.” This was just my point in the paragraph prior to this one. How does this methodological pointer help in any way to find and understand this interconnectedness? This is the fundamental problem that the appeal to form of life is to answer. But nothing that Boncompagni has to say about this methodological tool shows how Wittgenstein answers (or not) the problem, even though “form of life” somehow points to this interconnection.
- 4 Her final remarks on the utility of “form of life” strike me as quite problematic. The author suggests that this methodological tool can be used not only for certain specific philosophical problems, but also can be usefully applied to “political reflection and ethical/aesthetic exercises” (*ibid.*: 60). Here it is impossible to use the expression “form of life” to illuminate the possibility of alternative political views unless “form of life” is substantively meaningful. Boncompagni acknowledges this (*ibid.*: 61): “the connection between language games and forms of life (PI: 23) emphasizes that only by reference to forms of life can we grasp what our words are about.” For the form of life, especially nonhuman forms of life, to play the role of semantic standard, it must of course be meaningful or a norm if it is to play this central role in Wittgenstein’s conception of language. So how does a methodological rule, that is only a flashlight, not a substantive conception, contribute to our grasp of reference? This claim needs fuller development that keeps distinct the methodological from the substantive interpretation of “form of life.”
- 5 The thought that the methodological notion of “form of life” (a flashlight) has nonphilosophical uses is an additional reason for Boncompagni to give up on the attempt to find a satisfactory substantive notion. In particular, it can make political reflection possible through the (methodological) use of the (substantive) idea of forms of life because the latter “translates into an attitude of conceptual openness that instead of judging other ways of living based on given meanings, uses other (real or

imagined) ways of living for a rethinking of meanings” (2022: 1). Why this detour through the methodological use of “form of life” when all the work is done by a substantive notion? Further, there is no reason to think that that attitude of openness would result only in benign political forms of life. Indeed, we know that our current political world is not so restricted. As an interpretation of Wittgenstein’s use of “form of life,” Wittgenstein himself raises important philosophical objections to the use of imagination to play such a role. At PI: 250, he cites a case of how imagination can easily outstrip what the limits of meaningfulness are:

Why can’t a dog simulate pain? Is he too honest? Could one teach a dog to simulate pain? Perhaps it is possible to teach him to how on particular occasions as if he were in pain, even when he is not. But the surroundings which are necessary for this behavior to be real simulation are missing. (PI: 250)

- 6 Imagination cannot be the source of right kind of openness to possible forms of life without including the nonsensical, like talking chairs and foxes who defy gravity, which are of course acceptable to children, or mistaking grammatical propositions like “every rod has a length” (PI: 251) for an empirical proposition. In *On Certainty*, he makes an additional point about the acceptability of alien forms of life. In this we are to consider

[...] a tribe of people [...] who believe it is possible [to get to the moon] and that it sometimes happens [...]. And let them be never so sure of their belief – they are wrong and we know it. If we compare our system of knowledge with theirs then theirs is evidently the poorer one by far. (OC: 286)

- 7 Evidentially we cannot accept certain imagined forms of life as worth consideration. The point here is that not any kind of “openness” is warranted merely by recognizing the possibility of imagined “forms of life.” It also invites the question, just what is a form of life? This is the very question that Boncompagni sought to avoid by holding that the phrase “form of life” doesn’t denote anything substantive, but is a methodological tool only.

2. Representational Structure

- 8 Given that Wittgenstein has rejected any formalist account of language or meaning, and has argued in favor of holistic and contextualist language-games, we cannot begin with the idea that the propositional calculus, algorithmic rules, and semantic truth conditions are what we must start with to understand the fundamental structure of language. Use of language is embedded in human activities shared among individuals in pursuing certain ends. To understand the human form of life is to understand what is indispensable to the realization of such language-games. There are three components that are necessary: Representational structure, techniques and procedures for using words and rules, and the early acquisition of language. What is striking about all of these components is that, as I like to put it, all involve features that are blind to us. We are unaware and unreflective about the structure of representation, how the techniques by which rules are followed and realized, and what is really going on in initiate first-language learning. A characterization of each of these components, what they are and why we are blind to them, and yet members of a community agree with certainty in their actions and judgments expressive of our human form of life (cf. PI: 241).

- 9 First, representational structure. The classical idea is that individual words name objects thereby securing a referential connection between the name and the object which anchors language to the world semantically. “Apple” names apples; “slab” names slabs, so if I ask for an apple, I won’t be brought a slab or an orange or a ball. One of the chronic problems, philosophically, is the conflation of the object of representation, namely, the apple, and the means of representation, namely, the word “apple.” It is the one-to-one relationship that encourages that mistake. Wittgenstein’s understanding of the referential relationship is that it is much more complicated than that simple correlation. It involves a background to the correlation, which is necessary for the functioning of the representation as well as to the identity of the object. One form of representation that is especially helpful in bringing out the structure of representation is measurement, not naming. The example he uses is the standard meter stick preserved in a vault in Paris:

There is *one* thing of which one can say neither that it is one meter long, nor that it is not one meter long, and that is the standard meter in Paris. – But this is, of course, not to ascribe any extraordinary property to it, but only to mark its peculiar role in the language-game of measuring with a metre-rule. (PI: 50)

- 10 The standard metre-stick in Paris is not something that is represented as being one-metre long, but is the means whereby a different object can be measured to be one metre long. It is a means of representation. To be a means of representing length, the metre-stick itself must have certain properties: Material or physical properties of a certain kind; susceptibility to calibration; and a normative role, namely, it is the standard for being one metre long. The metre stick itself must be made of hard wood or metal. It cannot subject to bending, shrinking or stretching or in any other manner distorting or changing its length because its length just is the one metre length. To perform its role, it must be physically unchanging or fixed. “[...] what we call ‘measuring’ is partly determined by a certain constancy in results of measurement” (PI: 242). That constancy is physically determined by the material of the metre stick.
- 11 For more refined measurements, the stick must be subject to calibration. That too sets the standards for smaller units of length. Lastly, and most importantly for fixing the first two features of the metre-stick is its role as the standard for what counts as the one metre length. That is a normative role that itself must have a procedure or technique of use, one that must be learned before one can successfully use it. The technique of use must accommodate certain features of the human body: the flexibility of the human hand, the coordination of hand and eye, the capacity to bend the body over. The physical feature of the metre-stick must fit the human body. So we find that the means of representation implicate physical properties and human bodily processes. This of itself guarantees something of the unity between the animal and the cultural. But this is not thought to capture the animality of language, that its foundation is something animal-like or cultural. It is possible to argue that the language-game of measuring with the standard metre-stick is cultural at its foundation. The physical-behavioral elements are in the service of the point in having the metre-stick, for architectural reasons or tailoring reasons and so on. These are cultural considerations. This is correct, yet it is important to remind us all that the use of representations cannot be a disembodied use, certainly not at the primitive level. We will return to this issue later.

3. Techniques and Procedures for Rule Following

- 12 Secondly, we need to focus on the indispensable role played by the techniques and procedures of use of representations, this time focusing on rules. All language-games have a temporal dimension, and so can said to follow a rule. But Wittgenstein's discussion of rule-following opens with a simple example in which each step in following the rule seems fully determined, and that is the natural number sequence. This differs from symbols like "ball" or "stone" or "L. Wittgenstein," which function more like names attached to their objects. For a mathematical sequence the name "1" just looks like the number 1 so whether we are representing the numeral in the sequence we write down or we are writing down the numerals themselves is irrelevant. Either way the symbol or the numeral must follow a certain way. What kind of underlying technique fixes the infinite extension of the number sequence and how do we finite beings understand it?
- 13 Wittgenstein uses the idea of a machine (which we can recognizing as a computing machine) "[...] as symbolizing its action: the action of a machine – I might say at first – seems to be there in it from the start. What does that mean? – If we know the machine, everything else, that is its movement, seems to be already completely determined" (PI: 193). This is the ideal machine whose sequences seem fixed and complete from the outset. Only in this way can the ideal machine determine what the movements of the real machine must be. But we forget the possibility of the real machine breaking down, needing to be debugged, making mistakes, and so on. The determinacy thus does not hold for physical machines, and so cannot explain how they must operate correctly. All rules suffer from this deficiency: They create the illusion that they must be followed in a particular way and yet in use they are subject to error and failure to be used in the correct way. In holding that the idealized rule determines action, one has conflated the idealized symbol with the actual movements or activities taken in following a rule.
- 14 An obvious alternative explanation is given by interpretation. Wittgenstein's objection to this is one of his best-known passages:
- This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here. [...] What this shows is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation*, but which is exhibited in what we call "obeying a rule" and "going against it" in actual cases. (PI: 201)
- 15 A rule is not followed by being interpretable. And it does not lead by determining what the next step is. Wittgenstein's answer is that there is only one place to look for the explanation that is required. And that is the context in which one learned or was trained into the use of the rule. The rule without the background technique or procedure for using it is empty. Just the structure of representation, as a form of measurement, requires a context of use and a learned technique of applying the symbol correctly. Using representations and following rules are intimately involved with bodily activity as well as cultural goals. Nobody would deny this fact, but many would hold that the bodily realization of techniques is irrelevant to our human form of life. Part of the reason that this can seem plausible is because techniques are physically realized to serve a normative role. The techniques are shaped by the normative goal, but techniques are not norms themselves except by their relation to our goals. There is a further reason for ignoring the physical side that underwrites our action: in rejecting

interpretation, we acknowledge that there is a way of grasping a rule which is exhibited in “obeying a rule,” where that phrase does not bring with it any description of the technique by which we obey a rule. We just obey as we can just reach for a towel. Obeying a rule and reaching for a towel are cultural actions underwritten by a procedure or a technique both of which are hidden by the facility with which we engage in the activity.

4. Triangulation: The Initiation of Language Learning

- 16 The initiation of language learning is the most illuminating for the problem at hand. My own position is that our animality cannot be separated from our mastery of language. We have already seen two cases of that interconnect: The structure of representation (and so reference) and the necessity for techniques for using words and rules. Naturalism focuses on our being animals with language. But a better way of thinking of this, and the way Wittgenstein puts this point in one of his most quoted passages, is the *animality*, not the animal way, of way performing certain activities. Animality refers to our linguistified blind techniques. The preferred interpretation is the one that shows an intimate and necessary connection between the body and mastery of language. The second axis is between one and many forms of life. Again, there are both. The more important is what is meant by holding that there is only one human form of life – that is that every aspect of human life is linguistified. If language is a mark of culture, every aspect of human life is enculturated. Yet there are many differing cultural and social lives that human beings live, and so there are many forms of life in this less profound sense. Philosophically it is the singular form of life that is important.
- 17 The third axis – empirical vs. transcendental – is the most difficult. How do we discover and justify what is called “the human form of life”? Boncompagni describes an empirical approach to forms of life as investigating and describing actual societies, cultures, conventions and the like. The sort of work done by sociologists and anthropologists. It is not really a philosophical task. If this is aligned with Culture in the first axis, then the problem of the unity of the animality and the cultural simply disappears, or at least it is no longer of interest to those taking one of these positions. This seems to leave Transcendentalism alone as the means to address this problem. But it too is a position that completely sidesteps the physical side of our lives in favor of a metaphysical solution to the problem of how forms of life can be the given in different language-games. The transcendental solution to this problem is to provide the conditions of possibility of meaning and linguistic practices.¹ This approach is simply alien to Wittgenstein’s rejection of metaphysical solutions to problems. The problem being addressed here is a real one, but the solution must be found within actual human life. Wittgenstein is interested in the conditions for the possibility of meaning. However, he does not reach this by external conditions but, in what will concern here, the identity of objects to which we must secure a referential link to a word.
- 18 One of the most fruitful ways to examine the referential link is in the context of initiate language learning (cf. PI: 1-10; 244-6). This is a strategy that Wittgenstein uses repeatedly to draw attention to our first primitive form of language and how it is acquired. I shall use it to the same end. The early set of passages PI: 1-10 are directed against the view that the referential relation between a word and its object is achieved

by ostensive definition which is a means for naming the object. Naming, it is suggested, is more than mere association between a label and an object. It carries semantic weight. The arguments Wittgenstein constructs, using both the initiate learning context and his early language-games of the grocer and the builder, are directed against the naming hypothesis of reference. Mere labeling an object does not enable one to identify the object or property nor whether it signifies one object or object of a kind. Naming, unless associated with some special properties, like the occurrence of an image as an intermediary between the name and the object, is neutral with respect to which object or property, individual or kind, is picked out by ostensive pointing. It is an idle undertaking unless it is supplemented by something more. That addition is the use which the word has in a mature language-game which consists of “[...] language and the actions into which it is woven” (PI: 7). Wittgenstein points out that he will also use the expression “language-game” to refer to his primitive languages, such as the builders game. Further, “(w)e can also think of the whole process of using words in (2) as one of those games by means of which children learn their native language.” He concludes this line of thought as follows: “It is easy to imagine a language consisting only of orders and reports in battle [...] And to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life” (PI: 19). So we have our first introduction of the phrase “form of life.” It comes at the end of his critique of the positivist conception of reference and the beginning of his use conception of meaning in which language and action are interwoven. It is a way of saying that the claims he makes about language and the method he uses for showing this are reflective of a human form of life, a form of life in which language is intertwined with action. What gives that weight is that how we learn language is so clearly tied to what mature language is.

- 19 We need to examine two cases of a child first learning some basic words of objects that are familiar to the child: “ball,” “chair,” “red,” “pain.” Whereas the naming theory of reference could be used by the individual child him or herself to construct an individual, if not private, language. Sometimes a child can do that, say, naming his pacifier “wawa,” for example. But this can be done only by a very small and select number of cases; the rest of what is learned depends upon the presence and speaking of an adult. The child in other words must be in a social context to acquire language. This necessary feature of language learning is best played through triangulation. On this model, the adult occupies one angle of the base of the triangle while child occupies the second angle of the base. The adult points to the ball at the apex, saying “ball.” The child looks at the ball, and then looks at the adult and says “ball.” It is a triangulation because both adult and child must look at the ball, and they must look at each other while saying “ball.” Two important points must be made about this familiar form of training. First, the adult, to identify this object correctly for the child, must have a complicated array of a background for the use of this expression. Further, the child is supported to his use of the word “ball,” not because he has the background necessary for this concept, but because he is supported by the already competent adults (or older children) who use their competence to enrich the child’s ability to name the object.
- 20 The second point is a novel point that is more strongly supported by the second triangulation argument. But it holds for this first example as well. Wittgenstein holds that it is appropriate to say of the child that “[...] the learner *names* the objects; that is, he utters the word when the teacher points to the stone” (PI: 7). In this philosophical context, it sounds like the child has labeled the object, that he has associated a word with the object, such that the word and the object are distinct. Labels or names are

distinct from the object so-called. This is a crucial mistake. The child, just acquiring language, does not thereby acquire the distinction between the means for representing the object and the object of representation itself. He does not have the conceptual wherewithal to make this distinction, and so avoid conflating the two. What are the consequences of this? The child cannot distinguish between a label and the object. He is not learning a label as the adult may think; he is *learning what the object is*. It is a ball, not an object named “ball,” but being a ball is the identity of the object itself. Again, the child cannot distinguish the difference between the representation and the object so represented. The linguistic name is melded into the object itself. For the adult, eliding the distinction between name and object is the fallacy of conflation, and it is a fairly easy mistake to make even among philosophers. The child is acquiring, through learning his native language, a simple ontology of ordinary objects, ordinary properties, and ordinary sensations, like apples and oranges, balls and trucks, red and blue, hunger and pain. Every aspect of our lives is linguistified beginning with the primitive ontology of early first language. Given that we all acquire this simple ontology in learning language, we live with the ontology of our first language throughout our lives. In no aspect of our lives can the ontology of our first language ever be successfully replaced by a theoretical ontology of a different sort. Ordinary language is the given of our language games (PI: 226). It is our human form of life.

- 21 This feature of initiate learning, that is, the acquisition of the identity of what is real, including what philosophers since Descartes have taken to be private inner episodes. Ordinary language of the most primitive sort is the given of all our language-games. It is the linguistified human life in all its forms, whether a ball or a booboo, a color image or a measured length. When we talk of these, we cannot but take ourselves to talk of the objects directly and immediately. No mediation by representations. This is the human form of life. It is not our second nature. It is our first nature.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BONCOMPAGNI Anna, (2022), *Wittgenstein on Forms of Life*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge Elements).

WILLIAMS Meredith, (1990), “Wittgenstein, Kant and ‘the Metaphysics of Experience’,” *Kant-Studien*, 81(1), 69-88.

WITTGENSTEIN Ludwig, (1969), *On Certainty*, ed. by Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe & Georg Henrik von Wright, trans. by Denis Paul & Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe, Oxford, Blackwell. [OC].

WITTGENSTEIN Ludwig, (2009), *Philosophical Investigations*, German text with an English translation by Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe, Peter Michael Stephan Hacker & Joachim Schulte, revised 4th edition by Peter Michael Stephan Hacker & Joachim Schulte, Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell. [PI].

NOTES

1. See Williams 1990, where I develop a critique of the Kantian reading of the later Wittgenstein.
-

AUTHOR

MEREDITH WILLIAMS

Johns Hopkins University
mwill[at]jhu.edu

Wittgenstein on Forms of Life - Replies to Critics

Anna Boncompagni

- 1 Let me start by expressing my deepest gratitude to the authors who contributed to this book symposium with insightful comments and thoughts, and to the *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* for hosting this discussion. I feel honored that my Cambridge Element was chosen as a suitable subject for a book symposium and I will do my best to respond to the many perceptive, farseeing, and stimulating comments that Lars Hertzberg, Luigi Perissinotto, Elena Valeri, and Meredith Williams graciously provided.
- 2 Lars Hertzberg suggests that the role of Wittgenstein's invocation of forms of life as presented in my work can be characterized as "gesturing towards the contingent": that is, towards recognizing "the role common ways of acting have for our shared language." The notion of forms of life, just like that of language games, is a *gesture* in that it does not demand delving into what a form of life actually is and points to the *contingent* in that the investigation into our ways of judging and categorizing uncovers that there are no *a priori* restrictions on the shape that such epistemic practices can take. I feel very much in agreement with this characterization, and I also like Hertzberg's note on how through this notion Wittgenstein avoids the pitfalls of both empiricism (with its unsuccessful appeal to "specific experiences") and rationalism (with its similarly unsuccessful appeal to rule-following as preordained).
- 3 However, I have something to add regarding the idea of contingency. This is connected with Wittgenstein's non-traditional notion of foundations, amounting, for Hertzberg, to "that which has no foundation" (as opposed to "that which provides a foundation"). Leaning towards the acknowledgment of the fully contingent nature of our linguistic practices and forms of life, Hertzberg observes that talking of "logic and its applications" (as I do in p. 20) suggests that logic, in some sense, precedes or regulates our linguistic practices. The point is that "the notion of language having a hierarchical structure [which Hertzberg sees operating in my view here] is at odds with a conception of language as seen in the light of the concept of forms of life." I agree that language is embedded in our practices and logic is implicit in our use of words and

rules, rather than hierarchically superior to it, which gives me the opportunity to refine my own account: Wittgenstein's investigation of the relationship between logic and its applications is *precisely* a clarification of its embeddedness in how we reason, judge, classify, and so forth. I see indeed a dialectical and mutual relationship between the two, but I do not follow Hertzberg all the way down towards a full contingentism. Indeed, I think that Wittgenstein also acknowledges and holds onto the *distinction* between logic and applications, not in the sense of a hierarchical subordination of the latter to the former, but in the sense of a distinction *in kind* between the two. The riverbed metaphor in *On Certainty* (Wittgenstein 1975: §96-8) illustrates the point:

It might be imagined that some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with time, in that fluid propositions hardened, and hard ones became fluid.

The mythology may change back into a state of flux, the river-bed of thoughts may shift. But I distinguish between the movement of the waters on the river-bed and the shift of the bed itself; though there is not a sharp division of the one from the other.

But if someone were to say "So logic too is an empirical science" he would be wrong. Yet this is right: the same proposition may get treated at one time as something to test by experience, at another as a rule of testing.

- 4 I fear that the emphasis on contingency, while justified for the purpose of pointing out the reciprocal dependence between language and forms of life, logic and applications, or rules and practices, risks masking the relevance of this distinction.

- 5 Another concept that Hertzberg's piece helps put under focus is that of agreement. Particularly illuminating is his proposal of calling agreement in language or forms of life *alignment*, or *being in tune*, to mark its difference from agreement in opinion. The distinction is to be found in the *Investigations* (Wittgenstein 2009: §241):

So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false? – What is true or false is what human beings say; and it is in their *language* that human beings agree. This is agreement not in opinions, but rather in form of life.

- 6 The distinction makes sense of cases in which two individuals or two parties disagree in their views, their behaviors, or their goals, but still share a background of ways of living that shows in their common language. For instance, Hertzberg suggests, take the game of baseball: the pitcher and the batter are playing against each other and performing actions that have opposite goals, but still, their actions are *aligned* in that they take part in the same game and follow the same rules. To push the example a little further, I would add that the game itself is grounded in the alignment of the players' practices, their common knowledge and understanding of the rules, their mutual implicit agreement in following such rules, their awareness that, in a sense, "this is just a game," that they might also play a variant of the game, that there are procedures through which the interpretation of a rule can be questioned, and also procedures through which rules themselves can be altered. The players' alignment in what we may call the language of the game grounds their agreement and also their disagreement in opinions.
- 7 This example brings us back to the concept of foundations, showing that the idea of foundations suggested in Wittgenstein's work is *both* "that which has no foundations" and "that which provides a foundation," if what is meant by this is the grounding role of alignment with respect to agreement in opinion. In other words, I am on board in

rejecting a foundationalist interpretation of Wittgenstein, but I do not endorse a fully contingentist interpretation either.

- 8 Proceeding to Luigi Perissinotto's commentary – One point that he makes seems to me particularly on-target and requires some more elaboration on my part. He observes that while in my view the notion of forms of life is methodological, I also claim that there is a development in Wittgenstein's approach, which starts with remarks that emphasize the cultural aspect of forms of life and the possibility of different human forms of life, and ends with remarks that emphasize instead features that are common to all human beings. The former kind of investigation also seems more empirically oriented, and the latter leans towards a form of transcendentalism. This description, which I propose in 4.3, seems to betray a substantive rather than methodological view of Wittgenstein's notion, or at least seems to be in tension with a methodological reading.
- 9 In response, I want to make two points, one exegetical and one theoretical. From the point of view of exegesis, it is a fact that there is this shift in Wittgenstein's employment of this notion. That is, he tends to use it more in certain contexts than in others in earlier and later remarks, pointing at different ways of living at the beginning and to common human features later. Perissinotto's worry, though, remains apparently valid: this exegetical reading indeed seems to license the hypothesis that Wittgenstein was proposing a substantial view of forms of life, one in which he was explaining what a form of life is, and he slowly changed his mind precisely about what a form of life substantially is. This seems to contradict the methodological view. However – and this is the theoretical point – one can still hold onto the idea that the notion is methodological, if one identifies a development of Wittgenstein's views about philosophy itself: depending on how he intended his own work and the nature of philosophy he used the tool differently, but the instrumental nature of the notion remains throughout time. And there is reason to think that he did slightly change his views about philosophy and about his methods (in the plural: see *Investigations*, §133). For instance, like he did in the *Brown Book* (Wittgenstein 1969) at the beginning of the *Investigations* he imagined elementary language games and then progressively complexified them in order to highlight the essential interconnectedness of language and practices (I believe this is connected with the “developmental” use of the notion of foundations singled out by Hertzberg in his commentary). However, later he does not seem to be interested in a *systematic* study based on this method anymore (indeed, this was the project of the *Brown Book* that he abandoned in 1936). In other words, his metaphilosophy seems to shift a bit, even within his so-called later period. Parallely, the notion of forms of life is used differently in different phases of Wittgenstein's work. Recall the reconstruction I propose in 4.3: in the first phase, Wittgenstein uses it to point out that language games make sense only as part of a form of life (this is the “anthropological view” of 1936-1937). In the second phase (approximately 1938-1944) he uses this notion to discuss rules and agreement emphasizing, again, that we need to look at forms of life in order to better understand what we mean when we appeal to these concepts. In this phase Wittgenstein deepens his awareness of the kind of work he is doing, as manifested in a remark written in 1940:

If we use the ethnological approach does that mean we are saying philosophy is ethnology? No it only means we are taking up our position far outside, in order to see the things more objectively. (Wittgenstein 1998: 45)

- 10 In the third phase (after World War II), Wittgenstein uses this notion to point at “the given.” As Perissinotto also emphasizes, referring to “the given” amounts to an exhortation for philosophers to get rid of their fascination with the scientific way of explaining phenomena, and understand that *this* is the level where explanations stop. To go back to the apparent tension between the idea that there is a development in Wittgenstein’s use of this notion and the idea that it is a methodological tool, the point is that Wittgenstein progressively refined his view of philosophy and his use of this tool reflects such development. He always avoids a substantive notion (the explanation of what a form of life is) and limits himself to showing the embeddedness of language games in our practices, which is where we need to look if we want to better understand our meanings.
- 11 This theme is connected with the last question that Perissinotto asks: if the notion of forms of life is a methodological tool, what is the purpose of such tool? I believe its purpose lies in aiding our understanding of our concepts and of language overall, which has to do with seeing what we have in front of us in a more detailed, nuanced, and correct way. “What we have in front of us” are our concepts or meanings, the way we use words, and how the way our use of words is interlaced with what we do with them. The metaphilosophy that emerges here keeps together a clarificatory aspect – philosophy as conceptual clarification – and a therapeutic aspect – philosophy as a cure against the temptation of explanation.
- 12 This helps me reply to Elena Valeri’s and Meredith Williams’ comments about the nature of methodology. Valeri puts the issue in the framework of existent views about Wittgenstein: both those that I describe in section 3 of the book and those that focus in particular on the continuity between the early and later Wittgenstein and the idea of philosophy as therapy. Her first question therefore is as follows: Do I believe that the existent readings, that I classify according to the natural vs. cultural, singular vs. plural, and empirical vs. transcendental axes of debate, are prevalently substantive in kind? The short answer to this is yes, although there are nuances, and there are other readings besides mine that tend to advocate, implicitly or explicitly, for a methodological view. I include among those Morris (2007) (who follows the later Gordon Baker), Lagerspetz (2020), in part Stern (2004), and Hertzberg (2011), who indeed in the present symposium expresses agreement on this aspect of my work. Valeri’s second question is harder to answer, as I intentionally decided not to take position on the issue in the monograph. The question is whether the methodological vs. substantive distinction has anything to do with the standard vs. “New Wittgenstein” (or neo-Wittgensteinian) reading, according to which throughout his whole work Wittgenstein’s primary goal is a therapeutic one (Crary & Read 2000). This was (and partly still is) a huge debate in the Wittgensteinian scholarship, that, as often happens, gave rise to different trends and labels. The danger with this kind of strongly “labelled” discussion is that it often oversimplifies and overlooks details for the sake of defending a clear position. This is what I want to avoid by not inserting myself into either of the two camps. I agree with Valeri that, in very general terms, neo-Wittgensteinian and therapeutic readers are more on the methodological side, and standard readers more on the substantive side, but neither is necessarily so. On the one hand, “methodological” is definitely more than therapeutic. Therapy is but one aim of Wittgenstein’s philosophy, and he puts its methods to use with this *and other* goals in mind, including clarification. The two are obviously connected but do not coincide. On

the other hand, on the standard reading as described by Valeri, conceptual clarification is the primary goal, but one might further ask what conceptual clarification is and what it accomplishes. In my view, clarification is a matter of deepening our understanding rather than of adding to our body of knowledge. When Wittgenstein directs our attention to forms of life, he does not do so in order to obtain more information about (for instance) how human beings behave in communities; rather, he invites us to make finer distinctions in our concepts, to consider the contexts in which we use certain words, to grasp the “point” of certain situations in which an expression is typically used, and to consider what matters in our making sense of things. In this sense, philosophy, as Valeri says – and I agree on that (see Boncompagni 2012) – is the exercise of our capacity to see what is before our eyes, where seeing is a form of understanding, and what is under our eyes is our life with words.

- 13 Another set of comments from Valeri addresses the issue of the continuity/discontinuity between the early and later Wittgenstein, pointing out that some remarks from the *Tractatus* (Wittgenstein 1961) show connections with the later notion of forms of life. In 6.372 for instance, Wittgenstein distinguishes between “the ancients” who recognize that explanations have a clear terminus and “the modern system” that assumes illusorily that everything can be explained. I agree with Valeri that what Wittgenstein says here resonates with his later remarks on the “given” and the end of explanations. Another point of convergence between the early and later Wittgenstein, in her view, is on the use of the expression “form” to designate logical form in the *Tractatus* and forms of life in the *Investigations*. In both cases, she observes Wittgenstein is concerned with what cannot be analyzed further. Valeri is in good company in addressing this similarity: Juliet Floyd has worked along similar lines. However, one element of discontinuity here is that in checking Rush Rhees’s provisional translation of the first part of the *Investigations* in 1939, Wittgenstein saw as more appropriate for *Lebensformen* the expression “ways of living of human beings,” rather than the maybe more intuitive “forms of life” (Boncompagni 2022: 16). If the employment of “form” were an explicit choice, given the attention he dedicated to translations, he would have probably suggested “forms of life.”
- 14 More convincing (to my ears) is the similarity between this passage from the *Tractatus*, 4.002, and Wittgenstein’s later views: “Everyday language is a part of the human organism and is no less complicated than it.” I do agree on there being a strong continuity here that also shows in his insistence on the use of symbols in the *Tractatus*, which is often overlooked. Notably, just like in the passage just quoted, in the first remark of part II of the *Investigations* Wittgenstein talks of “this complicated form of life,” and the discussion is connected to the comparison between a human and an animal form of life (he is observing that we talk of “hope” for human beings, but not for dogs, except in elementary cases). So, overall, I feel in agreement with Valeri on some continuities between the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*, but I am not sure this is so relevant for our understanding of the notion of forms of life.
- 15 I would like to use this reference to the connection between language and the human organism to bring into the conversation the last commentator, Meredith Williams, who argues that with the notion of forms of life “Wittgenstein is primarily concerned with the problem of the unity of animality and our language game.” I would like to start with her positive proposal, that is, her (substantive) account of forms of life. In her view, to understand what a form of life is amounts to understanding what is

“indispensable to the realization of language games.” Three elements emerge as fundamental: representational structure, techniques and procedures to use words and rules, and the early acquisition of science. On the first point, she highlights that Wittgenstein goes deeper than simply postulating a correlation between word and object, because such correlation needs background conditions and these background conditions have to do with our practices with words, which in turn are attuned to our bodies being the way they are. On the second point, she claims that the place we need to look at for understanding rule following is “the context in which one learned or was trained into the use of the rule,” which again involves bodily activities as well as cultural goals. The third point, concerning what she calls “initiate language learning,” is for me the most interesting. Examining the first remarks of the *Investigations* and the criticism of ostensive definitions, up to the introduction of the notion of forms of life in PI §19 and §23, she claims that what is needed to understand reference and meaning is the consideration of a “mature” language game in which language is interwoven with actions – that is, what is needed is the notion of forms of life. When children learn to speak, they do so by means of a “triangulation.” The elements of triangulation are the child, the parent, and the object that the child and parent are looking at when the latter says what the object is. When children learn, Williams claims, they are not learning to attach a name to an object: they are learning *what that object is*. There is an entire primary ontology of ordinary objects and properties – apple, ball, red, pain, hunger, trucks, etc. – that is transmitted and learned here. When we talk about these objects and properties, it is not a matter of mediation by representation: we talk of them *directly*. This directness of ordinary language is, in Williams’ view, “the given,” and this is not second nature: our *first*, animal, nature is intrinsically linguistic, and it shows the unity of the animal and the cultural that is at the core of the notion of forms of life. (Using different words, Hertzberg also underlines that the biology/culture issue in the interpretation of forms of life is “spurious.”)

- 16 I find this description of the acquisition of a primary ontology through ordinary language genuinely illuminating, and I do think this is the direction towards which Wittgenstein invites us to look. However, and to reiterate once again the methodological point, I do not think that Wittgenstein is, himself, engaged in the explanation of what a form of life is. Williams’ criticism allows me to clarify this one more time. Williams tends to think that in my view the notion of forms of life is a blind pointer that in itself has no meaning, just like an indexical word. I am not claiming that “forms of life” lacks meaning, or that “methodological” equates to “meaningless”: I am claiming that Wittgenstein was not interested in explaining what its meaning was, for two reasons. The first is that the meaning was well-known, and there was no need to make it explicit. The second is that the explanation of what a form of life is by no means essential to the accomplishment of its purpose (and might, in fact, result in just diverting attention from its purpose): showing us where to look, namely, at the interconnectedness between the meaning of our words and what we actually do with them in the contexts in which we use them.
- 17 There are other themes that the four, generous, commentaries helpfully highlight and that unfortunately I do not have the space to address. However, I hope I have answered the main questions and concerns, and I am deeply grateful to all four commentators for the possibility of reflecting further on these topics.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BONCOMPAGNI Anna, (2012), *Wittgenstein. Lo sguardo e il limite*, Milan, Mimesis.
- BONCOMPAGNI Anna, (2022), *Wittgenstein on Forms of Life*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge Elements).
- CRARY Alice & Rupert READ (eds), (2000), *The New Wittgenstein*, London-New York, Routledge.
- HERTZBERG Lars, (2011), "Very General Facts of Nature," in Oskari Kuusela & Marie McGinn (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 351-72.
- LAGERSPETZ Olli, (2020), "Wittgenstein's Forms of Life: A Tool of Perspicuous Representation," *Nordic Wittgenstein Review*, 9, 107-31. Online: <https://www.nordicwittgensteinreview.com/article/view/3560>.
- MORRIS Katherine, (2007), "Wittgenstein's Method: Ridding People of Philosophical Prejudices," in Guy Kahane, Edward Kanterian & Oskari Kuusela (eds), *Wittgenstein and His Interpreters*, Oxford, Blackwell, 66-87.
- STERN David G., (2004), *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations: An Introduction*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- WITTGENSTEIN Ludwig, (1922/1961), *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. by David F. Pears & Brian F. McGuinness, London-New York, Routledge.
- WITTGENSTEIN Ludwig (1953/2009), *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th ed., ed. by Peter Michael Stephan Hacker & Joachim Schulte, trans. by Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe, Peter Michael Stephan Hacker & Joachim Schulte, Oxford, Blackwell.
- WITTGENSTEIN Ludwig, (1958/1969), *The Blue and Brown Books*, 2nd ed., Oxford, Blackwell.
- WITTGENSTEIN Ludwig, (1969/1975), *On Certainty*, ed. by Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe & Georg Henrik von Wright, 2nd ed., Oxford, Blackwell.
- WITTGENSTEIN Ludwig, (1977/1998), *Culture and Value*, 2nd ed., ed. by Georg Henrik von Wright, Heikki Nyman & Alois Pichler, trans. by Peter Winch, Oxford, Blackwell.

AUTHOR

ANNA BONCOMPAGNI

University of California, Irvine
 anna.boncompagni[at]uci.edu

Essays

Pragmatism and Post-Truth

Scepticism, Relativism, and Fallibilism

John Fennell

- 1 In this paper I contrast two familiar approaches to truth and justification: realist (represented by correspondence theories of truth broadly conceived) and anti-realist (illustrated by a verificationist conception of truth that falls out of a verificationist conception of meaning favored, e.g., by the logical positivists), in order to indicate, firstly, two important, but diametrically opposed, intuitions they each capture about truth and justification, and secondly, the epistemological problems they each beget: radical scepticism (realism) and relativism (anti-realism). The important intuition captured by realist approaches is the recognition that truth and justification are conceptually irreducible notions, that a belief no matter how well justified is never thereby true. The epistemological problem they court is that in insisting on the theoretical separation of truth from justification realist accounts risk the complete conceptual estrangement of the two, i.e., radical scepticism. Anti-realist accounts capture an opposing intuition – the connection between truth and justification, or justification’s truth-conduciveness, that the better justified a belief is the more likely it is to be true than its rivals, but in doing so they risk reducing truth to whatever happens to be well-justified at a given time, i.e., relativism. I argue that a third, pragmatist-fallibilist account – pieced together from James’s fallibilist conception of “becoming-true,” and Peirce’s idea that such fallibilism about truth can only be motivated by what he calls “real” doubt, never by mere “hypothetical,” i.e., Cartesian, doubt – can do justice to each of the important insights captured by realist and anti-realist accounts while avoiding their attendant problems. In holding that a proposition never actually attains the status of *being*-true but is always in a (more-or-less advanced) stage of *becoming*-true, i.e., of becoming more and better justified, this fallibilist account both recognizes the connection between truth and justification while avoiding conceptually identifying the two. The Peircean element adds the safeguard that the fallibilism of the always on-going becoming-truth process cannot be hijacked by scepticism, arrested by merely notional, far-fetched sceptical speculations (like the bare “metaphysical possibility” (Descartes 1986: 25) of an omnipotent deceiver) or the mere logical possibility that the view in question could be false, but only by real,

concrete, reason-backed counterevidence. In the final section, I apply this pragmatist account to a current issue of concern in public discourse: academic freedom on college campuses. I argue that the fallibilism it endorses fares better in navigating the “post-truth” world that relativism and radical scepticism result in. It protects a robust notion of academic freedom while at the same time delineating permissible conditions for limiting academic freedom, and in doing so provides a response to the charge of “illiberalism” that such a restriction typically attracts.

1. The Correspondence Theory of Truth and the Problem of Radical Scepticism

- 2 Familiarly, the correspondence theory of truth holds that the truth of a statement, proposition, or belief consists in its correspondence to the way the world is. The idea is that a statement, proposition, or belief (or whatever one’s favored “truth-bearer” is) depicts or represents the world as being a certain way, and it is true if the world is in fact the way the statement depicts, e.g., if there is a fact or state of affairs in the world that *corresponds* to it. On this view, there are two separable things: us, our representations, or what we think or believe is true, on the one hand, and the way the world is, which is independent of us (and them), on the other, with the truth of the former consisting in it corresponding to the way the latter is.¹
- 3 On this conception of truth, truth is *in principle* independent of our beliefs, thoughts, representations, etc., i.e., it is non-epistemic in nature in the sense that one can think, or believe, or even have good justification for thinking or believing something to be the case and yet it not be that way (and conversely, something can be the case without one believing it to be so). This captures one central intuition about our concept of truth, namely, that what is true is in principle independent of us and our (justified) beliefs and representations. This non-epistemic conception of truth expresses a realist conception, since to be a realist about some subject matter *X* is precisely to hold that there is a fact of the matter about *X*, independently of our ability to know, recognize, find out about, or justifiably believe *X*. The correspondence theory of truth precisely maintains this about truth: because for it the truth of a statement ultimately depends on the world being a certain way, and the world being a certain way is independent, in principle, of whether we know it is that way.
- 4 A key epistemological problem faced by such realist or non-epistemic conceptions of truth is that they, precisely in being *non-epistemic*, conceptually divorce truth from justification: that a belief is very strongly, perhaps even maximally, justified, never *entails* that it is true. Epistemic notions like justification, evidence, reason are one kind of thing; truth is another, different, non-epistemic thing altogether.² A consequence of conceptually disconnecting truth and justification in this way is that it opens the door to *radical scepticism*, since once truth and justification are thought to be *a priori* dissociated from one another, it is a short step to think that they have *nothing to do* with each other: i.e., that having good justification for holding a belief provides us with *no* reason for thinking that the belief so held is true, or even more likely to be true, than a belief lacking any justification at all.³ Radical scepticism expresses a deep cynicism about the notion of justification itself, and thus of the truth-conduciveness of good justification. Radical scepticism, in this way, should be distinguished from another, rather benign, non-radical form of scepticism (or *fallibilism*) which claims only that it is

possible (sometimes) for a belief to be justified and yet be false.⁴ Radical scepticism, on the other hand, is the view that a belief's justification is totally unrelated to the question of its truth, that truth and justification are *in principle* separate, not merely that they may sometimes *in fact* be separated (which is all that fallibilism says). That is, the radical sceptic countenances the possibility of a complete and permanent alienation of truth from justification, the fallibilist only that they may be partially and occasionally disconnected.

- 5 The link between realist conceptions of truth and radical scepticism can be illustrated by considering how Descartes' hypothesis of the omnipotent deceiver, which presupposes a realist conception of truth, generates radical scepticism (Descartes 1986: 14-5). The omnipotent deceiver hypothesis contends that we do not know that all of our experiences and beliefs are not being fed to us by an all-powerful, all-knowing deceiver because, being omnipotent and omniscient, our experiences and beliefs would be *exactly the same* whether they were accurately representing the way the world is or an elaborate delusion created by the deceiver. Thus, the hypothesis that there could be such a being who is comprehensively deceiving us is verification- and falsification-transcendent, something that we cannot ever verify or falsify (i.e., justify one way or the other) in our experience. If Descartes nevertheless thinks the hypothesis *could* be true, and he surely does since he thinks it is a serious sceptical challenge that needs to be answered before knowledge can be possible, his conception of truth must be a realist one: i.e., for him it must be possible for something (e.g., that there is an evil demon) to be true even though we *could* never possibly be justified in believing that there is (or that there is not). Also, and relatedly, since truth is a radically non-epistemic notion on this view, having good reason for holding a belief, e.g., that there is a table in front of me, in virtue of (say) being up-close to it and seeing it in good light, gives us no good reason for thinking that it is true (after all, there could be an omnipotent deceiver manipulating our experience). In this way, Descartes' omnipotent deceiver hypothesis presupposes a realist conception of truth which conceptually divorces justification and truth and in doing so ushers in the possibility of radical scepticism.

2. The Verificationist Conception of Truth and the Problem of Relativism

- 6 Traditionally, one strategy for dealing with this problem, which results from the a priori disconnection of truth and justification, is to simply a priori reconnect them by defining truth in terms of justification. One such example is the verificationist conception of truth. According to it, for a statement to be true is for it to satisfy a certain justificatory standard (such as, verification by experience), thereby re-establishing a conceptual link between truth and justification. On this account of truth, a proposition is true not if it corresponds to the way things are in the experience-independent world, but if it is verified or confirmed by our experiences (of the world).⁵
- 7 This verificationist conception of truth was held, e.g., by the positivists. Their *verification principle* was in the first instance a criterion of *meaningfulness*: a statement is *meaningful* iff it can be verified (or falsified) by possible experience, iff it has consequences for experiences that we could possibly have (Ayer 1971: 48f.). And, although the verification principle's primary job is to provide a criterion of meaningfulness, it has, as a straightforward corollary, a verificationist theory of truth.

Given that a statement is meaningful iff it can be verified or falsified by possible experience, a statement is *true* iff it is *verified* (rather than falsified) by possible experience, or iff its consequences for possible experience *actually obtain*.⁶

- 8 A distinctive feature of this verificationist theory of truth, in contrast to the correspondence theory, is that it constitutes an *anti-realist* (rather than realist) account of truth. That is, rather than holding that truth is independent of our epistemic capabilities, it holds instead that truth is dependent on our ability to possibly know or justify (e.g., by verifying in possible experience) that it is. For it, although truth may be independent of our *actual* knowledge-gaining powers at a given time, it is not independent of all our *possible* knowledge-gaining capacities. As such, it expresses an epistemic conception of truth, and in so doing, captures another, opposing but equally important, intuition about truth from the realist one: that if something is completely beyond our powers of *ever possibly* finding out about it (not merely beyond our current abilities to do so), then it is apocryphal, a metaphysical fairytale. For a claim to be possibly true, it has to be something that we *could* verify (according to some possible method of verification). It is the intuition behind the idea that justification is “truth-conducive,” that better justifying a belief increases the likelihood of it being true, and it explains why we are motivated in our truth-seeking inquiries to provide better justifications for our beliefs and theories.
- 9 The distinctiveness of this anti-realist conception can be illustrated by the starkly different response it has to the omnipotent deceiver hypothesis from Descartes’ own realist informed one. On the verificationist approach to truth, which precisely reconceives meaning and thence truth in terms of (possible) justification or verification by experience, the omnipotent deceiver hypothesis turns out to be straightforwardly *meaningless* (rather than expressing a deep sceptical challenge that demands address). A *fortiori*, it stands no chance of being even possibly true. For, since no experience *could* verify or falsify the deceiver’s possible existence, as its existence or non-existence is compatible with all *possible* experience whatsoever, the hypothesis fails to pass the test for meaningfulness set out by the verification principle, and thereby fails to clear the minimum bar for being possibly true. This is why, according to the positivists, the Cartesian problem of radical scepticism is a pseudo-problem, a prime piece of metaphysical hocus pocus. It is because, by their reckoning, the thought experiment generating it is not possibly verifiable (or falsifiable), and so is meaningless.
- 10 Traditionally, the main epistemological problem facing the verificationist conception of truth, and indeed anti-realist (or epistemic) accounts of truth more generally, is that they risk confusing truth with justification and in so doing result in relativism: i.e., identifying what *is* true with what we (justifiably) *think* is true, or *take* to be true, at a given time/place.⁷ To be sure, what is *thought* to be true, what is justified or verified by experience *can* (and often does) change over time/place, but this does not mean truth itself can or does. For example, the proposition that the earth is flat was once thought to be true, and the evidence of experience seemed to point in its favor; now we think it is (roughly) spherical, and the evidence of experience now justifies or verifies this contrary claim. In this way, what we (justifiably) think is true, what is confirmed or verified is relative to some one-or-other community of inquirers and context of inquiry. However, if truth and justification are identified, then truth would be relative to a community of inquirers as well, but this is unacceptable. For, while it is perfectly appropriate to hold that which beliefs are *justified* about the earth’s shape may change

over time (based as they are on the experiential/theoretical data available at the time), one cannot conclude from this that the *truth* about its shape also may – that would be to hold that the *earth* at some point changed shape, that it was once flat and is now round. Thus, what is *thought* true, what is verified or justified, is relative to time/place/context, but what is true is not. The verificationist account of truth (and epistemic accounts of truth more generally) is unable to do justice to this point, since in identifying truth with justification, it results in relativism about truth: that what is true is whatever we happen to (justifiably) think is true at a given time, thus that any (justified) view is just as true as any other, and consequently that we can only ever talk in terms of “true-for-us” and “true-for-them.”⁸ In short, the objection to the epistemic construal of truth is that it is not a theory of truth at all, for the notion of truth essentially involves the idea of what is the case independently of what one is justified in thinking, and this is sacrificed once truth is defined in terms of justification, or verification.

- 11 One way epistemic conceptions of truth try to capture the non-epistemic character of truth is by introducing an *ideal* element into their account.⁹ On these modified accounts, truth is not straight-forwardly equated with what is justified at a particular time and place, or what is agreed to in a certain context, but with what *would* be agreed to by all who investigate long enough and hard enough, i.e., it is the view about which there would be consensus *in ideal epistemic circumstances*, or at the *ideal end of inquiry*. The conceptual work done by the concept of the *ideal* is twofold: first, it is meant to preserve the distinction between something's being true and its being justifiably believed according to the standards of justification operative in some actual (i.e., non-ideal) context. The preservation of this distinction is essential for truth to keep its essentially objective character, its sense of being what is the case *whatever* we happen to think is justified at a given time/place, such that relativism can be averted. On the other hand, the notion of ideal justification is also meant to block radical scepticism by making truth something that is within our epistemic reach. This is because it rules out the possibility that all my beliefs could be ideally justified yet this provide no reason at all for them being true, since true beliefs are simply *defined* as beliefs that are ideally justified. The pressing question facing such idealized epistemic conceptions is: how coherent is the notion of ideal justification, how can it be both within and outside our possible epistemic grasp at the same time? For, if it is to block the relativist identification of what *is* true with what we justifiably *believe* is true at a given time it cannot be too much within our reach. However, if it is to avoid radical scepticism, the radical separation of truth from justification, the notion of ideal justification must be somehow still very much within our possible epistemic grasp. This seems an impossible needle to thread. The problem with such ideal accounts (expressed by the first horn of the dilemma) is working out what they could possibly mean since we have little to no idea of what ideal epistemic conditions are or what the ideal end of inquiry might look like, precisely because in being *ideal*, they are beyond anything we could ever actually achieve. Like the realist idea of correspondence to the world (in itself), which is also understood as something that is transcendent in principle to our ability to know it, idealizing epistemic accounts of truth risk positing truth as in principle beyond our epistemic reach, thus offering no real alternative to realism (and as a result promise a return to radical scepticism). On the other hand, to the degree they avoid this radical sceptical fate they make ideal justification something within the reach of our epistemic capabilities, but in so doing risk failing to sufficiently distinguish truth from

justification, thus landing us in relativism.¹⁰ The challenge is to craft a conception of truth that can do justice to both intuitions at once: one that allows truth its essential independence from justification at any given time/place so that we can avoid the pitfalls of relativism while at the same time conceptually connecting truth with justification we are actually capable of so as to avoid the perils of radical scepticism. I will argue in the next section that a fallibilist-pragmatic conception of truth, reconstructed from aspects of James's and Peirce's views, which eschews appeal to ideal epistemic conditions, can succeed in providing such a middle position.¹¹

3. A Fallibilist-Pragmatist Conception of Truth: James and Peirce¹²

- 12 A seemingly central feature of James's remarks on truth is that truth is not a static property of belief, but is instead a dynamic, living characteristic that an "idea" or belief can gain over time, and which it can also lose.

The Truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth happens to an idea. It *becomes* true, is *made* true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process: the process namely of its verifying itself, its veri-*fication*. Its validity is the process of its valid-*ation*. (James 1982b: 229)

- 13 James also speaks of offering "a genetic theory of truth" (James 1982a: 219), that truth is something that has a history of its coming about – beliefs *become* true (and can presumably no longer remain true). On my interpretation of James, it is crucial to distinguish the notion of *becoming true* from *being true*, and to recognize that the above remarks pertain to the becoming true of a belief not to what its being true consists in – i.e., what the property of truth *itself* is, once a belief has gone through the process of *becoming true* and has actually attained the status of *being true*. For, if the above remarks concerned *being true*, then James is in danger of saying that truth *itself* can change. The mistake in doing so was pointed out in the previous section – it confuses a property (namely, changeability) that applies to *becoming true* (which is James's proxy term for *being taken to be true* or *being thought true*) and predicates it of truth itself (or *being true*) – and if this were James's view it would make his position no different from relativism. For, it would mean not merely that James holds that what we *take* to be true (what is in the process of becoming true) at a given time can change, but that what *is* true can change. Thus, rather than interpreting his above remarks about the dynamism or changeability of truth as being about truth *itself* (i.e., *being true*), I contend James is talking instead about the process of *becoming true*, of being *taken to be*, or *thought*, true. On this reading, James's pronouncements about the non-stagnant character of truth do not express a problematic commitment to relativism, viz. that truth *itself* can (and does) change (e.g., that the earth changed shape sometime in its history), but rather the benign commonplace that what we *thought* to be true, e.g., about the earth's shape (or what was in the process of becoming true in the course of our inquiring into its shape) changed over time.
- 14 Although becoming true needs to be distinguished from being true in this way, nevertheless it is by going through the process of becoming true that some beliefs come out to *be* true. The question that remains is: what, for James, does the property of *being true* (i.e., the property of truth itself) consist in? These oft-quoted passages from

“Pragmatism’s Conception of Truth” and “What Pragmatism Means” give us clues to his answer:

“The true,” to put it very briefly, is only the expedient in the way of our thinking, just as “the right” is only the expedient in the way of our behaving. Expedient in almost any fashion; and expedient in the long run and on the whole of course; for what meets expediently all the experience in sight won’t necessarily meet all farther experiences equally satisfactorily. Experience, as we know, has ways of boiling over, and making us correct our present formulas. The “absolutely” true, meaning what no further experience will ever alter, is that ideal vanishing-point towards which we imagine that all our temporary truths will someday converge [...] We have to live to-day by what truth we can get to-day, and be ready to-morrow to call it falsehood. (James 1982b: 238)

[The] pragmatic account of what truth everywhere signifies [is that] “truth” in our ideas and beliefs means the same thing that it means in science. It means [...] nothing but this, that ideas (which themselves are but parts of our experience) become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relation with other parts our experience [...] any idea that will carry us prosperously from one part of our experience to any other part, linking things satisfactorily, working securely, simplifying, saving labor, is true [...] The process here is always the same. The individual has a stock of old opinions already, but he meets a new experience that puts them to a strain. Somebody contradicts them; or in a reflective moment he discovers that they contradict each other; or he hears of facts with which they are incompatible; or desires arise in him which they cease to satisfy. The result is an inward trouble to which his mind till then had been a stranger, and from which he seeks to escape by modifying his previous mass of opinions. He saves as much of it as he can, for in this matter of belief we are all extreme conservatives. So he tries to change first this opinion, and then that (for they resist change very variously), until at last some new idea comes up which he can graft upon the ancient stock with a minimum of disturbance of the latter, some idea that mediates between the stock and the new experience and runs them into one another most felicitously and expediently [...] New truth is always a go-between, a smooth-over of transitions. It marries old opinion to new fact so as ever to show a minimum of jolt, a maximum of continuity. We hold the theory true just in proportion to its success in solving this “problem of maxima and minima.” (James 1982a: 215-7)

- 15 James writes here that truth itself – our “older stock of truths” as he calls them – is what is “expedient in the way of our thinking [...] expedient in almost any fashion, and expedient *in the long run* and on *the whole course*” (James 1982b: 238; my emphasis). This expedience involves a number of things: true beliefs (as opposed to those that are in the state of becoming true) exert a stabilizing or controlling influence on the becoming-true process of newer beliefs. In the case of scientific or empirical beliefs, this means that true beliefs are the ones that make successful predictions about future runs of experiences, or that continue to be verified by ongoing experiences. They enable us to move from past sets of observations to future ones with a “minimum of jolt [to], a maximum of continuity [with]” well-established, fundamental surrounding beliefs. For example, the belief that the earth is round, rotates daily on an axis and revolves yearly around the sun on an elliptical orbit is one that makes certain predictions about future experience – e.g., concerning where the sun will be in the sky at certain times of the day, about the length of daylight hours at particular times of the year, about what shape we will see on satellite imagery of the earth, etc., etc. – which continue to be borne out in experience, while jibing with other, well-established surrounding scientific beliefs.

- 16 True beliefs are made through this becoming-true process, and as they continue to be verified by ongoing experience, continue to successfully predict future experience while cohering with past experience and well-established beliefs, they continue to approach the status of *being* true. However, since the becoming-true process is never-ending, since it is always open to the deliverances of future experience which cannot be known in advance, beliefs for James are ultimately always in the becoming-true state. Truth itself is what proves itself or is verified “in the long run,” and since the long run is never completely achieved but is always unfolding, at any given time what we take to be true (what is becoming true) could turn out false.¹³ As such, for James, we must be fallibilists about what we *take* to be true at any given time, “we have to live to-day by what truth we can get to-day and be ready to-morrow to call it falsehood” (James 1982b: 238). This is the inbuilt fallibilism of his becoming-true account: because the true belief is what is expedient to believe *in the long run*, yet what we take to be true, or what we think is expedient to believe, *at a given time* may turn out not to be in the long run, “what meets expediently all the experience in sight won’t necessarily meet all farther experiences equally satisfactorily” (*ibid.*), what we take to be true at any given time is always fallible (or, what is in the process of *becoming* true may not end up *being* true). For James, truth’s long run unchangeability or absoluteness is mirrored in the fallibilism of what we take to be true at any given time; or put otherwise, the inescapable fallibility of what we take to be true at any given time is the epistemic correlate of the objective “absoluteness” of truth itself.
- 17 To illustrate how this works in a mundane example: suppose I’m walking down Main Street and look across the road and see a figure in a shop window. I look at the figure for a good while and notice that it doesn’t move, so I form the belief that it is a mannequin that I am observing. From past experience, I have a stock of old beliefs concerning mannequins – e.g., that mannequins are often to be found in shop windows, that they are inanimate objects, that inanimate objects don’t move under their own steam, and so on. In forming the belief that this is a mannequin, I thereby create expectations about how future runs of my experience will go concerning it that are in keeping with the “older stock of truths” I have about mannequins and inanimate objects: e.g., I expect I won’t see it moving. The truth of this belief that there is a mannequin in the shop window consists in its ability to move most expediently from old beliefs to new (future) experiences. Suppose I continue to get experiences of a motionless figure when looking at it, then the belief that it’s a mannequin is discharging this function of mediating between old and new experiences and beliefs expediently, and in this way the belief is being verified, and so is in the process of becoming true. However, if, when I continue to look, the figure moves, the belief is no longer predicting successfully future experience because, coupled with my old stock of beliefs already outlined about mannequins and inanimate objects, I expected to get future experiences of it remaining stationary. I now have an inconsistency in (a “jolt” to) my stock of beliefs: e.g., that this object is a mannequin, that mannequins are inanimate objects, that inanimate objects are not self-movers, that this object moved of its own accord. Consistency can be restored to (the jolt can be removed from) my belief corpus in a number of different ways: I could write off the experience of its moving as non-veridical (after all, say, I was looking from across the street, there were reflections of cars and people moving on the window that was interfering with what I was seeing and which may have given the impression that the mannequin was moving when it wasn’t), I could change my belief that it was a mannequin in the first place (rather it

was in fact a shop steward who just happened to be remarkably still when I was first looking), more radically I could change my beliefs about mannequins being inanimate objects or about inanimate objects not being self-movers, I could even deny excluded middle and hold that something can move and be stationary at the same time and place. For James, which option I should take, and therefore which belief is (in the process of becoming) true is the one that restores consistency and enables predictive success in the most expedient way in the long run, i.e., with the minimum modification to our well-established belief corpus in the long run. Which revision will do so in the long run will depend, of course, on how future experience plays out. Unless our old stock of beliefs is badly mistaken we would expect consistency to be restored in ways other than those suggested by the final three possibilities laid out above, since they would involve altering many fundamental beliefs of biology, physics, and logic, which are extremely well-credentialed by an enormous amount of past experience and other surrounding beliefs. This is the epistemic constraint of conservativeness that James speaks of, a mark of the epistemic venerability of the “old stock” of beliefs, their justificatory entrenchment in our web of belief, as Quine would put it. It dictates that we are, and should be, loathe to revise them, unless runs of experience go pear-shaped and pragmatically demand it. So, in this particular case, the pragmatic response would be to adopt either one of the first two options, which one would depend on how experience continued to unfold. However, it must be noted that, should ongoing experience unfold in highly unexpected ways (to us, now), more radical consistency-restoring options would be pragmatically called for. In this way, the account still demands that we be fallibilists even about our currently most firmly held beliefs, however it will only be pragmatically warranted to revise those beliefs if experience were actually to unfold in radically unexpected ways.¹⁴ Importantly, fallibilism about, and, if necessary, subsequent revision of, the well-established, old stock of beliefs, needs to be motivated by real reasons for doubt, such as unexpected experiences actually occurring. The mere logical possibility of there being alternative ways of restoring consistency to one’s belief corpus is not enough.

- 18 This last point is in keeping with an important distinction which Peirce draws between *hypothetical* and *real* doubt.

We cannot begin with complete doubt. We must begin with all the prejudices which we actually have when we enter upon the study of philosophy. These prejudices are not to be dispelled by a maxim, for they are things which it does not occur to us *can* be questioned. Hence this initial scepticism will be a mere self-deception, and not real doubt [...] A person may, it is true, in the course of his studies, find reason to doubt what he began by believing; but in that case he doubts because he has a positive reason for it, and not on account of the Cartesian maxim. Let us not pretend to doubt in philosophy what we do not doubt in our hearts. (Peirce 1992: 28-9)

- 19 In an avowedly anti-Cartesian spirit, Peirce argues that in epistemology we cannot but begin where we are, *in medias res*, with all its attendant presuppositions, cultural inheritances, “prejudices,” or “older stock of truths” (James). He warns us not to “pretend to doubt in philosophy what we do not doubt in our hearts,” and in so doing draws a distinction between pretend doubt and genuine doubt, between hypothetical (or Cartesian) grounds for doubt and real (or pragmatic) grounds for doubt. That is, Peirce is insisting on the difference between merely pretending to doubt that there’s a mannequin in the shop window (because of the extremely remote logical possibility that there could be an omnipotent deceiver) and really doubting that there is as a

result of some anomaly in my current experience. When one has a real doubt, one has a concrete reason to doubt, and when this occurs, one is able to make an inquiry into whether the reason is a good reason for doubt or not. If it's not, the doubt is allayed; if it is the doubt is reinforced, and further inquiry may result in actual revision of the belief. One can only assess the doubt if there is a reason, and the reason for him cannot be the bare Cartesian possibility that one could be the victim of evil demon deception. One needs, instead, a "positive," concrete reason for doubting the mannequin's existence – e.g., having an experience of it moving, noticing beads of sweat on its brow when I see it close up, etc. In this way, for Peirce, there are standards of legitimacy for calling a belief into doubt, and the merely logical possibility that it could be false is not enough to legitimize a genuine, rationally motivated scepticism.¹⁵ Rather, there needs to be real doubt, doubt generated from actual experience not mere metaphysical speculation, and in the absence of some specific, concrete evidence for thinking that a belief is no longer "expedient," then the appropriate epistemological stance to take towards it is to continue to think that it is.¹⁶

4. Fallibilism, Relativism, and Radical Scepticism

- 20 From the discussion of the mannequin example in the previous section, the fallibilist-pragmatist account of truth involves three epistemic criteria: verification by experience *in the long run*, logical consistency with other beliefs *in the long run*, and "conservativeness" ("minimum of jolt, a maximum of continuity" with our "older stock" of epistemically venerable beliefs) *in the long run*.¹⁷ The component common to each is the "long run" feature, and its significance for my purposes lies in the fact that it makes available a middle position between the broadly anti-realist and realist approaches laid out earlier, and in doing so avoids the problems of relativism and radical scepticism that they face respectively.
- 21 The fallibilist-pragmatist account avoids relativism because it gets objectivity into the picture, and it does so without having to invoke the realist notion of correspondence to a world completely independent of us and our epistemic norms (or the anti-realist surrogate of ideal epistemic conditions impossible for us to ever actually achieve).¹⁸ A genuine objective standard is made available not by comparing our current empirically verified, consistent and "conservative" beliefs against *the world per impossible*, or against a set of beliefs that satisfy some ideal version of these epistemic standards (again *per impossible*), but rather by comparing them against other (imperfect) beliefs that we actually come up with which meet these same epistemic standards. The account does not identify true beliefs with beliefs that satisfy the threefold criteria *at a given time*, thereby avoiding the relativist identification of what we think is true at any given time with what is true, since true beliefs are those that satisfy these criteria *in the long run*, and presumably beliefs could be verified by experience *at a given time*, be consistent with other beliefs *at a given time* and satisfy the constraint of "conservativeness" *at a given time*, yet not do so *in the long run*. Hence, at any given time, what we think is true, i.e., what meets our threefold epistemic criteria, is always provisional (i.e., fallible), and possibly revisable based on comparison with future beliefs of ours that meet (an updated version of) these criteria. In this way, the assessment of whether our beliefs at any given time are true is not carried out by comparing them to the belief-independent world, nor to impossible-to-actually-achieve

ideal standards, but by comparing such beliefs and their capacity to satisfy our epistemic criteria with other, future beliefs of ours and their ability to meet the same criteria, and so on (where those other, future beliefs will be open to assessment by comparison to still further-into-the-future beliefs and their ability to meet the same standards). Because what we *think* is true at any given time is always open to assessment by comparison with what we think is true at another time, what we think is true at any given time is always provisional and possibly revisable such that truth *simpliciter* is never identifiable with it. This account keeps truth epistemically in-house, since truth neither requires comparison to a world which is in principle independent of our knowledge gaining capacities, nor to ideal epistemic conditions that are impossible for us to ever actually epistemically achieve. In this way it does not divorce truth from justification *tout court*, thus honoring the anti-realist intuition about the relation between justification and truth and avoiding radical scepticism. At the same time, while not identifying what is true with what we find justified (i.e., what satisfies the threefold epistemic criteria) *at a given time*, because what is true is identified with what is justified *in the long run*, this account can distinguish between justifiably thinking that a belief is true at a given time and its being true, and so does justice to the realist intuition (that truth and justification are conceptually irreducible to one another) and avoids relativism. In fact, it entails fallibilism rather than relativism, where fallibilism is distinguished from relativism in the way pointed out earlier: relativism is the view that whatever we take to be true (i.e., whatever beliefs are justified according to our threefold criteria) at a given time is true; fallibilism is the (different) position that whatever we take to be true at a given time could turn out false. Relativism identifies what *seems* to us to be true at a given time with what *is* true; fallibilism precisely does not.¹⁹

- 22 In order to avoid relativism, one needs the conceptual resources to draw the distinction between what one *thinks* is true at any given time and what *is* true (i.e., the seeming/being distinction). The fallibilist-pragmatist account shows how to draw this distinction “internally” (i.e., without appeal to the external world or ideal belief systems) by comparing a given belief system’s ability to meet the threefold epistemic criteria against another belief system’s ability to meet the same criteria. The permanent possibility of assessing any given belief system’s ability to satisfy the criteria against another belief system’s ability to satisfy the criteria is what allows conceptual space for the idea that any given set of beliefs could be wrong, which in turn forestalls the relativist identification of what seems to us to be true at a given time with what is true. And, if one is worried that this internal account of truth is not objective *enough*, such worries may be allayed by the realization that this fallibilist conception of truth, as James and Peirce reminds us, is the one natural science operates with.
- 23 This account also should be distinguished from radical scepticism. As indicated earlier, radical scepticism completely decouples justification from truth, either by conceiving of true beliefs as those that correspond to the way things are in the world which are completely independent of us and our epistemic norms, or by thinking that true beliefs are those that satisfy ideal epistemic standards which are impossible for us to ever attain. Truth and justification thus become conceptually severed from each other, which is why radical scepticism entails that a belief’s being justified does not provide any reason for thinking that it is true. Fallibilism, though, does not *completely* disconnect truth from justification. Instead, for fallibilists, it’s *possible* for truth and justification to *on occasion* fail to go together (which is enough for there to be a

conceptual distinction between the two, and thus relativism is avoided), but they are not conceptually disbarred from (ever) going together (and thus radical scepticism is avoided). To be sure, for fallibilists, truth and justification are different notions such that a belief's being justified at a given time cannot be identified with its being true (which is how it avoids relativism); but they are not *totally* unrelated to each other either, such that it's not the case that being justified doesn't count *at all* in favor of a belief's being true (which is how it avoids radical scepticism). Rather, for fallibilists, truth is conceptually *related* to justification without being *reduced* to or *identified* with it – i.e., truth falls out of standards of justification being satisfied *in the long run*, without being identifiable with such standards *at any given time*.

- 24 For pragmatists, then, the dialectical space is not foreclosed in the binary way traditionally imagined. A choice is not forced between *either* having a genuinely objective notion of truth, which (supposedly) requires appeal to the way the world is or ideal epistemic standards (and which leads to radical scepticism), *or else* an account of truth that conceptually identifies it with certain de facto standards of justification, and which leads to relativism. There is a third way, fallibilism, which, by developing a genuine, internal standard of objectivity, avoids both radical scepticism and relativism.

5. Fallibilism and Academic Freedom

- 25 Familiarly for pragmatists, the measure of the usefulness of a view is the difference it makes in practice. In this final section, I aim to put the fallibilist-pragmatist position developed here to the pragmatic test by considering how it fares on a currently highly charged issue in public discourse: academic freedom on college campuses in the US.²⁰ I contend that it compares favorably to relativism and radical scepticism (though I will focus more on the way it contrasts with the former).²¹ I will argue that efforts to restrict academic freedom by both the political right and the political left currently are informed by a relativistic outlook, shown by the fact that such efforts tend to express ideological parochialism or partisanship. This has the consequence that they aim at, or result in, the suppression of different viewpoints, i.e., a culture of cancellation, whereas positions informed by a fallibilist perspective typically would not. Furthermore, I will argue that where a fallibilist-informed position would recommend deplatforming a given viewpoint, it would do so on more principled, i.e., non-ideologically driven, truth-pursuing grounds, and in doing so offer a more consistently liberal basis for limiting academic freedom than relativist-backed ones.
- 26 A problematic implication of relativism is that it leads to the kind of “post-truth” ideology that underwrites cancel culture, instead of providing the conditions for genuine, rational discussion and assessment of opposing viewpoints, where views are accepted or rejected on the basis of their epistemic merits or lack thereof. The route from relativism – the position that denies the possibility of a singular, objective truth on any subject matter, substituting in its stead talk of a plurality of “my truths” and “your truths” – to cancel culture is as follows: if whatever we happen to think is true at a given time is identified with the truth, then once there are different “we’s” with very different ideas about what is true, then there are different *truths*, and no way for rationally evaluating them. The mere assertion that it’s “my truth” or “our truth” is all the warrant a view needs and can have; no further justification is required or possible (given that there is no objective truth of the matter to be had). Examples of this kind of

relativism resulting in the cancellation of opposing viewpoints abound from both ends of the political spectrum although they manifest in different ways. Relativistic, i.e., ideology-driven, assaults on academic freedom from conservatives have come from outside the academy and have taken the form of government intervention in the hiring of faculty or the framing of curricula. A paradigmatic example is Governor De Santis's overhaul of New College Florida which involved: the appointment of six new conservative trustees to the board, the firing of the former, progressive president and the installing of a conservative political ally as the new one, the dismantling the college's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) office, the denial of tenure to five faculty members with progressive research agendas and teaching profiles, and the enforcement of curricula restrictions so as to eliminate courses, with certain race and gender content, from being taught. De Santis deemed such measures "justified" by "his (and more generally conservatives') truth" that prevailing educational approaches in progressive institutions of higher education like New College constitute indoctrination in "woke" Ideology rather than genuine education. Assaults on academic freedom from progressives have typically come from inside the academy, led by professors or students (or both) who justify the suppression of conservative viewpoints on the grounds of "their truth," namely that such views are oppressive to marginalized or vulnerable groups.²² In such a relativistic, post-truth (or truth-denying) intellectual vacuum where there are just different groups each with their own dug-in ideas about what they think is true, rational scrutiny and assessment of opposing viewpoints in the search for genuine truth is replaced by ideological decisionism in which one or another view is just simply adopted and deemed true (depending on who is in power) and the other suppressed (or bullied into suppression).

- 27 The question is: does fallibilism leave us any better off than relativism in this regard? The worry is that it does not. For, if any given view is (in principle) possibly false, as fallibilism holds, then we should avoid ideological tunnel vision and allow as many different viewpoints as possible to be heard and pursued if we are to have a chance of arriving at the truth. In this way, fallibilism is naturally aligned with academic freedom – so far so good – but the concern is that this leads to a similar epistemic egalitarianism as relativism: the equal worth of all viewpoints, progressive and conservative, with nothing to choose between them. In such an environment, progressives accuse fallibilist-backed defenses of academic freedom of allowing academic freedom (or "viewpoint diversity") to be weaponized by conservatives:²³ they compel everyone (in the name of academic freedom) to platform and respond to views that are obsolete, even pernicious, as well as to defend (unnecessarily) positions that are already well-justified. They argue that fallibilism will mire us in debates we rightly left behind long ago: requiring us to engage with, and respond to, opponents of DEI or those who deny the reality of systemic anti-Black racism (say), simply because, in the spirit of fallibilism, there is a possibility that our opposing positions on these issues *could* be false. However, such progressives argue, we should not have to, just as we shouldn't have to respond to flat earthers or Holocaust deniers. I think, though, that the two key features of the fallibilist-pragmatist position I have been highlighting – the "long run" orientation of its three-fold epistemic standards and its insistence that "real" doubt is required to legitimately motivate a fallibilistic attitude about a well-established belief – insulate fallibilism from this objection. Furthermore, both features work in lockstep with the ideal of academic freedom, and thus provide an avenue of response to the

charge of “illiberalism” often made, in counter objection, by conservatives against progressives.

- 28 First, fallibilism does entail that progressive positions on, e.g., the reality of systemic Anti-Black racism or the merit of DEI programs, are subject to scrutiny and may need to be defended by their advocates from possible objection. But this is as it should be – any view should be subject to intellectual scrutiny – and it is something that should be welcomed by their defenders. However, this does not mean that fallibilism thereby imperils the legitimacy of progressive viewpoints; on the contrary, such positions have nothing to fear from a fallibilistic approach so long as they continue to satisfy the three-fold pragmatic epistemic criteria. It is true that fallibilism does not epistemically insulate any view (including progressive ones) from challenge, but this should be seen as a good thing, since it will challenge and ultimately unseat only those views that cannot stand up to scrutiny, i.e., satisfy the three-fold criteria of truth in long run. If one’s position is right, it will be borne out *in the long run*. Likewise, this element of the fallibilist account of truth does not legislate that any view (including conservative ones) is flat-out false to begin with and thereby justify our canceling it from the get-go (although it will weed out those that fail to meet its criteria over time), but it does have a built-in structural mechanism that prevents us from ever being left with one if it proves unsatisfactory – courtesy of the standing requirement that any view is open to scrutiny, and possible rejection, if it fails to pass muster.
- 29 The second component of the account – the Peircean distinction between real and hypothetical doubt (which is also captured to a degree in James’ “conservativeness criterion”) – is what really works to defang this objection that fallibilism risks giving unnecessary oxygen to rightly rejected, retrograde views. For, it requires that one needs to “take seriously” that one’s beliefs could be wrong, and thence adopt a good-faith fallibilistic attitude towards them, only if presented with a “positive reason,” as opposed to a gratuitous, merely hypothetical, ground for doubt. Thus, just because something may be always open to doubt and thus possibly revisable does not mean it is legitimate (according to pragmatists) to doubt, and possibly revise, it. Just as the mere possibility that there could be an omnipotent deceiver is not, for pragmatists, a legitimate reason for doubting that there is a desk in front of me now, so one cannot call into question a progressive political position, e.g. that there is systemic racial inequality currently in the world, merely because one happens to think it is a left-wing conspiracy theory. More than this is required; one would need some concrete evidence for the claim that it is a leftist political fabrication, in the form of (say) intersubjectively accessible and assessable socio-economic data, before the fallibilistic mechanism of subjecting the claim to scrutiny should be mobilized. In the absence of such concrete reasons for doubt, such a belief should remain part of the (now) “stock of truths” accepted in the academy that are continuing to pay their way epistemically. Although James advises to take as true what today you think is true but be open to the possibility that it may turn out false tomorrow, this is compatible with the idea that so long as a view continues to meet the threefold criteria, so long as there are not real reasons to doubt it, it should continue to be treated as true and be acted on accordingly. Thus, the distinction between real and hypothetical doubt can help to safeguard well-established (progressive) views from being vulnerable to gratuitous doubt or “nuisance objections” from their political opponents.

30 Furthermore, the pragmatic-fallibilistic position may provide progressives with an effective response to the charge of illiberalism often levied at them by conservative opponents. As I pointed out earlier, a common way liberal campuses have been responding to conservative speakers and viewpoints is to simply “deplatform” them: i.e., ban them from speaking or conduct campaigns to have them cancelled.²⁴ Predictably, this has invited the charge from conservatives of hypocritical “illiberalism,” of progressives only honoring the ideal of academic freedom for views with which they are in political agreement.²⁵ In response, some progressives have doubled down and argued that the ideal of academic freedom is a Trojan horse for regressive views to get an undeserved re-airing. For them, calls for “viewpoint diversity” are nothing of the sort, but rather a dog whistle allowing reactionary political positions to get re-broadcast. (This is a version of the progressive objection to academic freedom, mentioned earlier, viz. that it risks being disingenuously used by the right to advance their conservative political agenda). While the ideal of academic freedom *may* be (mis)used in this way politically, it strikes me that getting rid of it is both dangerous²⁶ and unnecessary. For, as we have just seen, the fallibilist-pragmatist position has a mechanism for legitimately limiting the freedom to voice any view at all in the name of academic freedom: namely, any re-airing of a previously discredited viewpoint needs to be in the service of pursuing the truth, and so some concrete epistemic motivation needs to be provided for such a view to get a rehearing, e.g., a different argument supporting it (from the one considered to have convincingly discredited in the past), or an objection to the argument thought to have undermined it in the past, etc. In the absence of such motivation or challenge, the “conservativeness criterion” extends default entitlement to the accepted view. In this way, it seems to me that progressives can deal with this threat in the same way as contextualists deal with sceptical challenges in epistemology. Just as we do not need to rule out the possibility that we are looking at a barn façade when we see a barn in the distance unless we have some positive evidence for thinking we are in barn-façade county, so we are not epistemologically required to seriously consider a “regressive” conservative viewpoint in the name of academic freedom on the fallibilist-pragmatist position I’m defending here unless there is good reason for thinking it has something to it. Thus, although fallibilism does not permit us to cancel such viewpoints out of hand, likewise it does not require that we have to platform them in the name of academic freedom unless there is a concrete reason to do so.²⁷ In this way, the deplatforming of certain retrograde viewpoints under such conditions does not sacrifice the ideal of academic freedom.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

“A Letter on Justice and Open Debate,” *Harper’s Magazine*, July 2020. Online: <https://harpers.org/a-letter-on-justice-and-open-debate/>.

AYER Alfred Jules, (1971), *Language, Truth and Logic*, New York, Penguin.

- BERUBE Michael & Jennifer RUTH, (2022), *It's Not Free Speech*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press.
- BRANDOM Robert B., (1994), *Making It Explicit*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.
- DAVID Marian, (2018), "The Correspondence Theory of Truth," in Michael Glanzberg (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Truth*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 238-58.
- DAVIDSON Donald, (1984), *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- DAVIDSON Donald, (2001), *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- DESCARTES René, (1986), *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. by John Cottingham, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- DUMMETT Michael, (1978), *Truth and Other Enigmas*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.
- DUMMETT Michael, (1993), *The Seas of Language*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- FOGELIN Robert, (1994), *Pyrrhonian Reflections on Knowledge and Justification*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- JACKMAN Henry, (2021), "Putnam, James, and 'Absolute' Truth," *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, 13(2). Online: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejpap.2509>.
- JAMES William, (1982a), "What Pragmatism Means," reprinted in Horace Standish Thayer (ed.), *Pragmatism: Classic Writings*, Indianapolis, Hackett, 209-26.
- JAMES William, (1982b), "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth," reprinted in Horace Standish Thayer (ed.), *Pragmatism: Classic Writings*, Indianapolis, Hackett, 227-44.
- LAMBERTH David, (2005), "James and the Question of Truth: A Response to Hilary Putnam," in Jeremy Carette (ed.), *William James and the Varieties of Religious Experience: A Centenary Celebration*, New York, Taylor & Francis, 221-34.
- MISAK Cheryl, (2000), *Truth, Politics, Morality: Pragmatism and Deliberation*, New York, Routledge.
- MISAK Cheryl, (2015), "Pragmatism and the Function of Truth," in Steven Gross, Nicholas Tebben & Michael Williams (eds), *Meaning Without Representation: Essays on Truth, Expression, Normativity, and Naturalism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 262-78.
- PEIRCE Charles Sanders, (1982), "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," reprinted in Horace Standish Thayer (ed.), *Pragmatism: Classic Writings*, Indianapolis, Hackett, 79-100.
- PEIRCE Charles Sanders, (1992), "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities," reprinted in Nathan Houser & Christian J. W. Kloesel (eds), *The Essential Peirce*, vol. 1, Bloomington, Indiana University Press.
- PUTNAM Hilary, (1978), *Meaning and the Moral Sciences*, London, Routledge.
- PUTNAM Hilary, (1981), *Reason, Truth and History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- PUTNAM Hilary, (1995), *Pragmatism: An Open Question*, Oxford, Blackwell.
- PUTNAM Hilary, (2005), "James on Truth (Again)," in Jeremy Carette (ed.), *William James and the Varieties of Religious Experience: A Centenary Celebration*, New York, Taylor & Francis, 172-82.
- QUINE Willard Van Orman, (1953), "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," in W.V.O. Quine, *From a Logical Point of View*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.
- RORTY Richard, (1982), *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.

RORTY Richard, (1991), *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, New York, Cambridge University Press.

RORTY Richard, (1998), *Truth and Progress*, New York, Cambridge University Press.

RORTY Richard, (2000), "Universality and Truth," in Robert B. Brandom (ed.), *Rorty and His Critics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1-30.

STIRTON William, (1997), "Anti-Realism, Truth-Conditions, and Verificationism," *Mind*, 106(424), 697-716. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2254671>.

WILLIAMS Michael, (1996), *Unnatural Doubts: Epistemological Realism and the Basis of Scepticism*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press.

WRIGHT Crispin, (1993), *Realism, Meaning and Truth*, Oxford, Blackwell.

NOTES

1. The correspondence theory of truth has gone through many versions and refinements over its long history. Various truthbearers (e.g., beliefs, thoughts, ideas, judgments, statements, utterances, assertions, sentences, propositions) and truthmakers (facts, states of affairs, events, objects, tropes, properties), as well as different conceptions of the relation of correspondence (representing, picturing, isomorphism) have been proposed to deal with various technical problems (e.g., false beliefs, logically complex beliefs, the liar's paradox, and so on). Two of the more enduring technical problems with it, for pragmatists, are: first, that no sense can be made of the idea of a sentence corresponding to an extra-linguistic fact in the world because facts are always linguistically mediated and can only be individuated by appeal to the true sentences that "correspond" to them (Rorty 1982: xix; Misak 2000: 55); and second, that the correspondence theory entails that every true sentence corresponds to the same fact – the Big Fact (Davidson 1984: 41-3). For an overview of the technical problems facing correspondence theories, see David 2018. I put such technical matters aside here since my interest is in the basic realist idea they all have in common (no matter the technical differences between them), namely that a truthbearer (whatever one takes that to be) is true or false in virtue of the way the independent world is, and the epistemological implication that that conception of truth has, viz. radical scepticism.

2. Rorty (1998: 22; 2000: 4) dubs this the "cautionary" sense of truth, which is the only (deflationary) use he finds for the concept.

3. Many have noted the link between realist or non-epistemic accounts of truth, such as the correspondence theory, and radical scepticism, including Putnam (1981: 54f., and 1978: 125), Fogelin (1994: 161f.), and Davidson (2001: 144-5). Williams (1996: 229-30) expresses it most clearly: "It seems natural to many philosophers to conclude that if truth is a non-epistemic property of beliefs or propositions, a radically non-epistemic notion, then truth about the objective world is always potentially evidence-transcendent. That a proposition is maximally well-supported by experience never means that it is true, evidential support being one thing and truth another. Why, however, should the mere existence of a gap between truth and evidence threaten us with radical scepticism? At its most general, the answer is that realism seems to open the way to scepticism by making it impossible to account for the necessary truth-conduciveness of epistemic justification. The intuitive thought here is that, whatever else he thinks, a realist must take the truth of a belief to consist in some kind of non-epistemic relation to the world, which we can think of under the general heading of 'correspondence'; and the problem for the realist is to explain why this does not play into the sceptic's hands by decoupling justification and truth altogether. If truth is not to be analyzed in epistemic terms, there can be no internal or conceptual connection between attributing justification to a belief and attributing truth. But we

cannot establish an empirical connection between the conditions under which we take beliefs to be justified and the conditions under which we take them to be true unless, per impossible, we have a way of grasping facts that operates independently of whatever beliefs we happen to find credible. This seems to mean that we cannot establish any connection between justification and truth [...]. [O]nce we become realists we will be unable to show that what we call 'justification' really deserves the name."

4. See Williams (1996: 48f.) on the notion of "radical scepticism" and its difference from "non-radical scepticism" (aka fallibilism).

5. The anti-realist conception of truth, like its realist counterpart, has gone through various iterations, depending on which element of the realist position it has primarily targeted: whether the correspondence relation, the notion of truth-conditions, the idea of mind-independence, or the law of bivalence. The various forms of antirealist opposition these have spawned include: verificationism, assertion-conditional or manifestability-conditional approaches, various forms of idealism (phenomenal, transcendental, linguistic, etc.) and intuitionism – see Dummett 1978, 1993, and Wright 1993 for developed versions of some of these antirealist varieties. For discussion of some of the differences between a variety of antirealist positions, as well as some realist responses to them, see Stirton 1997. As with realism, I bypass these technical matters as my interest is in what these different antirealist positions have in common – that the truth is not independent in principle of our ability to know it – and the epistemological implication of this idea, relativism.

6. Ayer (1971: 116). In typical anti-realist fashion, Ayer explains how the verificationist account of meaning turns the question of what it is for a statement to be true into one of how it is validated (verified, justified). In the case of empirical statements this is by sensory experience.

7. This point – that epistemic conceptions of truth, which include verificationist and coherentist ones, risk resulting in relativism (and the subsequent example) – is drawn from Putnam (1981: 55). It is a point also made by Davidson (2001: 137-40), Fogelin (1994: 158), and Williams (1996: 233f.).

8. What Putnam (1981: 54) called "anything goes" relativism, and what some today (at least in part) mean by the term "post-truth."

9. See for example Peirce (1982: 97) and Putnam (1981: *passim*). As the rest of this paragraph points out, the introduction of an "ideal" element into this broadly anti-realist, verificationist conception moves it away from a strictly anti-realist/verificationist position to one that has a certain realist character. For, given that *ideal* justification is not something that can ever be actually attained by any justificatory practices in which ordinary, i.e., non-ideal, fallible inquirers can be engaged, such a standard (and thereby truth which is identified with it) is transcendent to, and alienated from, any justification *we can ever achieve*. However, at the same time, in still conceiving of truth in terms of *justification* (albeit ideal justification) rather than to something conceptually divorced from justification (viz., the evidence-transcendent world), it attempts to maintain the conceptual link between justification (or evidence) and truth, and to that extent retains a certain anti-realist element. Because "idealized accounts" can, in this way, be seen as tilting in both realist and anti-realist directions, if Peirce's idealized account of truth is characterized as realist, then it is not of the simple correspondence-theory type; but likewise, if it is typecast as anti-realist, then it is not of the simple verificationist-theory variety either. Pragmatist positions generally, I argue, occupy a middle position between realism and anti-realism (as I will explain in section 4 below), and depending on the extent to which they feature "ideal conditions" are more or less problematic (for the reasons explained in this paragraph and reiterated later).

10. Williams (1996: 236-7) points out this dilemma facing "idealizing" anti-realist theories; he also diagnoses that the reason such accounts of truth invoke the idea of "ideal justification," in notions like "ideal epistemic conditions" and "ideal end of inquiry," is in an attempt to avoid

relativism. On the problem of making sense of notions like “ideal epistemic conditions” and “ideal end of inquiry,” see also Misak (2000: 49-50).

11. Peirce is standardly interpreted as propounding an account of truth that features the notion of ideal epistemic conditions. I follow this standard interpretation of him, for an alternative interpretation see Misak (2000: 48-101). Given my objections to this notion, it is not this element of Peirce’s account that the “fallibilist-pragmatist” account I am proposing will make use of. The component of Peirce’s account that is important for my purposes is his insistence that truth and knowledge can only be challenged by “real doubt.” To avoid the relativistic identification of truth with *de facto* justification, which is the job supposedly performed by *ideal* epistemic conditions in Peirce’s account of truth (on the standard view), my account will make use of James’s fallibilistic conception of the “becoming-true” process. I will argue this has two advantages: first, it avoids risking incoherence by not employing the idea of ideal epistemic conditions, which we can in principle never achieve or have any clear idea of. Second, in using only epistemic resources that we can actually get our hands on in its account of the concept of *being* true, it avails itself only of what a pragmatist should: the actual justificatory procedures operative in a given context of inquiry in which beliefs go through the process of becoming-true.

12. I don’t wish to get embroiled in an intramural debate about whether the view of truth expressed in this section accurately represents James’s own or expresses instead “Putnam’s James” (Putnam 1995: 8-12; 2005), or “Rorty’s James” (Lamberth 2005), or Rorty’s own (Rorty 1991: 128), etc. Suffice to say I think it’s a recognizably pragmatist view that can be cobbled together from certain commitments of James and Peirce. My interest is to consider it on its own terms with a view to clarifying the epistemological and practical work it can do. On the interpretative question, see Jackman 2021, and Lamberth 2005.

13. As just noted, the satisfaction of James’s three-fold epistemic criteria (verification by experience, logical consistency with other beliefs, and conservativeness or “minimum of jolt”) in the long run is never actually achieved; it is always fugitive and ongoing since there are always future experiences to be had, further objections to be answered, additional contexts of inquiry to be considered, etc. Given this, James’s invocation of epistemic criteria being satisfied in the long run can sound very similar to Peirce’s appeal to ideal epistemic conditions which also can never be attained such that one might be tempted to think there is little to choose between Peirce’s (to which I have objected) and James’s (which I am advocating): viz. that they both appeal to the “ideal” in some way and so both face the problem sketched earlier for such “idealizing” views. However, there is an important point of contrast between them, and one that makes James’s account preferable to Peirce’s in my view. Although, for James, the satisfaction of the three-fold epistemic criteria in the long run can never be actually achieved (and so in that sense is ideal), it is not by comparison to such an unachievable “ideal” long run standard that objectivity is introduced into his account of truth. Instead a standard of objectivity is supplied to his (and indeed any) account of truth once a seeming/being distinction can be drawn (or once the identification of truth with what is taken to be true at a given time is averted) and this can be achieved via a comparison between two conflicting (actual) beliefs about what is true at different times – which is very much within our epistemic capabilities as it is what we do all the time in the course of our ongoing inquiries – rather than contrasting a belief produced under actual epistemic procedures with one produced under purportedly ideal ones. The ideal of a belief that stands fast in the long run while never actually achievable nevertheless provides the permanent possibility for comparing any actual belief with any other, actual, but possibly conflicting, belief, and in so doing forestalls the identification of any one of them with *the* truth. In this way, the notion of an ideal standard is doing no work in James’s account in terms of injecting into his notion of truth a genuine sense of objectivity, and so it avoids the problems associated with such a notion discussed earlier (see the last paragraph of the previous section and note 11 above).

14. Quine (1953: 43) expresses clearly the flavor of this fallibilism: “Revision even of the logical law of the excluded middle has been proposed as a means of simplifying quantum mechanics; and what difference is there in principle between such a shift and the shift whereby Kepler superseded Ptolemy, or Einstein Newton, or Darwin Aristotle?” Compare James (1982b: 238): “Ptolemaic astronomy, Euclidean space, Aristotelian logic, scholastic metaphysics, were expedient for centuries, but human experience has boiled over those limits, and we now call these things only relatively true [...] ‘absolutely’ they are false.”

15. Brandom’s default-challenge conception of justification is a contemporary version of Peirce’s idea, see Brandom (1993: 176–8). The basic idea of the default-challenge conception is that one can be justified in holding a belief, e.g., an observation report like, “There is a barn there,” because, in ordinary conditions, one has default entitlement to it. Such beliefs are justified not because they are based on prior reasons for them but because typically there are no reasons against them. For such stable, well-entrenched observational beliefs, we are required to justify them *only if an appropriate challenge is made*, i.e., a “real doubt” (in Peircean terms) arises about them, otherwise, they enjoy a default justified status.

16. So characterized I think the pragmatic-fallibilist account of truth developed in this section bears certain similarities to the “new pragmatist” position on truth defended by, e.g., Misak (2000: 64–7, and 2015: 263–5), which views truth as a norm of inquiry in the language game of making assertions. On that view, truth’s role in assertion-making discourse is what makes assertion-making different from other discursive practices, such as, those in which speakers idly speculate, or air mere opinions or swap personal preferences or aim to amuse each other, etc. Speakers who are engaged in inquiry or the making of assertions are under distinct obligations or undertake certain commitments: e.g., their assertions require, and speakers are committed to offering, justification or verification for them, the implications of said assertions need to be identified and assessed for compatibility with other assertions made, conflicting well-motivated objections need to be considered, and so on, all of which is motivated by the discourse being aimed at arriving at the truth. As a norm regulating actual discursive conduct, rather than an impossible-to-attain ideal or *focus imaginarius*, truth functions to give structure and content to the discourse as it unfolds: by requiring justifications to be given, objections to be considered and answered (if possible), implications to be teased out, etc. If one takes the discursive practice of engaging in inquiry and making assertions that Misak speaks of as similar to what I have called the process of the “becoming true” of beliefs in a context of inquiry, and what Misak identifies as the obligations and commitments that the norm of truth holds speakers to in such context as similar to what I have called the “three-fold epistemic criteria in the long run” which beliefs have to satisfy in order to be true, then there are broad similarities between our positions. We differ on which figure of classical pragmatism we think most held it: Peirce or James.

17. As we saw from the mannequin example, these three criteria need not always pull in the same direction or with the same strength. What might be expected on the basis of past experience and be consistent with settled beliefs – e.g., that it’s a mannequin, that mannequins don’t move unaided or sweat – need not be what is being verified by current experience – e.g., seeing the figure move or sweat. A solitary experience of it moving we might write-off as a hallucination (and thereby lean on the criterion of conservativeness and the epistemic integrity of well-established beliefs), repeated experiences of movement or sweating will require other means of restoring consistency. Consistency itself, in radical enough circumstances, may even be something that needs to be revisited – as Quine’s quantum theory example supposes. This is what gives the belief that is in the process of becoming true at this time (the one we *take to be true* at this moment) its always provisional, ineliminable fallibilistic quality, which is what I take James to mean when he calls such provisional, becoming-true beliefs a temporary “go-between or smooth-over of transitions” between the stock of old beliefs and new experiences.

18. See notes 9 and 13 above.

19. Of course, in resisting relativism, fallibilism captures the realist intuition – that truth is one thing, and justification something else, since (fallibly) justified beliefs need not be true. Fallibilism, thus, I claim, occupies a middle position, between realism and anti-realism, and thereby avoids both radical scepticism and relativism.

20. While they are sometimes run together and can lead to similar challenges, academic freedom and free speech need to be distinguished. Academic freedom is framed explicitly around the pursuit of truth; freedom of speech is not. Academic freedom is the outgrowth of the late nineteenth century re-thinking of the university from a kind of finishing school for young men whose job it was to instruct them in the conventional moral “truths” of the day needed to succeed in civic life, to an institution devoted to the production of specialized knowledges aimed at arriving at the truth about the natural and social worlds. Academic freedom was the protection needed so that the truth could be pursued without fear or favor from forces outside the academy, be that the government, the church, public opinion, or powerful and wealthy private stake holders. Freedom of speech has no such truth remit, it is rather the first amendment right that one has an individual to freely express one’s own opinion, whether or not it purports to reflect some truth or merely airs a personal preference, taste, prejudice, etc., so long as doing so does not harm others (where harm is usually narrowly interpreted so as allow this freedom maximal acceptable scope). As such, academic freedom should be constrained by the ideal of truth, freedom of speech need not. Because I am concerned, in this section, with the pragmatic function that truth can play in the regulation of public discourse, my interest is directed at academic freedom rather than freedom of speech, but I would note that since academic freedom is constrained by the ideal of truth but freedom of speech is not, the protections afforded expression under the banner of free speech should be more extensive than those afforded by the ideal of academic freedom, and thus why banning speech protected by the former is more fraught than it is for the latter. E.g., under freedom of speech, one should not be silenced if the content of their speech is merely not true, it has to be harmful to others; under academic freedom one can – if it’s false, as judged by the norms and methodologies of the relevant discipline and its practitioners – since such discourse aims at truth. So, another difference between academic freedom and free speech is that the latter is a right that the *individual* has, the former is a freedom held and administered (and possibly limited) by a discipline, or community of practitioners/knowledge-peers.

21. The reason being that it is rare to find in public discourse actual examples of *radical scepticism* motivating the conclusion that there is no truth concerning some subject, radical scepticism being more of a boutique obsession of professional epistemologists. One, though, could argue for the *theoretical* possibility of a route from radical scepticism to post-truth (truth denial) in the following way: in holding that no view is ever adequately justified, radical scepticism denies the possibility of knowledge, and thereby that any position is (really) true. However, since this proposed route from radical scepticism to post-truth is purely notional, and since in this section, I’m interested in concrete examples from the public sphere, I will talk exclusively of the route from relativism to post-truth. In the final paragraph of this section, I will outline similarities between the way progressives who embrace a fallibilist approach to truth can respond to conservatives’ charges of illiberalism, and the way contextualists in epistemology respond to sceptics.

22. Recent examples include: the disinviting of Professor Dorian Abbot, a University of Chicago geophysicist, from delivering the John Carlson Lecture at MIT in 2021 after his expressed opposition to some aspects of affirmative action and diversity programs in higher education; and the resignation of Carole Hooven, the Harvard evolutionary biologist, following a campaign of vilification from students for her view that sex is binary, even though gender identities are multiple. Another example is the following proposal contained in the Princeton Faculty Letter to the President on July 4th, 2020 as part of a faculty-led effort to address Anti-Black racism: “11.

Constitute a committee composed entirely of faculty that would oversee the investigation and discipline of racist behaviors, incidents, research, and publication on the part of faculty, following a protocol for grievance and appeal to be spelled out in the Rules and Procedures for Faculty. Guidelines on what counts as racist behavior, incidents, research, and publication will be authored by a faculty committee for incorporation into the same set of rules and procedures.” All are examples of silencing or censoring (or attempts to silence or censor) certain viewpoints or research endeavors in the name of a particular constellation of beliefs thought true at the moment – in these cases, DEI and Anti-Black racism. These constellations of beliefs may well be true (and I believe that many of them are) but the fallibilist-pragmatist approach would require that such beliefs (and my opinion of them) should be substantiated by the process of standing up to ongoing scrutiny, not by silencing, or intimidating into silence, opposing viewpoints.

23. Berube & Ruth 2022 make this charge.

24. For examples, see the cases of Professors Abbot and Hooven mentioned in an earlier note.

25. The “illiberalism of the left” is often dismissed by those on the left as a conservative fiction, however it is a worry harbored within the professoriate on progressive campuses. *Harper’s Magazine* published “A Letter on Justice and Public Debate” in the summer of 2020, co-signed by more than 150 authors, artists, academics, and journalists disturbed by the climate of censorship and cancellation they perceive to be prevalent on progressive college campuses.

26. Cancel culture can cut both ways and is just as easily deployed by conservatives against progressives, as was illustrated earlier in this section.

27. Of course, who determines whether there is “concrete reason” will be contested and probably settled by whoever is in power in the moment. This is usually how it goes in culture wars about epistemic authority whether between Cardinal Bellarmine and Copernicans or between present-day conservatives and progressives on issues like affirmative action or structural racism. However, preserving the ongoing, open-ended, fallibilist structure of inquiry and contestation will at least help to ensure the correction in the long run of whatever missteps we may make in the short term.

ABSTRACTS

This paper begins by contrasting two familiar approaches to truth and justification: realist and anti-realist, in order to indicate, firstly, two important, but diametrically opposed, intuitions they each capture about these notions, and secondly, the epistemological problems they each give rise to: radical scepticism and relativism respectively. It then introduces a third, fallibilist-pragmatist account, which captures each of the important insights of the other two accounts while avoiding their problems. The paper concludes by showcasing how the fallibilist-pragmatist approach differs from both relativism and radical scepticism, and in doing so fares better than they do in navigating the issue of academic freedom and “cancel culture” on college campuses.

INDEX

Keywords: Realism, Anti-Realism, Scepticism, Relativism, Fallibilism, Academic Freedom

AUTHOR

JOHN FENNELL

Grinnell College
fennellj[at]grinnell.edu

Potentiality and Actuality in Peirce and Dewey

Jim Garrison

- 1 The categories of potentiality and actuality are fundamental to the philosophies of Charles Sanders Peirce and John Dewey. However, the literature on these categories is remarkably sparse.¹ The existing references are scattered, difficult to find, and often underdeveloped. The only comprehensive exposition of Dewey's understanding of potentiality and actuality thus far found is a perceptive paper by Thomas M. Alexander (2014). Similarly, the only paper exclusively addressing Peirce's views on potentiality and actuality appears to be Dewey's "Peirce's Theory of Quality."
- 2 Peirce and Dewey provide original revisions of Aristotle that share striking similarities, likely due to their familiarity with Aristotle's logic and metaphysics. They are perhaps the most significant advancements in the discourse on actuality and potentiality since the Scholastics. This paper seeks to prove these two categories as vital for the future development of pragmatism.
- 3 I start by outlining Aristotle's philosophy of potentiality and actuality before discussing Dewey's reconstruction of Aristotle. The third section examines some of Peirce's relevant references to Aristotle. It is followed by a discussion of secondary literature on Peirce's Scholastic realism, universals, potentiality, and actuality. I then discuss Dewey's presentation of Peirce on potentiality and actuality. The conclusion summarizes Peirce and Dewey's similarities, including unique individuality and the anti-Parmenidean continuity of inquiry, while noting disparities.

1. Aristotle on Potentiality and Actuality

- 4 Since Peirce and Dewey both reconstruct Aristotle, I begin with the rudiments of his position. In Aristotle's metaphysics, substance (i.e., *ousia*) is ontologically basic. All else inheres in or is said of substance. *Eidos* designates essence, unchanging unique form, or constitutive nature. *Eidos* is the *telos* toward which everything that changes moves.

Aristotle's metaphysical concepts are understood primarily in terms of *eidos* (*Metaphysics* 1071b-1076a).

- 5 *Arche* refers to the ultimate foundation, ultimate origin, or absolute first principle. *Energeia* indicates actuality, activity, functioning, active power to enact change, or efficient cause. Latent potentiality (*dynamis*) is the passive power or capacity to receive change. *Entelecheia* refers to perfect and complete actualization, ultimate, or final cause; it is nearly synonymous with *energeia*. *Ousia* and *arche* tend to simply become the *eidos* upon complete actualization (*entelecheia*) of an entity's latent potential (*dynamis*). An acorn has the latent potential to become an oak tree. *Eidos*, *entelecheia*, *ousia*, *arche*, *telos*, *energeia*, and *dynamis* are reticulately related; hence, they cannot be entirely pulled apart.
- 6 W.D. Ross observes, "We cannot explain change without potentiality" (1971: 177). However, according to Aristotle, "Nothing is promoted from potentiality to actuality without the agency of something actual" (*ibid.*). Potentiality for Aristotle requires a preexisting, actual essence to give it form. For instance, a piece of wood may be formed into a chair or a table. *Eidos*, not matter (i.e., potential), defines "chair" or "table." For Aristotle, actuality precedes potentiality and every principle of change (*Metaphysics* 1051a2-3).
- 7 According to Ross, Aristotle

distinguishes two senses of δύναμις [*dynamis*]. One is that which the word in ordinary Greek connotes, viz. power, the power in one thing to produce change of some sort in another. The other, in which he is mainly interested, is the potentiality in a single thing of passing from one state into another. He sees clearly that the notion of potentiality is indefinable; he can only indicate its nature by pointing to particular instances. (Ross 1971: 176; 1045 b35-1046 a11, 1048 a25-b4)
- 8 Aristotle offers an active, dynamic, teleological philosophy wherein "the action is the end, and the actuality is the action. And so even the word 'actuality' is derived from 'action,' and points to the complete reality" (1050a 22-23).² Unlike Plato, for Aristotle, the eternal forms are immanent rather than transcendent. The eternal essences depend on a never-failing succession of material realizations in individual substances.

2. Dewey's Reconstruction of Aristotelian Potentiality and Actuality

- 9 Dewey's "The Subject-Matter of Metaphysical Inquiry" is a good place to begin examining his reconstruction of actuality and potentiality. Dewey names three irreducible traits of existence: "diverse existences, interaction, change" (1915, MW.8: 6). Diverse existences are actualities. Interactions among existences actualize potentialities, thereby affecting change.³ Dewey's reconstruction of Aristotelian potentiality and actuality is indispensable to his reconstruction of metaphysics.
- 10 Dewey decries the "tendency to conceive a fixed state of affairs and then appeal to a latent or potential something or other to effect change" (1918, MW.8: 11). Although rejecting Aristotle's latent potentials leading to a predetermined *entelecheia*, he agrees that potentials require something actual to be actualized. Alexander observes: "'Potentiality' might as well be the term given to this ability to see some things as conditions of other things and those others as outcomes without making assumptions

that the result was ‘contained’ [latent] in the condition absolutely” (2014: 43, fn.26). The actual is not some eternal antecedently existing essence.

- 11 Change involves two facts. First, “the change exhibits (in connection with interaction with new elements in its surroundings) qualities it did not show till it was exposed to them” (1915, MW.8: 11). Dewey is thinking of emergent properties. Oxygen sustains combustion, hydrogen is highly combustible, and H₂O extinguishes class A fires. Emergent qualities occur when existences participate in novel interactions. Alexander comments that Dewey seeks “a new sort of naturalistic metaphysics that embraced possibility, potentiality, emergence, and creativity” (2014: 20). Dewey’s Darwinian universe involves not only change but also novelty. *Eidos* translates into Latin as species. Dewey does for all *eidon* what Darwin did for species. They emerge, evolve, and become extinct. The second fact is that “the changes in which these qualities are shown run a certain course” (*ibid.*: 11). Changes are events having continuity.
- 12 According to Dewey, no potentiality is actualized unless actual existences interact with other actual existences:

To say that an apple has the potentiality of decay does not mean that it has latent or implicit within it a causal principle which will some time inevitably display itself in producing decay, but that its existing changes (in interaction with its surroundings) will take the form of decay, *if* they are exposed or subjected to certain conditions not now operating upon them. Potentiality thus signifies a certain limitation of present powers, due to the limited number of conditions with which they are in interaction plus the fact of the manifestation of new powers under different conditions [...]. Potentiality thus implies not merely diversity, but a progressively increasing diversification of a specific thing in a particular direction. (Dewey 1915, MW.8: 11)
- 13 As potentials are actualized, diversity increases.
- 14 In Dewey’s theory of emergence, we must not assume that the “eventual has somehow been there from the start, ‘implicitly,’ ‘potentially,’ but efficaciously enough to attend to its own realization by using material conditions at every stage” (1925, LW.1: 209). The eventual is an eventuation of interactions constituting an event (1931, LW.6: 9-10).
- 15 Here is an example of such an emergence. The first-generation stars that condensed after the “Big Bang” included only the first three elements of the periodic table: hydrogen, helium, and lithium. Gravity condensed these elements into stars that began generating fusion reactions, forming heavier elements. Beyond lithium, all the elements in the periodic table up to iron result from exploding giant red stars. Heavier elements like zinc, iodine, and gold emerged from the exploding nebula. The currently known heaviest element in the periodic table is Oganesson. It may exist nowhere else in the universe beyond the interactions in the laboratory where it was created. As Kahn comments, for Dewey, “Since our knowledge or experience of powers can never be complete, we are privileged to work within the framework of nature to create new potentialities” (1949: 716). Emergent human life, with its emergent technoscience, helps actualize the universe’s potential. Oganesson was created “intentionally,” with intentionality being an emergent actualization of the potentiality of first-generation stars.⁴
- 16 In “Time and Individuality,” Dewey refines his earlier reconstruction. He examines two implications of postulating that genuine qualitative transformations occur throughout nature:

First and negatively, the idea [...] is excluded that development is a process of unfolding what was previously implicit or latent. Positively it is implied that potentiality is a category of existence, for development cannot occur unless an individual has powers or capacities that are not actualized at a given time. But it also means that these powers are not unfolded from within, but are called out through [actualizing] interaction with other things. While it is necessary to revive the category of potentiality as a characteristic of individuality, it has to be revived in a different form from that of its classic Aristotelian formulation. (Dewey 1940, LW.14: 109)

- 17 Potentiality is not a latent or passive category of existence; it is the active power of change, development, and evolution.
- 18 Instead of antecedently existing latent potentials, the potential for change is only actualized through the interaction of individuals. Dewey complains that for Aristotle:
[P]otentialities are connected with a *fixed* end [*entelecheia*] which the individual endeavors by its own nature or essence to actualize, although its success in actualization depended upon the cooperation of external things and hence might be thwarted by the “accidents” of its surroundings – as not every acorn becomes a tree and few if any acorns become the typical oak. (*Ibid.*)
- 19 Instead, to develop into an oak tree, an acorn must engage in many interactions, integrating it with diverse conditions such as soil, nutrients, sunshine, water, *etc.* It must also avoid acorn-squirrel interactions. Ends are flexible, evolving, and emergent in a nonteleological Darwinian world.
- 20 One can only know the developmental potential of an individual acorn for sure after the consequences of diverse interactions emerge:
When the idea that development is due to some indwelling end which tends to control the series of changes passed through is abandoned, potentialities must be thought of in terms of consequences of interactions with other things. Hence potentialities cannot be *known* till *after* the interactions have occurred. There are at a given time unactualized potentialities in an individual because and in as far as there are in existence other things with which it has not yet interacted. (*Ibid.*)
- 21 Potentialities may exist but are not known or even experienced apart from the interactions actualizing them.

2.1. Peirce, Potentiality, and Aristotle

- 22 Houser (1992) denotes significant transitions in Peirce’s philosophy. Peirce accepts the reality of thirds (i.e., universals) early. Around 1890, “he accepted the reality of seconds, the universe of facts (influenced by Scotus)” (EP 1: xxviii). Finally, in 1896, “he broadened his evolving realism to accept the reality of firsts, the universe of possibility (influenced by Aristotle)” (*ibid.*). In the second and the third stages of Peirce’s career, he increasingly embraced Scholastic Aristotelianism.⁵
- 23 Peirce depicts Aristotle’s “two grades of being” (EP 2: 180). There is “actual reactive existence” and “germinal being, an *esse in potentia* or I like to call it an *esse in futuro*” (*ibid.*). The editors add this footnote: “Aristotle’s two grades of being are δύναμις (potentiality) and ἐνέργεια (actuality)” (*ibid.*: 522, fn.5). Peirce asserts, “In places Aristotle has glimpses of a distinction between ἐνέργεια [*energeia*⁶] and ἐντελέχεια [*entelecheia*]” (*ibid.*: 180). The same footnote mentions that this distinction is between the process of actualization and the accomplished result of action, where the latter,

citing Aristotle, “tends to have the meaning of ‘complete reality’ (εντελέχεια) [entelecheia]” (*ibid.*: 522, fn.5).

- 24 Peirce states Aristotle’s “dunamis is germinal being” that, while “not amounting to existence,” is “undifferentiated,” “indeterminate,” and “unknowable” (CP 6: 356). “The original potentiality,” Peirce asserts, “is the Aristotelian matter or indeterminacy from which the universe is formed” (CP 6: 206). Firstness and secondness correspond to potentiality and actuality. Peirce notes, “Indeterminacy, then, or pure firstness, and haecceity, or pure secondness, are facts not calling for and not capable of explanation” (CP 1: 405).
- 25 Sfondoni-Mentzou argues that “the thread of melody” unifying the diverse ideas involved in Peirce’s theory of truth is “potentiality” (1991: 27 and 28). She points out that “potentiality” is “a concept in many respects analogous to the Aristotelian ‘*potentia*’ or ‘*dynamis*’” (*ibid.*: 28). She concludes that for Peirce, “potentiality is the essential characteristic of thought and reality” (*ibid.*: 65).⁷ It “expresses an indeterminacy or spontaneity which is in many respects analogous to Aristotle’s definition of matter” (*ibid.*: 38-9). It may not have been realized but can be if “the necessary conditions exist” (*ibid.*: 39).

2.2. Peirce and Scholastic Realism

- 26 Peirce was firmly committed to the reality of universals. He notes the word “universal” was “used in the middle ages where we should now use the word General” (CP 2: 367). Peirce asserts that “*general principles are really operative in nature*. That is the doctrine of scholastic realism” (CP 5: 101). Peirce proclaims, “I should call myself an Aristotelian of the scholastic wing, approaching Scotism but going much further in the direction of scholastic realism” (CP 5: 77, fn.52). More stridently, “I am myself a scholastic realist of a somewhat extreme stripe” (CP 5: 470). From his extreme position, “Even Duns Scotus is too nominalistic when he says that universals are contracted to the mode of individuality in singulars, meaning, as he does, by singulars, ordinary existing things” (CP 8: 208).⁸ Mayorga discusses Scotus’s “nature in itself” (2007: 52). She notes that “the nature-in-itself manifests itself in only two ways” (*ibid.*). It may be present in intellect as “the complete universal” or “present in the particular when it is contracted by the haecceity into one numerical unity, the individual” (*ibid.*). She then argues that Peirce recognizes “the mode of being of the nature-in-itself in his first category, potentiality, but chides Scotus [...] for making the nature-in-itself dependent on the particular thing and on the particular mind thinking it” (*ibid.*). The firstness of firstness, as *esse in futuro*, is a mode of being (i.e., reality) preceding existence. It may never exist. For Peirce, existence is only one mode of reality: “Existence, then, is a special mode of reality, which, whatever other characteristic it possesses, has that of being absolute determinate” (CP 6: 349). “Secondness is *existence*” (CP 1: 532), “existence is reaction” (CP 8: 262), or a “theatre of reactions” (CP 6: 195).
- 27 Wilson points out, “Peirce considers existence as a “mode of being” that is the same with actuality” (2016: 53; CP 2: 237; CP 6: 343). Peirce states that “actuality and existence are words expressing the same idea in different applications” (CP 1: 532). Firstness is potentiality preceding existence: “The first is a *posse* which it has in itself; for the *priman* stops at *can-bes* and never reaches to existence, which depends on interaction, or *secundarity*” (CP 1: 351).

- 28 Peirce finds the scholastic definition “a very degenerate sort of generality” requiring modification (CP 5: 103). This is because, as the editors of note, elsewhere he says, “When the Scholastics talk of universals, they merely mean general terms” (CP 2: 367). Peirce wants a sense of generality compatible with modern, counterfactual and probabilistic, scientific laws. Sfendoni-Mentzou claims that, for Peirce, “generality includes an infinite number of differentiations” (1991: 41). In Peirce’s terms, “the idea of a general” involves “variations” that “no multitude of existent things could exhaust” (*ibid.*; CP 5: 103). Peirce states, “in using the word law, or regularity, we bring into prominence the kind of universals to which modern science pays most attention” (CP 4: 1). Wilson helps us better understand why Peirce would prefer using generality rather than universality and why the medievals require modification: “He regards laws as a type of general and laws are the type of generals his realism emphasizes the most” and “he holds that not all laws [...] are exceptionless or exact” (2016: 51). Thus, “the propositions expressing such laws are not universal propositions (quantified by “all” or “every”) but are general propositions which can admit of exceptions” (*ibid.*). Laws can also be probabilistic. Wilson asserts that the universals Peirce is most interested in (i.e., laws) “are not ‘contracted’ into individuals, but remain general wherever they govern individuals” (*ibid.*). Finally, “Peirce maintains that laws *exist* only if they actually govern individuals” (*ibid.*).
- 29 Peirce distinguishes two kinds of generality: “Generality is either of that negative sort which belongs to the merely potential, as such, and this is peculiar to the category of quality; or it is of that positive kind which belongs to conditional necessity, and this is peculiar to the category of law” (CP 1: 427). To properly appreciate the distinction, we must first recognize that for Peirce “continuity and generality are the same thing” (CP 4: 172). According to Peirce, “Continuity, as generality, is inherent in potentiality, which is essentially general” (CP 6: 204). However, “Firstness, is essentially indifferent as to continuity. It lends itself readily to generalization but is not itself general” (CP 6: 205). The generality of thirdness incorporates the generality of firstness as the firstness of thirdness.
- 30 Sfendoni-Mentzou says that “Synechism is derived from the category of Thirdness for this category expresses a generality” and, therefore, “there is a close connection in Peirce’s thought, between continuity and generality to such an extent, that eventually they become identical” (1991: 41). Peirce explicitly says, “True generality is, in fact, nothing but a rudimentary form of true continuity. Continuity is nothing but perfect generality of a law of relationship” (CP 6: 172). Generality does not become actualized as continuity except as a firstness of thirdness governing secondness (i.e., individuals). She calls the result “generality-continuity-law” (Sfendoni-Mentzou 1991: 41).
- 31 Short claims: “A continuum is not properly speaking a combination of parts, because the parts into which it is divisible have only a potential existence” (2015: 20). He concludes: “Continuity therefore entails potentiality, i.e., law-governed possibility” (*ibid.*). Zalamea (2012) and Hudry (2004) explore the mathematical role of potentiality and actuality.
- 32 Zalamea names six “polarities” that provide “enrichment of the Peircean *summum bonum* – understood as the continuous increase of potentiality – and an explosion of mathematical creativity into the most diverse forms” (2021: 349). He extolls the virtues of Peirce’s “non-Cantorian continuum” because it “seems to involve profound intensional characteristics that are impossible to achieve with an extensional

modeling” such as that required by Zermelo’s separation axiom (*ibid.*: 324-5). Zalamea concludes that “the manipulation of contradictory intensional domains (in the potential) without having to confront the associated contradictory extensional classes (in the actual) that would trivialize the system” allows us to “achieve a greater flexibility in our generic approach [...] to the continuum” (*ibid.*: 325). Such an approach enhances creativity and opens opportunities for expanding synthesis.

- 33 Hudry mentions that Peirce was fully aware of the consistency of Cantor and Dedekind’s definitions of continuity. Peirce’s philosophical concern was that discrete “arithmetical continuity cannot constitute a true principle of [geometric] continuity” (2004: 231). He accepts the presence of points within a continuum. However, there are “no actually existent points in an existent continuum” (CP 6: 182). Peirce solves the problem by resorting to “the potential existence of points” (Hudry 2004: 232).⁹ Hudry notes: “The concepts of potentiality and actuality pertain to Aristotle’s metaphysical claim that a line is continuous if and only if its parts are potentially divisible and not actually divided” (*ibid.*: 232-3). He then states that “potentiality enables Peirce to define potential points as actually indistinct and to avoid their definitions as broken and discontinuous entities” (*ibid.*: 233). Peirce develops a topology wherein: “The continuous connections of loci correspond to potential places in which points do not exist in actuality, whereas the breach of continuity pertains to the existence of singular, actual points. The transition from continuous, potential places to discontinuous, actual points constitutes the essential property of Peirce’s geometric topology” (*ibid.*: 238). Nonetheless, “Peirce’s view is metaphysically defensible, in the sense that there is nothing wrong in identifying a potential continuum with ‘synechism’ (*sunechês* meaning ‘the continuous’)” (*ibid.*: 241). Whatever shortcoming potential continuity may have for the foundations of mathematics, Hudry concludes that if it does “correspond to the intuitive idea of continuity, then we are dealing with philosophical and metaphysical properties,” which achieves its purposes (*ibid.*: 239). Meanwhile, Murphey claims that for Peirce “any true continuum must contain potentialities which are not only not now actualized but which are greater in multitude than any set of events which can ever be actualized” (1993: 395-6). He concludes (*ibid.*: 397) this “is what Peirce meant when he said that synechism was the new Scholastic realism (CP.6 : 163).”

- 34 Mayorga states,

Synechism, as a real force, is what propels us towards the final opinion, the object of which is the real, and this is what comprises reality. What grounds reality for Peirce, then, is synechism, which has the mode of being of a law, or Third. What grounds reality, then, is a Third. Compare that to Scotus, who grounds reality in the individual, with the mode of being of a Second. Peirce’s is an extreme scholastic realism indeed! (2007: 147)

- 35 No doubt, Mayorga is thinking of passages such as this: “The opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate, is what we mean by the truth, and the object represented in this opinion is the real. That is the way I would explain reality” (EP 1: 139). Peirce further remarks that “reality is independent, not necessarily of thought in general, but only of what you or I or any finite number of men may think about it; and that, on the other hand, though the object of the final opinion depends on what that opinion is, yet what that opinion is does not depend on what you or I or any man thinks” (*ibid.*). It seems odd that reality is independent of what we think about it and yet what is believed in the final opinion.

- 36 Stango accounts for the oddity by suggesting Peirce's position on the convergence of reality and truth accords with Aquinas's, not Kant's, "transcendentals." For Aquinas, the transcendentals establish the "conformity in which truth consists, then, is not primarily the correspondence or agreement of a particular intellectual judgment with a particular state of affairs, but more deeply, the original connaturality of thought and being" (2022: 171).¹⁰ He cites Peirce: "Over against any cognition, there is an unknown but knowable reality; but over against all possible cognition, there is only the self-contradictory. In short, *cognizability* (in its widest sense) and *being* are not merely metaphysically the same, but are synonymous terms" (EP 1: 25). Stango suggests Peirce has an "eschatological agreement theory of truth" (2022: 172). Peirce does claim truth is "the very entelechy of reality" (EP 2: 324). Peirce also says, "The very entelechy of being lies in being representable" (*ibid.*). The following is compelling: "[T]he objectivity of truth really consists in the fact that, in the end, every sincere inquirer will be led to embrace it [...] I hold that truth's independence of individual opinions is due (so far as there is any 'truth') to its being the predestined result to which sufficient inquiry would ultimately lead" (Stango 2022: 172; EP 2: 419). Peirce seems committed to a renovated version of Aristotle's *entelecheia* as perfect actualization, final cause, and man's glassy essence.
- 37 Short approaches the oddity of reality being independent of what we think and still agreeing with the fated opinion somewhat differently. He finds it is feasible only "by the latter thought being potential, the former actual" (2022: 89). Thus, "it is not even necessary that each part of it be attained in some finite time. That is not necessary, because potentiality does not depend on future actualization. So the modal realist claims" (*ibid.*). What Short says next opens a valuable discussion about possibility, firstness, and thirdness.
- 38 Once Peirce adopts modal realism,
 we can say, consistently, that the final opinion is what *would be* thought – that is, under conditions possibly counterfactual or that cannot be known to be factual or as to which there is as yet no fact, such as that inquiry continues without end. That there is such an opinion – hence, that there is something real – is a hypothesis – a hypothesis about what is possible. (*Ibid.*: 90)
- 39 Short recognizes that there are several types of possibilities.¹¹ So, what did Peirce mean by the reality of possibility? According to Short:
 He meant that some, not all, of what may be is potentiality. Something is potentiality when there is a way in which it can be brought about, that is when there is a law applying to actual things that determines that it would be were certain conditions realized. The latter conditions must also be potential, and therefore potentiality is a realm unto itself, distinct from the possibilities represented in, for example, myth. What can be made actual is really possible, as distinct from possibilities only conceived of. (2022: 199)
- 40 The reality of possibility depends on potentiality. However, Short states: "The word 'possible' turns out to be equivocal: It can refer to what may be or to what would be" (*ibid.*). We need to clarify the difference.
- 41 Short states: "Firstness is the root of our idea that possibility is not reducible to actuality" (2015: 19). In a footnote, he adds: "I refer here to possibility in the sense of what may be. The other type of possibility that Peirce distinguished is what would be. The first is a matter of firstness; the second, sometimes named real possibility or potentiality, belongs to Thirdness" (*ibid.*: 33, fn.12). Both firstness and thirdness involve

the reality of possibility. Short remarks: “The actuality of a law of nature consists in its governing reactions that actually occur. Thus we can say that it is the case that such-and-so *would be*” (2022: 198). Meanwhile, Rosenthal remarks, “As a mere ‘may-be’ which contains no ‘would-be,’ Firstness is related neither to what has been nor to what will be. Having no relatedness, it is a ‘substratum’ of pure spontaneity or chance. Hence Peirce’s identification of both quality and chance with the category of Firstness” (1968: 162, fn.11). General laws, thirdness, govern seconds. A law specifies what “would be” actualized should specific interactions occur. Stango summarizes: “Peirce speaks of the modalities in a variety of ways – as possibilities, actualities, and necessities; as qualities, occasions, and laws; as might-bes, existents, and would-bes; Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness” (2022: 161).

- 42 Mayorga (2007) provides a genealogy of Peirce’s Scotistic Realism from Aristotle to Alexander of Aphrodisiast, Porphyry, and Boethius, finishing with Avicenna, who directly influenced the Scholastics, including Duns Scotus. She distinguishes four senses of universal (U1-U4). U1 means “the nature is somehow ‘in’ the thing” (2007: 24). U2 is an abstracted “entity in the mind” that is necessarily predicated of many (*ibid.*). U3 is a nature-in-itself such that universality and commonness are “not essential to the nature itself,” unlike U2, but are only “potential properties of the nature itself” (*ibid.*). “Universality and commonness are accidental” depending on whether more than one individual happens to have the same nature (*ibid.*).
- 43 Avicenna develops U4 where the nature in itself “is neither universal nor singular” and “its essence belongs to it on its own” (cited by Mayorga, *ibid.*: 34 and 35). Mayorga understands it as a neutral, indifferent “nature in an indeterminate manner” (*ibid.*: 35). The nature-in-itself is an independent *esse* preceding universality in the mind or existence in nature. Avicenna’s U4 anticipates Peirce’s firstness of firstness (indeterminate nature-in-itself) as potentially and generality, secondness as actualized potentiality (i.e., existence, individuality, facticity) that retains potentiality as a firstness of secondness but lacks generality, and thirdness as universals governing the facticity of secondness, rendering secondness knowable as a further actualization of the potential of firstness as *esse in futuro*.
- 44 For Avicenna, numerical unity is only a property of individual substance (i.e., existence, particular) in Aristotle’s sense. However, numerical unity is only a possible accident of the indeterminate nature-in-itself. The problem for the Scholastics is that as God’s creation, all beings have the property of unity, truth, and goodness. Scotus will develop his famous ideas of a real “less-than-numerical unity” and formal distinctions to resolve the problem.
- 45 Scotus is known as the “subtle doctor,” and those who rejected this subtly called his followers dunces. Peirce was a brilliant dunce and subtle himself. I will only provide a brief sketch that is sufficient for our purposes. The Scholastics agreed on rejecting (a) Platonic Forms, (b) that universals are mind-dependent, and (c) only individuals are substances.
- 46 Mayorga argues that U4 is “a sort of being, akin to a potentiality” (*ibid.*: 55). The nature-in-itself is a potential (firstness) that may be actualized in an individual sensible substance (e.g., secondness), although such actualization is contingent and unnecessary. Indeed, it may never occur. If the mind can abstract the form in the actual individual substance, then the potential (i.e., intrinsic nature) becomes actualized in

the mind as a universal “essence, or nature, or quiddity (*quidditas*) of what is sensible” (i.e., U2), which resembles thirdness (*ibid.*: 45).

47 Mayorga suggests that an individual consists of an “individuated nature” or “an individuated U4 (I-U4)” (*ibid.*: 48). She then concludes that “the individual consists of an individuated nature, or an individuated U4 (I-U4) and a haecceity, although these are really one [...]. The I-U4 is what is formally distinct from the haecceity in the individual and is what is abstracted and synthezized [*sic*] into the U2” (*ibid.*).¹² Recall that Avicenna had already argued the nature-in-itself of U4 is indifferent to the accidental qualifications of individuality or universality. Thus the intrinsic nature “can belong to many because it is not of itself (*de se haec*) a ‘this.’ The nature-in-itself (U4) cannot have numerical unity since it is not ‘one.’ When contracted by the haecceity into particularity it becomes one individual. When abstracted by the human intellect it becomes a numerically one universal (U2) that applies to many” (*ibid.*: 49).¹³ Of itself, the nature-in-itself U4 is a unity less than one. Indeed, it could not belong to many if it were numerically one because it would be an individual substance.

48 The individual depends upon its *haecceity*, and the intrinsic nature contracted into it to become numerically one, although the nature and the haecceity are only formally distinct. The formal distinction is a distinction of intellect; if the intellect were not real, the formality would not be either. Mayorga explains the formal distinction:

Every individual thing has no less than two formalities: its haecceity and its quiddity; in an individual these two are joined as one, hence they are only formally and not really distinct (really the same). It is important to realize that even though the formal distinction is grounded in the thing, it is relative to thought; nowhere does Scotus suggest that it can be defined or described without reference to the fact that formalities, or realities, can be separated only in thought. Actually, the fact that Scotus says this is a type of distinction of reason (*distinctio rationis*) should make this clear. We can then extrapolate and say that if no intellect existed there would be no formal distinction, for though it is “prior” to the act of thinking, it occurs only in thought. (*Ibid.*: 63-4)

49 One may separate things in thought that are not sensibility separated. Your intellect can abstract a mathematical rectangle from the door of your home.

50 Peirce provides a sketch of Scotus’s realism at CP 8: 18. He begins by noting that Scotus rejects “the Platonic forms” for Scotus “the universal must be in the mind *habitualiter*, so that if a thing be considered as it is independent of its being cognized, there is no universality in it.” Peirce’s habits are thirds; that is universals. Peirce continues:

Such natures (i.e., sorts of things) as a *man* and a *horse*, which are real, and are not of themselves necessarily *this* man or *this* horse, though they cannot exist *in re* without being some particular man or horse, are in the *species intelligibilis* always represented positively indeterminate, it being the nature of the mind so to represent things. Accordingly any such nature is to be regarded as something which is of itself neither universal nor singular, but is universal in the mind, singular in things out of the mind [...]. It is the very same nature which in the mind is universal and *in re* is singular; for if it were not, in knowing anything of a universal we should be knowing nothing of things, but only of our own thoughts, and our opinion would not be converted from true to false by a change in things. This nature is actually indeterminate only so far as it is in the mind [...]. But this universal only differs from the singular in the manner of its being conceived (*formaliter*), but not in the manner of its existence (*realiter*). (*Ibid.*)

51 Peirce recognizes the nature-in-itself is “neither universal nor singular,” but can be actualized *de re* and *de dicto*. He also recognizes that one is *realiter* and the other

formaliter and that the latter is derived from the former. However, Peirce reconstructs Scotus by emphasizing not the individual abstracting mind, although it does form habits, but the continuity of the *community* of inquiry that continues to refine the determination of the universal seeking the opinion fated to be agreed upon by all that inquire.

52 Stango (2022) explores three striking similarities between Thomism and Peircean pragmatism, revealing other aspects of Peirce's Scholastic realism. I only discuss the one most relevant to potentiality and actuality. This comparison involves first proving that Thomist substance ontology is compatible with evolution and then comparing Peirce to Aquinas. Stango draws on Jacques Maritain to show how to account for the differentiation of forms, the increase of complexity, and the emergence of new structures, generativity, and growth "with reference to potentiality and actuality" within "a hylomorphic substance ontology" (2022: 156). Stango claims, "Peirce articulates the fundamentals of a hylomorphic view of nature by reinterpreting the Aristotelian categories of potentiality and actuality and matter and form in dialectical emergentist terms, namely, as having at their center the idea of growth" (*ibid.*: 158). Peirce says that of all Aristotle's "achievements, the greatest in the eye of reason, that of bringing to light the supremacy of the element of *Growth*, was, after all, nothing but a special application of Aristotle's pure vision" (EP 2: 373). Stango also argues that Peirce's ontology relies upon a revision of "Aristotelian notions, such as final causes (EP 2: 120)" and "entelechy (EP 2: 324)" (Stango 2022: 159).¹⁴

53 Stango calls Thomistic evolution "essential growth," by which he means "the possibility that an essence can remain the same essence while changing radically" (*ibid.*: 163). He likens this idea to "intraspecific evolution" (*ibid.*). He calls attention to the following passage:

Today, the idea uppermost in most minds is Evolution [...]. Whatever in the philosophies of our day [...] is not Ockhamism is evolution of one kind or another; and every evolutionism must in its evolution eventually restore that rejected idea of law as a reasonableness energizing in the world (no matter through what mechanism of natural selection or otherwise) which belonged to the essentially evolutionary metaphysics of Aristotle, as well as the scholastic modification of it by Aquinas. (*Ibid.*: 164; EP 2: 72)

54 The movement is from potentiality to actuality to the generality of laws.

55 Stango sees Peirce's modal realism as securing essential growth where, as Peirce states, "the idea of a general involves the idea of possible variations which no multitude of existent things could exhaust" (*ibid.*: 165; CP 5: 103). As he interprets Peirce, "Each actual being transcends itself in virtue of its general constitution and of the possible growth of the essence to which it belongs. If we take 'essence' to mean the real possibility defining a certain kind of substance, we can then interpret the process of diversification and specialization of its habits as a form of essential growth" (*ibid.*: 165). If Stango is correct, Peirce's modal evolutionism is incompatible with Darwinism.

56 Darwinism is nonteleological.¹⁵ It does away with final causes, entelechies, and the predestined, such as we find in the following: "Accordingly, the pragmatist does not make the *summum bonum* to consist in action, but makes it to consist in that process of evolution whereby the existent comes more and more to embody those generals which were just now said to be *destined*, which is what we strive to express in calling them *reasonable*" (CP 5: 433). Furthermore, intraspecific (i.e., intraspecies) evolution does not

include interspecies evolution. Both intraspecies and interspecies competition drive natural selection. The role of competition in Peirce's account is unclear. Also, Peirce does not readily provide for species (*eidos*, essence) extinction. On Stango's account, Peirce retains the Aristotelian idea of latent potential.

- 57 Atkins says little about potentiality *per se*. However, he says much about feeling and quality, which are usually taken as psychological and metaphysical firsts. He maintains, "Phenomenologically, Peirce is ultimately compelled to deny that feelings and qualities are only conceptually distinct [*distinctio rationis*]" (2018: 85). Atkins claims that by the 1903 Harvard lectures, Peirce realizes: "Feeling always involves not only what is felt but a mind that feels it. As such, feelings are instances of secondness" (*ibid.*: 164). Again, "it is the quality of the feeling and not the feeling that corresponds to firstness" (*ibid.*). To support this claim, he cites the following passage three separate times: "[I]f we quite abstract vividness from feeling, nothing remains but the mere quality, which is the same as the feeling *in posse*" (*ibid.*: 145, 177, 195; R 298: 26x). This claim is crucial to Atkins's argument that "there are possible qualities that have never been felt and so even in phenomenology we must not restrict the category of quality to those qualities that have been felt. Rather, qualities must be possible feelings" (*ibid.*: 168). There is something odd in all of this, however. *In posse* means in possibility, having the potential to exist. It contrasts with *in esse*, which means in actuality or existence. A feeling *in posse*, a potential feeling; hence, a firstness of firstness. There is no phenomenological occurrence of a firstness of firstness; we have no such experience; it does not exist. Still, it is a mode of being. However, Atkins's concern is phenomenology, not metaphysics. Dewey has the same concern when responding to Goudge.

2.3. Firstness (Potentiality) and Secondness (Actuality): Dewey's Reply to Goudge

- 58 Peirce's first two categories are the topic of Dewey's response to Goudge, who claims: "Peirce advocated at least three mutually incompatible views concerning the given in experience: (1) That it is wholly ineffable and unknowable; (2) that it consists of qualities of feeling; and (3) that it consists of logical possibilities or universals" (1935: 538). Dewey prefaces his rebuttal by remarking that the questions canvassed in "Mr. Goudge's criticism of Peirce on the nature of the 'given,' are of high importance in the contemporary state of philosophy in which the problems of the given, on one hand, and of universals and essences, on the other, bulk so large" (1935, LW.11: 86). The problem of the given far exceeds Peirce. However, Dewey notes the value of Peirce's contribution.
- 59 Before addressing Dewey's response, let us first clarify the "given" in Peirce. What is immediately given are percepts, or perhaps the even more primitive "impression of sense" (see CP 2: 141-3). In their immediacy: "There is no difference between a real perception and a hallucination, taken in themselves" (CP 7: 644). The difference is a matter of inference, inquiry, and "rational predictions," a matter of cognitive judgment (*ibid.*). Wilson remarks, "hallucinations have the same direct effects in relation to knowledge and belief as do percepts in the case of real perception" (2016: 193). Wilson explains: "While Peirce holds that the percept by itself is sufficient to distinguish perception from other cognitive operations," he nonetheless "recognizes that it is not sufficient for *perceptual knowledge*" (*ibid.*: 195). While the percept is given, knowledge is

not. The transition to knowledge involves perceptual facts, a percipuum, perceptual judgment, and abduction. Wilson concludes: “The perceptual judgment is a propositional (and thus symbolic) representation of the perceptual fact with the assent to it. Being representation, it is also an *interpretation*” (*ibid.*: 196). Peirce tacitly accepts Wilfrid Sellars’s rejection of “the Myth of the Given.”¹⁶

- 60 The third view, named by Goudge, that the given “consists of logical possibilities or universals” is doubly confused. First, universals are given in experience but only after perceptual judgment. Second, universals provide real possibility (i.e., would-bes), not mere logical possibility. Goudge also confuses the generality of firstness with that of thirdness as a universal. Dewey has no difficulty in refuting Goudge. Our interest is in how Dewey exposit Peirce and what it means for a pragmatic understanding of potentiality and actuality as well as diversity, interaction, change, and the given.
- 61 Dewey starts by observing all the passages from Peirce to which Goudge refers explicate “experience as experienced” (1935, LW.11: 86).¹⁷ He notes that Peirce “introduces at times (and rather unfortunately in my opinion) his predilection for panpsychic metaphysics” (*ibid.*). Nonetheless, here, Peirce “is not writing on a metaphysical or cosmological basis but is giving a logical analysis of experience” (*ibid.*). Dewey provides a familiar statement of Peirce’s categories of being: “Firstness, or sheer totality and pervading unity of quality in everything experienced [...], Secondness, existentiality, or singular occurrence, and Thirdness, mediation, or continuity” (*ibid.*). He further defines secondness as “reaction and interaction,” “actuality in the literal sense,” and “strictly individual” (*ibid.*: 87).
- 62 Dewey’s counterargument has two parts. First, when Peirce “uses the word ‘possibility’ he means by it material potentiality or power, not logical possibility” (*ibid.*: 86-7). Second, Peirce “does not hold that Firstness as such, that is, as the given permeating total quality of anything experienced is, strictly speaking, even potentiality” (*ibid.*: 87). We only experience a given quality as firstness of secondness actualized by an interaction. Firstness *per se* lacks existence. Nonetheless, material power is the source of spontaneous emergence. In Dewey’s terms, we cannot know a potential (*dynamis*) until after an actualizing interaction.
- 63 Dewey begins with the second counterargument by identifying Goudge’s confusion regarding possibility. Goudge cites Peirce as follows: “Firstness [...] is perfectly simple and without parts. [...] The word *possibility* fits it” (1935: 537; see CP 1: 531). Dewey points out that Goudge cuts the passage off too soon. The passage reads: “The word possibility fits it, *except* that possibility implies a relation to what exists, while universal Firstness is the mode of being of itself. *That* is why a new word was required for it. *Otherwise*, ‘possibility’ would have answered the purpose” (1935, LW.11: 87; see CP 1: 531). According to Dewey, what Peirce “is saying in the passage quoted is that while quality is possibility in relation to Secondness, or existence, it is *not* possibility in and of itself” (1935, LW.11: 87).¹⁸ Although firstness *per se* (i.e., “the mode of being of itself”) does not exist, it is a condition of secondness. (It is also, along with secondness, a condition of thirdness.) Dewey adds, “In reference to existence so defined [secondness, interaction, actuality, individuality] quality is both possibility and generality. A pervasive unity of quality is a condition to be satisfied in connection with the existential aspect of any phenomenon” (*ibid.*). We never experience the potentiality or generality of firstness until it is interactionally actualized, although secondness lacks generality.

- 64 Goudge confuses the possibility of firstness as “may bes” actualized in secondness (i.e., existence), with universals as “would bes.” He also confuses the generality and continuity of firstness with the generality and continuity of thirdness. As a germinal being – an *esse in potentia*, or as Peirce prefers, *esse in futuro* – the continuity, mediation, and lawfulness of thirdness is qualified by firstness.¹⁹
- 65 Having established interaction as the existential condition for experiencing firstness, Dewey turns to his first counterargument. Firstness is material potentiality, not that of universals. As confirmation, Dewey cites Peirce’s answer to “What, then, is *quality*?”:
- It is not anything which is dependent, in its being, upon mind, whether in the form of sense or thought. Nor is it dependent, in its *being*, upon the fact that some material things possess it. That quality is dependent upon sense is the great error of the conceptualists. That it is dependent upon the subject in which it is realized is the great error of all the nominalistic schools. A quality is a mere abstract *potentiality*, and the error of these schools lies in holding that the potential, or possible, is nothing but what the actual makes it to be. (1935, LW.11: 88; CP 1: 422)²⁰
- 66 Firstness has its mode of being as qualitative material potentiality apart from the mode of being of secondness, actuality, and existence. This is Scholastic realism.
- 67 Dewey references Peirce’s rhetorical question, “Do you mean to say that a piece of iron not actually under pressure has lost its *power* of resisting pressure?” (*ibid.*; CP 1: 422). Here is Dewey’s gloss on this passage: “Quality *per se*, in itself, is precisely and exclusively, according to Peirce, this potentiality” (1935, LW.11: 88-9). He recognizes potentiality as something that “*may happen*” or “*might happen*” (*ibid.*: 89).
- 68 Since a law, a universal, involves what would happen, although it is not currently happening, it “involves quality as potentiality” (*ibid.*). A potentiality is “a way of behaving” (*ibid.*). While it is only “actualized on particular or individual occasions,” nonetheless, “*qua* power it is general” (*ibid.*). Goudge is embarrassingly confused about generality. The generality of Peirce’s potentiality is not that of universals; instead, potentials “provide the cosmological or physical basis for logical possibilities” (*ibid.*).²¹
- 69 Goudge cannot follow what Peirce means by the wholly ineffable and unknowable. To make his point, Dewey calls attention to this passage: “When we say that qualities are general, are partial determinations, are mere potentialities, etc., all that is true of qualities *reflected upon*; but these things do *not belong* to the quality-element of experience” (*ibid.*: 90; CP 1: 425).²² Dewey’s gloss on the passage states: “Considered in itself, quality is that which totally and intimately pervades a phenomenon or experience, rendering it just the one experience which it is. Of course, then it is ‘ineffable’” (*ibid.*: 90). Only when the pervasive *immediate* quality is reflected upon (e.g., mediated, described, taken as a sign) “in relation to existence” is it “seen to be a potentiality and to be general” (*ibid.*). The quality is merely the immediately pervasive phenomenon; as experienced, it is immediately given, not mediately known.

3. Conclusion: Many Significant Similarities and at Least One Significant Disparity

- 70 Peirce and Dewey’s theories of actuality and potentially reconstruct Aristotle. They agree with Aristotle that potentiality is a category of being necessary to account for change. They also agree that potentiality requires actuality for realization. Thus, actuality is also a category of being. Furthermore, there is no experience of pure

potentiality (the firstness of firstness) nor unqualified actuality (the firstness of secondness). They can only be experienced together, although they can be thought apart. They disagree with Aristotle's that actuality is an eternal form (*eidos*) that depends on a succession of material actualizations. Potentials are independent powers imparting quality upon actuality. For both, potentialities are actualized as consequences of interacting conditions.

71 Although Peirce and Dewey agree that potentiality and actuality are categories of being, their similarities require clarification. While Peirce distinguishes firstness from secondness (i.e., existence), Dewey proclaims that "potentiality is a category of existence" (1940, LW.14: 109). The difference is merely one of nomenclature. Recall that Dewey asserts that potentialities cannot be known until after actualizing interactions have occurred. Dewey agrees with Peirce that *dunamis* as "germinal being" (EP 2: 180) is of itself "unknowable" (CP 6: 356). This implicitly distinguishes potentiality from actuality as modes of being (Peirce) or modes of existence (Dewey). By comparing Peirce to Dewey, we can recognize that Dewey's category of "existence" includes potentiality and actuality as distinct categories of being.

72 Peirce and Dewey agree that individuality (i.e., actuality) is unique and unrepeatable. Peirce states, "Secondness only is while it actually is. The same thing can never happen twice. As Heraclitus said, one cannot cross the same river twice" (EP 1: 268; CP 1: 532 and 566). Meanwhile, Dewey asserts that "the particular water with which the experimenter actually deals never, as matter of fact, shows itself twice; it never recurs [...]. That particular portion of water could never have presented itself at any other portion of the world's history" (MW.2: 6-7). Elsewhere, Dewey affirms:

But the individual butterfly or earthquake remains just the unique existence which it is. We forget in explaining its occurrence that it is only the *occurrence* that is explained, not the thing itself [...]. Go as far back as we please in accounting for present conditions and we still come upon the mystery of things being just what they are. (1940, LW.14: 112)

73 Concluding an inquiry explains an occurrence, but the brute existential fact (i.e., secondness) stands stubbornly.

74 Regarding thirdness, Dewey is not a Scotistic realist. He cannot be classified as a realist, nominalist, or conceptualist about generals, although, influenced by Peirce, he is closest to realism (1938, LW.12: 260-2). Dewey acknowledges the influence: "The readers who are acquainted with the logical writings of Peirce will note my great indebtedness to him in the general position taken. As far as I am aware, he was the first writer on logic to make inquiry and its methods the primary and ultimate source of logical subject-matter" (*ibid.*: 17).

75 Peirce's influence is found throughout Dewey's theory of inquiry. Consider the concept of "warranted assertibility":

When knowledge is taken as a general abstract term related to inquiry in the abstract, it means "warranted assertibility." The use of a term that designates a potentiality rather than an actuality involves recognition that all special conclusions of special inquiries are parts of an enterprise that is continually renewed, or is a going concern. (*Ibid.*: 16-7)

76 Dewey relies on Peirce's pioneering method of inquiry, including habits of inference and "leading principles" (*ibid.*: 20).²³ Dewey adopts "what Peirce called 'fallibilism,'" arising from the "possibility and probability of a discrepancy between means available

for use and consequences that follow [...]. Because we live in a world in process, the future, although continuous with the past, is not its bare repetition" (*ibid.*: 46). Dewey fully embraces an emergent revisable continuity of inquiry.

- 77 Alexander finds that Dewey challenges twenty-five hundred years of western philosophy "stemming from Parmenides's identification of being and the known" (2013: 34). Parmenides establishes the "fixation upon the primacy of identity over continuity" and static being excluded from change and becoming (*ibid.*: 8). Parmenides denies contingency.²⁴ Peirce states:

There is a famous saying of Parmenides [...] "being is, and not-being is nothing." This sounds plausible; yet synechism [continuity] flatly denies it, declaring that being is a matter of more or less, so as to merge insensibly into nothing. [...] [T]he object has an imperfect and qualified existence. (CP 7: 569)

- 78 Parmenides is a rationalist who relies on static logic. Hence, he applies the principle of noncontradiction directly to being: "Thus it must completely be or be not" (KR 273). It is otherwise with continuously generalizable firstness and thirdness.

- 79 Taking potentiality and actuality as independent modes of being separate from knowing (i.e., cognition), although knowable, is a remarkable advance in western thought. Add evolutionary continuity along with diversity, interaction, and change as well as the rejection of the epistemological given, and the results contest most of western philosophy. Peirce and Dewey may mark the greatest advance in our thinking about potentiality and actuality since the Scholastics.

- 80 Although Peirce and Dewey's extraordinarily innovatory theories of potentiality and actuality display considerable concord, they have at least one significant divergence – *haecceity*. This is surprising since both agree that individuals are unequivocally unique. Consider the following:

An indexical word, such as a proper noun or demonstrative or selective pronoun, has force to draw the attention of the listener to some *hecceity* common to the experience of speaker and listener. By a *hecceity*, I mean, some element of existence which, not merely by the likeness between its different apparitions, but by an inward force of identity, manifesting itself in the continuity of its apparition throughout time and in space, is distinct from everything else, and is thus fit (as it can in no other way be) to receive a proper name or to be indicated as *this* or *that*. (CP 3: 460)²⁵

- 81 Peirce's motivation for embracing *haecceities* seems to be logical.

- 82 Peirce was a pioneer in the logic of relations and modal logic. *Haecceitism* asserts that each individual has a unique non-qualitative nondescriptive difference. DiLeo remarks that around 1885, "Peirce discovered the theory of quantification, and thus altered his theory of denotation" (1991: 90).²⁶ As a result, Peirce "claimed that the demonstrative 'this' is a sign that refers directly to an *existent* individual [...]. Objects are now denotable by the non-qualitative and non-descriptive demonstratives 'this' and 'that' – words which are signs that awaken and direct the attention" (DiLeo 1991: 90). DiLeo cites Peirce:

A sign which denotes a thing by forcing it upon the attention is called an *index*. An index does not describe the qualities of its object. An object, in so far as it is denoted by an index, having *thisness*, and distinguishing itself from other things by its continuous identity and forcefulness, but not by any distinguishing characters, may be called a *haecceity*. A *haecceity* in its relation to the assertion is a *subject* thereof. (*Ibid.*; CP 3: 434)

83 Here is DiLeo's gloss on this passage:

Thus, it is the haecceity, "thisness," or "hereness and nowness" (1: 405; 8: 266) of objects, which is denoted by terms such as "this," "that," "here," and "now," that enables the objects to be unambiguously distinguishable. These terms are to be regarded as indexicals or indicators that serve a purely denotative function, although they do not denote any properties or qualities of objects. (*Ibid.*)

84 For Dewey, indexicals perform no such function.

85 Dewey proclaims, "Propositions which are linguistically expressed by proper names and by words like *this*, involve demonstrative reference to singulars. Hence it is often assumed in contemporary logical theory that there are such things as pure demonstrative propositions – 'pure' in the sense that they involve no descriptive element" (1938, LW.12: 240). The problem with pure demonstratives is they assume "the subject-matter demonstratively present, which forms the logical subject, is immediately given" (*ibid.*: 241). Dewey complained about logics that assume their ontologies are unproblematically given.

86 Alexander explains, "The 'locus' of the potential is in the total situation, not simply in the individual substance or *ousia* as Aristotle would have it" (2014: 28). The total situation involves interaction among diverse existences, constituting a unique individual situation. Alexander further remarks, "What Aristotle regarded as ontologically fundamental, the distinct individual being which is both a 'what' and a 'that,' a *toteti*, is for Dewey a feature of a more complex reality that includes the environment for living things and the cultural context as well for human beings" (*ibid.*: 34). Both observations about Aristotle and Dewey apply *mutatis mutandis* to the divergence between Peirce and Dewey.

87 For Dewey, "That which is 'given' in the strict sense of the word 'given,' is the total field or situation" (1938, LW.12: 127). What is strictly individual are such situations. A singular object exists in a situation as a product of prior inquiry. Thus,

The difference between a singular and an individual is the same as that previously pointed out between *an* object (or set of objects in their severalty) and a situation. Singular objects exist and singular events occur within a field or situation. *This* or *that* star, man, rock or whatever, is always a discrimination or selection made for a purpose, or for the sake of some objective consequence within an inclusive field. (*Ibid.*: 126)

88 Every situation is "a whole in virtue of its immediately pervasive quality" and, therefore, has unactualized potential (1938, LW.12: 73). Thus,

Objective interaction is the overt means by which the actualized situation is brought into existence. What was potential at a given time may be actualized at some later time by sheer change of circumstantial conditions, without intervention of any operation which has logical or intellectual intent, as when water freezes because of a specified change in temperature. But in inquiry a *deliberate* operation intervenes. (*Ibid.*: 288)

89 Deliberate operations determine singular objects as one of a kind (*ibid.*: 248). For Dewey, "In actual experience, there is never any such isolated singular object or event; *an* object or event is always a special part, phase, or aspect, of an environing experienced world – a situation (*ibid.*: 72). This is why Alexander says Dewey has "an ecological concept of potentiality" (2014: 28).²⁷ Meanwhile, for Peirce, "In pure Secondness, the reacting correlates are *Singulars*, and as such are *Individuals*" (CP 5: 70). Future work comparing Peirce and Dewey on potentiality, actuality, interaction,

diversity, change, and the given might best begin with the difference between their thinking about haecceity and ontology.²⁸

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ALEXANDER Thomas M., (2013), *The Human Eros: Eco-ontology and the Aesthetics of Existence*, New York, Fordham University Press.

ALEXANDER Thomas M., (2014), "Potentiality and Naturalism: Dewey's Metaphysical Metamorphosis," in Christopher C. Kirby (ed.), *Dewey and the Ancients*, New York, Bloomsbury Publishing, 19-45.

ATKINS Richard Kenneth, (2018), *Charles S. Peirce's Phenomenology*, Oxford University Press.

DEWEY John, (1899-1924/1976-1983), *The Middle Works of John Dewey*, 15 vol., ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press. [MW. For ex.: MW.3: 111 = vol. 3, p. 111.]

DEWEY John, (1925-1953/1981-1990), *The Later Works of John Dewey*, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press. [LW. For ex.: LW.3: 111 = vol. 3, p. 111.]

DILEO Jeffrey R., (1991), "Peirce's Haecceitism," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 27(1), 79-109.

GOUDGE Thomas A., (1935), "The Views of Charles Peirce on the Given in Experience," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 32(20), 533-44. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2016475>.

HOUSER Nathan, (1992), "Introduction," *The Essential Peirce*, 1, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, xviii-xli.

HUDRY Jean-Louis, (2004), "Peirce's Potential Continuity and Pure Geometry," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 40(2), 229-43.

KAHN Sholom J., (1949), "The Status of the Potential: A Reply to Professor Dewey," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 9(4), 714-6. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2103301>.

KAPLAN David, (1975), "How to Russell a Frege-Church," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 72(1), 716-29. Online: <https://andrewmbailey.com/kap/Kaplan1975HTRAFc.pdf>.

KIRK Geoffrey Stephen & John Earle RAVEN, (1957/1975), *The Presocratic Philosophers*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. (KR in the text followed by the page number.)

MAYORGA Rosa Maria Perez-Teran, (2007), *From Realism to "Realicism"*, New York, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

MURPHEY Murray G., (1961/1993), *The Development of Peirce's Philosophy*, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company.

PEIRCE Charles Sanders, (1898/1992), *Reasoning and the Logic of Things: The Cambridge Conferences Lectures of 1898*, ed. by Kenneth Laine Ketner, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press. [Abbreviated as RLT.]

PEIRCE Charles Sanders, (1931-1958), *Collected Papers of Charles S. Peirce*, 8 vol., Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press. [CP. Paragraph numbers follow the volume number in CP references.]

PEIRCE Charles Sanders, (1992, 1998), *The Essential Peirce*, 2 vol., Bloomington, Indiana University Press. [EP. Page numbers follow the volume number in EP references.]

PEIRCE Charles Sanders, (1967-1971), *Charles S. Peirce Manuscripts*, Houghton Library, Harvard University. [Citations are by manuscript number (as assigned in Robin 1967 and 1971) and, where available, page number. Abbreviated as R.]

ROSENTHAL Sandra B., (1968), "The 'Would-Be' Present of C. S. Peirce," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 4(3), 155-62.

ROSS William David, (1971), *Aristotle*, London, Methuen & Co Ltd.

SFENDONI-MENTZOU Demetra, (1991), "Towards a Potential-Pragmatic Account of Peirce's Theory of Truth," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 27(1), 27-77.

SFENDONI-MENTZOU Demetra, (1993), "The Role of Potentiality in Peirce's Tychism and in Contemporary Discussions in Quantum Mechanics and Microphysics," in Edward C. Moore (ed.), *Charles S. Peirce and the Philosophy of Science*, Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 247-61.

SHORT Thomas Lloyd, (2007), *Peirce's Theory of Signs*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

SHORT Thomas Lloyd, (2015), "Empiricism Expanded," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 51(1), 1-13.

SHORT Thomas Lloyd, (2022), *Charles Peirce and Modern Science*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

WILSON Aaron Bruce, (2016), *Peirce's Empiricism*, Lanham, Lexington Books.

NOTES

1. Searching Philosophers Index and PhilPapers returned one paper on Peirce with potentiality or actuality in the title (Sfendoni-Mentzou 1991) and one on Dewey (Kahn 1949). Canvassing several Dewey scholars, none knew of other sources. Some of my reviewers found sources on Peirce, potentiality, and actuality. I will at least mention what I found on the following pages. I want to thank all my reviewers for their valuable suggestions.
2. Nowhere in this paper has emphasis been added to citations.
3. Dewey insists "all changes occur through interactions of conditions. What exists co-exists" (1938, LW.12: 220).
4. Intentional agency and Picasso's Guernica were always potentials of the universe, which does not imply that either necessarily had to be actualized. As Peirce puts it, "a quality [potential, firstness] is eternal, independent of time and of any realization" (CP 1: 420).
5. The influence of Aristotelianism on Dewey by F.J.E. Woodbridge is well documented (Westbrook 1991, among others). However, Dewey's major professor, George Sylvester Morris, studied with the influential German neo-Aristotelian Friedrich Trendelenburg. Peirce refers to Trendelenburg several times.

6. "Secondness is predominant; for the real is that which insists upon forcing its way to recognition as something *other* than the mind's creation [...]. The real is active; we acknowledge it, in calling it the *actual*. (This word is due to Aristotle's use of {*energeia*}, action, to mean existence, as opposed to a mere germinal state.)" (CP 1: 325).
7. Sfendoni-Mentzou (1993) finds similarities between Peirce and Werner Heisenberg on potentiality. She calls attention to passages in Heisenberg, such as his claim that elementary particles are "a world of potentialities or possibilities rather than one of things or facts" (*ibid.*: 253). She concludes, "What chance, spontaneity, and generally share in common is that they are all manifestations of the same mode of being, namely, of *firstness*" (*ibid.*: 250).
8. Peirce did not believe thirds could in any way contract into seconds.
9. "Now the points on a line not yet actually determined are mere potentialities, and, as such, cannot react upon one another actually; and, *per se*, they are all exactly alike; and they cannot be in one-to-one correspondence to any collection, since the multitude of that collection would require to be a maximum multitude" (CP 3: 568).
10. Because human intelligence has evolved with its environment, Darwinism is also connatural.
11. CP 6: 371 lists ten sorts of possibility, beginning with logical possibility, but does not mention mathematical possibility.
12. Mayorga provides an argument as to why the U4 and I-U4 are themselves formally distinct and that I-U4 is formally distinct from the haecceity (2007: 64-6). Also, quiddity only arises after the potential of the nature-in-itself U4 is actualized in an existent individual U1 and abstracted by mind U2. This is the sort of subtlety we cannot further consider.
13. Peirce accepted *haecceities* while rejecting contraction.
14. Peirce declares: "Aristotle gropes for a conception of perfection, or entelechy, which he never succeeds in making clear. We may adopt the word to mean the very fact, that is, the ideal sign which should be quite perfect, and so identical [...] with the very matter denoted united with the very form signified by it" (EP 2: 304).
15. Peirce proclaims, "For evolution is nothing more nor less than the working out of a definite end. A final cause may be conceived to operate without having been the purpose of any mind: that supposed phenomenon goes by the name of *fate*" (CP 1: 204). Peirce is mistaken from a Darwinian perspective.
16. "Generality, Thirdness, pours in upon us in our very perceptual judgments, and all reasoning, so far as it depends on necessary reasoning, that is to say, mathematical reasoning, turns upon the perception of generality and continuity at every step" (CP 5: 150).
17. Goudge recognizes that Peirce's position is "wholly phenomenological [...] to ascertain the precise nature of the given" (1935: 533).
18. Dewey calls attention to a nuance of firstness as possibility, may-bes, not mentioned above.
19. There is a difference between the continuity and generality of thirdness and firstness, but there is also a connection. For instance, "habit is a generalizing tendency, and as such a generalization, and as such a general, and as such a continuum or continuity. It must have its origin in the original continuity which is inherent in potentiality. Continuity, as generality, is inherent in potentiality, which is essentially general" (CP 6: 204).
20. Dewey's emphasis. Citation taken directly from Peirce since Dewey omits a clause from the first sentence, "in its being," between the words "dependent" and "upon." He also omits the antepenultimate sentence.
21. Dewey should have dropped Goudge's phrase "logical possibilities" and stuck with "universals." As Dewey uses "logical possibilities," he means Peirce's "universals."
22. Dewey's emphasis. He omits the phrase "are mere potentialities."
23. Dewey's "What Are Universals" (1935, LW.11: 105-14) relies on "leading principles" and expresses the stance taken in his 1938 *Logic*. Dewey rejects "traditional nominalism" for linguistic/semiotic reasons (1925, LW.1: 145).

24. Peirce affirms tychism while Dewey emphasizes “the ineradicable union in nature of the relatively stable and the relatively contingent” (1925, LW.1: 56).

25. Here Peirce drops the “a” from “haecceity.”

26. Short states, “at least by 1888, Peirce did not distinguish the actual by its being determinate but, rather, by its *haecceity*” (2007: 79). DiLeo refers to the 1903 Gamma system as “Peirce’s attempt at dealing with the logic of possible worlds: modal logic” (*ibid.*: 101). *Haecceities* make it much easier to secure transworld identity in possible world semantics for modal logic (Kaplan 1975).

27. Such an understanding of potentiality is indispensable to Alexander’s (2013) “eco-ontology.”

28. If there is another place to begin, it might be Peirce’s cosmology, which assumes heterogeneous, indeterminate, chaotic nothing as a latent potential or *arche*, ultimately evolving into a perfectly actualized rational *entelecheia*. Houser (1992) remarks that Peirce seems to waver between “an end of history” and “a state of equilibrium between chance and law” (EP 1: xxxiii).

ABSTRACTS

This paper fills a gap in the literature concerning the importance of the categories of potentiality and actuality in the philosophies of Charles Sanders Peirce and John Dewey. Peirce and Dewey derived their positions by revising Aristotle. Their revisions are surprisingly similar in many aspects and different in at least one significant feature – haecceity. Peirce and Dewey’s pragmatic reconstruction of actuality and potentiality is perhaps the most important advance since the Scholastics. The goal is to recover the categories of potentiality and actuality for the future development of pragmatism.

INDEX

Keywords: Actuality, Aristotle, Being, Individuality, John Dewey, Charles Sanders Peirce, Potentiality, Quality

AUTHOR

JIM GARRISON

Virginia Tech
wesley[at]vt.edu

“Subject-matter”: The Graphic Evidence of an Operative Field

Gioia Laura Iannilli

1. Introduction

- 1 The translation of a philosophical text can often bring to the fore aspects that were “hidden in plain sight” when reading the same text in the original language. This is precisely what happened recently as I was working on the translation of a series of texts authored by John Dewey between the end of the 19th century and the 1930s.¹ While in this process, a term particularly struck my attention: “subject-matter.” Unusually hyphenated, this otherwise common term progressively acquires a technical meaning in Dewey’s work and it becomes a concept. The term subject-matter – which, as far as I know, has until now attracted little attention² in the field of Dewey Studies – requires then a twofold approach: a theoretical and a linguistic one. As I am not a native English-speaking scholar, the very attempt to translate it into my own language (i.e. Italian) raises a few issues. Simply reading it in the original text, instead, does not arouse any particular “suspicion,” for it constitutes a “flowing” and therefore integral part of the discourse. In Italian, no direct correspondent is available for subject-matter. A translator is therefore forced to look for the closest match in the realm of its synonyms. But what is Dewey’s subject-matter synonym of? In this case, while striving to preserve the full import of the original text in a philosophical translation, linguistic matters tend to merge in a twofold, as already anticipated, or better “bistable,” co-constitutive, theoretical-linguistic inquiry.
- 2 In the following analysis of subject-matter, I will employ an “archaeological” method. This latter will allow to dig into and make sense of the several layers – even the somewhat messy ones – of the notion. Although at first sight subject-matter does not seem to belong to a clear speculative grammar and lexicon, in my view, it can be seen acquiring an increasing technical import. Its conceptual status is poignantly addressed in *Art as Experience*, but it can also be found at work in some other strategic venues of Dewey’s *corpus* over a long period of time, long before, and even after, the publication

of his 1934 book. One passage from the 1903 *Studies in Logical Theory*³ well exemplifies the length of this journey. Dewey addresses the topic of subject-matter from the standpoint of its relationship with thought, and provides for it the following complex articulation:

In taking up the problem of the subject-matter of thought, I shall try to make clear that it assumes three quite distinct forms according to the epochal moment reached in control of experience. I shall attempt to show that we must consider subject-matter from the standpoint, first, of the *antecedents* or conditions that evoke thought; secondly, of the *datum* or *immediate material* presented to thought; and, thirdly, of the *proper objective* of thought. Of these three distinctions the first, that of antecedent and stimulus, clearly refers to the situation that is immediately prior to the thought-function as such. The second, that of datum or immediately given matter, refers to a distinction which is made within the thought-process as a part of and for the sake of its own *modus operandi*. It is a status in the scheme of thinking. The third, that of content or object, refers to the progress actually made in any thought-function; material which is organized by inquiry so far as inquiry has fulfilled its purpose. (Dewey 1903/1976: 317)

- 3 One should also add that in a 1906 essay, while outlining the characters of “The Experimental Theory of Knowledge” in a realist, or naturalistic sense, Dewey quotes Santayana’s indication⁴ to follow “the lead of the subject-matter” (Dewey 1906/1977: 118). To this apparently trivial word, therefore, a speculative weight of no little importance is attached as early as the turn of the century.
- 4 In what follows an account will be provided of the career of this term, of its increasing technicality, and of how translating hurdles bring out conceptual specificities.
- 5 The paper will proceed as follows: after providing an etymological profile, I will discuss the difficulties encountered while translating the term subject-matter, briefly outline the possibilities indicated by fellow native English-speaking philosophers, and then offer possible solutions. Key passages in which Dewey employs the term will guide this process. I will start my survey from *Art as Experience* and conclude it with *Experience and Nature*. This latter work will also provide the ground to a basic comparison between *subject-matter* as employed by Dewey and the phenomenological notion of *Lebenswelt*. This is meant to simply indicate a framework for a possible and programmatic comparison, which still remains to be developed more systematically. The reader should therefore not be surprised to find that, in the final parts of the text, an agile and to some extent experimental sampling of passages is used and commented on as the ground work for future investigations on the proximity between the two aforementioned concepts.⁵

2. Etymological Clues and Conceptual Distinctions Starting from *Art as Experience*

- 6 As any English-Italian dictionary will show, the meaning that is generally attached to subject-matter is that of “theme or topic of discussion,” which, *sub specie philosophica* in general and *sub specie deweyana* in particular, amounts to an unsatisfactory result. Translating subject-matter into Italian is not a problem *per se*, because, as a matter of fact, the context itself usually provides an indication on how to proceed to make the text as a whole linguistically understandable and flowing. When translating Dewey’s texts, however, I could but notice how insistently Dewey turns his attention to this

term, hence suggesting its conceptual technicalization in a number of passages, and I felt challenged, or even tempted, to provide an unambiguous translation of it. And this is where problems begin, as this strategy is often detrimental to the readability of the text as such, as I shall show.

- 7 To begin with, whenever one encounters a term that exhibits a certain “viscosity” or generates a certain “friction,” checking its etymological origin is always a useful exercise. And that’s what I did here.
- 8 In this case,
[t]he meaning “subject matter of an art or science” is attested from 1540s, probably short for subject matter (late 14c.), which is from Medieval Latin *subjecta materia*, a loan translation of Greek *hypokeimene hylē* (Aristotle), literally “that which lies beneath.” (Online Etymology Dictionary, last accessed on January 5, 2024)
- 9 At least heuristically, this etymological detour provides us with two clues: one related to the legal sphere, and one related to Aristotelianism. Both aspects prove useful in understanding the (mostly implicit) proposal I believe Dewey puts forward concerning the subject-matter. In the case of the former, *subjecta materia* means “what is being discussed,” “what is under examination,” “what pertains to,” “what is at stake.” One could also say that *subjecta materia* is that to which interest and attention and possibly also speech are directed and from which they are hence articulated. In the case of the latter, namely in the framework of the reference to *hypokeimene hylē*, what is highlighted is a dimension that is, so to speak, infrastructural, and which, in being so, characterizes, informs and is at the same time characterized, informed by what it sustains. At any rate, in both cases it is possible to speak of an inherence and, by extension, of an inextricable relationality between a “what” and a “how.”
- 10 As to the second etymological strand, the reference to Aristotle seems not to be entirely fortuitous. Even though no explicit reference to Aristotle can be found in it, ancient philosophy plays a crucial role in a key chapter (i.e. Chapter 6) of *Art as Experience*. There, Dewey argues against the classical distinction between “Substance and Form,” as also the chapter title suggests. It is safe to say that a thorough critique of the Platonic doctrine of ideas is carried out in those pages, an operation that also Aristotelian anti-dualistic hylomorphism was aimed at accomplishing. In the same pages, one can also find a thorough conceptualization of subject-matter. Dewey introduces in fact clear distinctions between the import of this term and that of other terms in his philosophical device, in particular within the framework of a re-definition of substance and form in an anti-dualistic sense.
- 11 Almost obsessively throughout the chapter, the relationship between substance and form is discussed based on the assumption that, granted that all arts are expressive – as crucially established in Chapters 4 and 5 – they should be seen as languages articulated by their specific medium; moreover, it should be made clear that they always involve an individual and a shared dimension, an organism and an environment, a creator and a perceiver, what is said and how this something is said, namely, *a substance and a form*. In these pages Dewey constantly oscillates between the analysis of each of these inseparably co-operative aspects, while adopting a writing style that remains as accurate as possible in expressing this inseparable co-operation, that is, in preserving the complexity of the modes of *experiencing qua experiencing*.
- 12 Nevertheless, for analytical purposes, his initial focus is on the side of substance.⁶

- 13 Paraphrasing Bradley's (1926) account on poetry, Dewey draws a first distinction between "subject" and "substance."
- 14 On the one hand, he links the "subject" of a work to a "matter *for*," that is to say, something that can be described in many different ways without the work being affected by them: a theme, a title, a description, something that, for Dewey, serves at most the purpose of identification: "The subject [...] is outside the poem. [...] 'Subject,' however, itself varies over a wide range: hardly more than a label; the occasion that called out the work; the subject-matter which as raw material entered into the new experience of the artist and found transformation" (Dewey 1934/1989: 115).
- 15 On the other hand, he links the "substance" of a work to a "matter *in*," that is to say, the work itself, something that cannot be said, or done, or experienced otherwise: "one can tell another in words the subject of the 'Ancient Mariner.' But to convey to him its substance one would have to expose him to the poem and let the latter have its way with him" (*ibid.*). What is at stake here is aesthetic matter, or the subject after having been processed by the artist, after undergoing his/her treatment and having been experienced by someone else: "the substance is within *it* [the poem]; rather, *it is the poem*" (*ibid.*). Dewey also specifies that "substance" is not a "theme" or "topic," just as none of these three indicated terms is what he calls an "antecedent subject-matter" (*ibid.*: 116). Attaching the character of antecedence to subject-matter is not of secondary importance.
- 16 The following example adds some clarity:

The "subject" of the "Ancient Mariner" is the killing of an albatross by a sailor and what happened in consequence thereof. Its matter is the poem itself. Its subject-matter is all the experiences a reader brings with him of cruelty and pity in connection with a living creature. (*ibid.*)
- 17 Associated with the overall experience of an individual or group of individuals – on a spectrum that for Dewey ranges from creator to user – *up to that moment*, subject-matter is "antecedent," in the sense of being the operative condition on the basis of which the rest can be built. For analytical purposes Dewey provides a somewhat linear and sequential description of the procedure. However, this does not actually reflect the modes through which experience actually or operatively unfolds, for him. These modes are instead seen by Dewey as transversal, contemporary and complex. But "for the sake of clarity," he states: "First comes subject-matter, then the substance or matter of the work; finally the determination of topic or theme" (*ibid.*).
- 18 An unambiguous translation of subject-matter with theme, subject or content, is therefore clearly non-viable. The solution generally suggested by dictionaries, and therefore certainly acceptable in current English, does not work for Dewey's use of the word, and the peculiarity of his philosophical standpoint around it. One more aspect should be also taken into account. What is at stake is not only the "priority" of the subject-matter as such, but also the manner in which such priority is itself operative.
- 19 This can be seen at play in Dewey's rejection of conventionalism and mechanicalness when it comes to artistic construction, as well as in general in the management of experience, where certain aspects of it are intensified, or made more perspicuous and experienceable. By conventionalism and mechanicalness, Dewey means all those forms of elaboration of experience that effect a detachment from the organic and ever-situated transaction that characterizes the relationship between humans and the environment, by applying pre-constituted forms and formulas that, as such, are closed

and forced upon. And this is what happens if one starts exclusively from a mere “subject” upon which to work: “The artist himself can hardly begin with a subject alone. If he did, his work would almost surely suffer from artificiality” (*ibid.*).

- 20 The “antecedence” or “priority” of subject-matter entails instead a processual dimension of development, both temporal and transformational. Important parallels can be here pointed out with Dewey’s understanding of form as a *forma formans* rather than as *forma formata*:

Antecedent subject-matter is not instantaneously changed into the matter of a work of art in the mind of an artist. It is a developing process. As we have already seen, the artist finds where he is going because of what he has previously done; that is, the original excitation and stir of some contact with the world undergo successive transformation. That state of the matter he has arrived at sets up demands to be fulfilled and it institutes a framework that limits further operations. (*Ibid.*)

- 21 In this process the subject-matter *possibly* becomes substance, that is, formed matter.

As the experience of transforming subject-matter into the very substance of the work of art proceeds, incidents and scenes that figured at first may drop out and others take their place, being drawn in by the suction of the qualitative material that aroused the original excitement. (*Ibid.*)

- 22 This process, however, does not take place simply, but selectively, namely by complying with the “retention” and “release” movements enacted by what Dewey calls a “qualitative material.” I will get back to this point in the next section.

3. A Few Attempts, a Possible Solution and a Common Ground

- 23 Now, in the light of this meticulous series of distinctions and nuances that Dewey brings to the fore, it is clear that the term subject-matter is hardly “tamable,” both from the standpoint of a philosophical translation into Italian, where, unlike what is the case for the other terms Dewey uses, there is no direct correspondence to it, and from the standpoint of the attempt to find, in English – specifically meant as Deweyan English – a *conceptually* adequate synonym.

- 24 This brings us to two further steps taken in my survey: first, an outline of the responses I received from native English-speaking colleagues whom I consulted,⁷ and second, a focus on a seemingly trivial graphic element – the hyphen – namely the nexus that connects “subject” and “matter.”

- 25 Let’s begin with the first point: I involved six American colleagues, who can be categorized into three groups: Dewey experts, pragmatists, and aestheticians. Their responses were varied and can also be organized into types. Some argue for the lack of any technical import in Dewey’s usage of the term subject-matter, which, then, would result in plain English, and which may be hence equated with “theme,” “topic,” “content,” “object” or even “point” of anything, something which may be defined as being connoted by a certain “aboutness.” Other respondents argue that in subject-matter, “matter” means things of importance, things that matter and hence that subject-matter is whatever comes to be noticed by a subject. Finally, in some responses, the specifically technical and philosophical import of the term in question was acknowledged and thematized. I will focus particularly on the latter type of response.

- 26 The aim of this paper is not to provide a detailed account on Dewey's philosophy. Yet, an unavoidable aspect that should be taken into consideration if one wishes to understand the latter, and if, of course, one wishes to understand how actually relevant subject-matter is within it, is what is referred to as *continuism*. To sum up this complex feature in a nutshell: nothing happens *in vacuo*, *ex abrupto* or *ex nihilo*, but life unfolds relationally, qualitatively, historically, temporally, processually, and contextually or situatedly. Namely, within a field. It is therefore not surprising that, as I also at some point considered, some of the proposed translation options included precisely "situation" [in Italian: *situazione*] and "field" [*campo*] in which a certain relevance, prominence, pertinence, and significance is at stake. However, I argue that although they are, among the various options that have emerged, the ones that overlap to a greater extent with subject-matter, they cannot be used as its synonyms, nor as a suitable base for an Italian translation, since they are thematized by Dewey in a somewhat "self-sufficient" manner.
- 27 Concerning the term "situation," one could take, for example, the following passage from the 1930 essay "Qualitative Thought," in which, while elaborating on his distinctions, Dewey says:
- What is intended may be indicated by drawing a distinction between something called a "situation" and something termed an "object." By the term situation in this connection is signified the fact that the subject-matter ultimately referred to in existential propositions is a complex existence that is held together in spite of its internal complexity by the fact that it is dominated and characterized throughout by a single quality. By "object" is meant some element in the complex whole that is defined in abstraction from the whole of which it is a distinction. The special point made is that the selective determination and relation of objects in thought is controlled by reference to a situation – to that which is constituted by a pervasive and internally integrating quality, so that failure to acknowledge the situation leaves, in the end, the logical force of objects and their relations inexplicable. (Dewey 1930/1984: 246)
- 28 "Situation" clearly embodies a principle of selection, control and relevance of and in experience. This point is also made in *Art as Experience*, as exemplified for instance also by one of the passages quoted in the conclusion to the previous section, and which I now retrieve, where Dewey refers to the operation of "suction of the qualitative material" in the process of transforming the subject-matter into the substance of the work of art. In that process perceiving is carried out toward the direction of expressing: a process which, from a situation, moves toward an (inferred) object. Hence, even though they can be considered as equally constitutive elements of the process through which operatively and tacitly efficacious experiential elements are intensified, possibly thematized, and made explicit, "situation" and "subject-matter" cannot be fully equated.
- 29 Concerning the other term, which has been indicated as a "better fit" as far as a theoretical-linguistic point of view is concerned, a similar argument can be put together.
- 30 The term "field" is frequently used in Dewey's *corpus* (see for instance Dewey 1925/1984: 52-3), although it never really reaches the same degree of technicalization that "situation" and "subject-matter" have.
- 31 It is also true that Dewey's conception of experiential dynamics could or perhaps should be termed "energetic." As the title of one of the chapters of *Art as Experience*

suggests, the dynamics underlying *an* experience (i.e. an aesthetic one) are indeed understood in terms of “The Organization of Energies.”

- 32 It is noteworthy then to point out that Dewey describes emotion – a key notion to him – not only as a

[...] moving and cementing force [which] selects what is congruous and dyes what is selected with its color, thereby giving qualitative unity to materials externally disparate and dissimilar. It thus provides unity in and through the varied parts of an experience. (Dewey 1934/1989: 49)

- 33 But also, in the framework of the development of an expressive act, as something that selectively operates as a magnet, which is nothing but an energy field that

[draws] to itself appropriate material: appropriate because it has an experienced emotional affinity for the state of mind already moving. Selection and organization of material are at once a function and a test of the quality of the emotion experienced. In seeing a drama, beholding a picture, or reading a novel, we may feel that the parts do not hang together. Either the maker had no experience that was emotionally toned, or, although having at the outset a felt emotion, it was not sustained, and a succession of unrelated emotions dictated the work. In the latter case, attention wavered and shifted, and an assemblage of incongruous parts ensued. The sensitive observer or reader is aware of junctions and seams, of holes arbitrarily filled in. (*Ibid.*: 75)

- 34 Furthermore, it should be noted that Arnold Berleant, in his 1970 volume *The Aesthetic Field: A Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, not only highlighted the radical affinities between a phenomenological and a pragmatist perspective, but also thematically fine-tuned some of the conceptual aspects that in Dewey mainly played an “operative” and not fully “thematic” role, since they were finely integrated into the text as such. Interestingly enough, it is precisely the notion of “field” which undergoes such “fine-tuning” procedure.

- 35 This set of indicators has thus made me rule out the usage of “field” as a possible equivalent of “subject-matter,” since – despite closely “bordering” each other – field already has, as a matter of fact, its own well-defined identity.

- 36 As stated above both “situation” and “field” have to do with a certain relevance, prominence, pertinence, and significance. The passages that have been quoted here also indicate a selective and controlling aspect and, not least, a processuality that moves from a *fungierend* – as German phenomenologists would nicely put it – implicit and dense operativity toward a level of organization, emergence and, possibly, of explicit thematization. In this sense, one might discern in all of this that “double-barreled” character that Dewey ascribes on the one hand to experience and on the other hand also to the inquiry field (for want of a better term). In the case of experience, he understands it as both lived experience and structured, organized experience. In the case of the inquiry field, he understands it both as a field *for* inquiry – to be managed, organized, explored, at least potentially – and as a field *of* inquiry – a more structured, explicit, delimited, yet still to be investigated one.

- 37 And this point brings us back to the earlier etymological indication regarding subject-matter, in which both aspects were referred to, namely that involving a certain “indeterminacy” (Aristotelian root) and that involving greater “determinacy” (legal root). This would seem to suggest that “subject-matter” has itself a double-barreled nature, and that as such it requires a translation – both in a linguistic and conceptual sense – that accounts for this complexity but is also sufficiently flexible.

- 38 The following passages, in particular, challenge the idea that single term consistency should be pursued in the translation of subject-matter:

[1:] The actuality of our perception thus lies in its activity, in the movements which prolong it. Take this passage seriously and literally, and you have the precise view of perception here contended for. It is not a choice accomplished all at once, but is a process of choosing. The possible responses involved are not merely postponed, but are operative in the quality of present sensori-motor responses. The perceived subject-matter is not simply a manifestation of conditions antecedent to the organic responses, but is their transformation in the direction of further action. (Dewey 1912/1979: 24)

[2:] Let a man be as persuaded as you please that the relation between psychology and philosophy is lacking in any peculiar intimacy, and yet let him believe that psychology has for its subject-matter a field antithetical to that of the physical sciences, and his problems are henceforth the problems of adjusting the two opposed subject-matters; the problems of how one such field can know or be truly known by another; of the bearing of the principles of substantiality and causality within and between the two fields. (Dewey 1913/1979: 48)

- 39 In this latter passage from an essay on the topic of “Psychological Doctrine and Philosophical Teaching” subject-matter does in fact lean towards a more “plainly linguistic” acceptance, but it is not just that.
- 40 Conceptually close to this acceptance of subject-matter, I suggest translating the latter here as “*materia trattata*,” or “addressed matter.” While not suitable for total adoption, such a translation choice would emphasize the specific thematic and thematized import of subject-matter. After all, Dewey is writing about teaching, an activity which, like science, philosophy or research at large, does require a degree of thematization. Yet, according to the pragmatist golden rule, any thematization or conceptualization still finds its root and testbed in concrete experience. A “thematized subject-matter,” or “addressed matter,” is then more than just a mere “topic of discussion,” but it actually designates a highly structured articulation which deals with or asserts “implicit” and lived experience explicitly.
- 41 In the former passage, from “Perception and Organic Action,” in which Dewey deals widely and critically with Bergson’s *Matter and Memory*, and particularly with its first chapter titled “Of the Selection of Images for Conscious Presentation. What Our Body Means and Does,” the subject-matter is interestingly attached to perceptual activity, just like, in *Art as Experience*, it is specified in terms of an “antecedent subject-matter.” Here, (perceived) subject-matter seems to stand for an ongoing, enduring, operative presence and also a directional force which finds its expression, or presentification, not via thematization, but into and through a choosing, acting, or transforming, just like artists do when they organize experienced matter into an “aesthetic” one, or into an artwork, as in Dewey’s example in *Art as Experience*. This also applies to anyone whenever they organize experienced matter into an experience. What is at stake is an *inherent*⁸ force that is expressed throughout and within a relationship between “subject” and “matter.”
- 42 And, again, even though unsuitable for total adoption, this other characterization of subject-matter could be conceptually rendered by translating it with “*materia inerente*,” “*materia d’inerenza di*” that is, respectively, “inherent matter,” “a matter to which something inheres,” emphasizing in this sense both the passive and active form of the verb “inhering.” In this case, the translation emphasizes its more specifically

philosophical import, bringing to the fore the radically continuistic acceptance – in the sense described above – on which the whole Deweyan proposal is based.

- 43 And this brings us to another indication that Dewey puts a lot of philosophical weight on “subject-matter”: his use of the hyphenation. Normally, current English speakers write “subject matter,” that is, as two words without the hyphen. Needless to say, they are writing about a century after Dewey, and any argument built on this fact would be anachronistic and a non-sequitur. Moreover, the *Oxford English Dictionary*⁹ shows the occasional use of the hyphen during and leading up to Dewey’s time. Yet, putting weight on such a miniscule “trait,” is more than just a rhetorical strategy, since the hyphen could also be understood as the graphic element designating Dewey’s approach to philosophy. Even if it was not unseen in his time, he could have chosen not to use it, for instance. The hyphen in this word, at any rate, fits comfortably within Dewey’s attempt to overcome *even graphically* the traditional philosophical dualisms between subject and object, form and matter, activity and passivity, mind and world, inner and outer, *experience and nature*.
- 44 Interestingly enough, in the text where – perhaps more radically than any other one – Dewey presents his anti-dualistic thought in different respects and in different areas of philosophy (i.e. a moral, epistemological, aesthetic one, etc.), namely *Experience and Nature*, the locution “subject-matter” and its hyphen recur quite often (on at least 80 pages out of about 300, more than 100 times). In this case, unlike what we have seen in *Art as Experience*, the locution is put at work without any thematic-technical explanation. The abundance of its occurrences reveals nevertheless its strategic function in expressing some basic moves of Dewey’s overall theory, precisely in relation to the question of experience as explored in the whole volume.¹⁰
- 45 Experience, as already mentioned above, is double-barreled, that is, it has an intrinsic duplicity which, however, does not amount to dualism, but rather to an entanglement of “what” and “how.” All things considered, it is precisely the subject-matter of experience that is called upon to manage this entanglement, because the subject-matter is itself a “what” according to a “certain mode,” namely, an *inherent matter*. And by virtue of the mode in which it occurs, it turns out to be inherent with respect to potentially thematic contents that can be made explicit and thus become *addressed matter*. This can be seen in a number of instances where this locution occurs and which I will quote below. These passages allow, also, to see that subject-matter expresses that same layer of experience which in phenomenological terms corresponds to the notion of *Lebenswelt*. Subject-matter and the latter, in fact, equally have to do with that operative texture of aspects from which and in which also scientific-philosophical knowledge respectively begins and is rooted. Namely, that texture which scientific-philosophical knowledge seeks to address, seeks to make explicit, according to the forms and syntaxes of scientific-philosophical thought. As a result, subject-matter is transformed into a meaning that can also be ideally defined, that is to say, defined with respect to an ideal of science-philosophy, and to an ideal scientific-philosophical method.
- 46 In conclusion, subject-matter is that layer of potential meaningfulness that cannot be reduced to a cognitive meaning. It rather nourishes and supports the latter. While cognitive meaning is expressed in the forms of *judgment*, subject-matter is inherent in the side of *experientiality* as such. Husserl’s typical dichotomy between experience and judgment can be fruitfully put at play here. The same contrast can also be described in

terms of the relationship between an “ante-predicative” or “pre-categorical” and a “predicative-judgmental” or “categorical.” In this sense, pragmatism and phenomenology can both be seen attempting to retrace the sensible roots of experiencing between thematization (i.e. explicitness, even to the point of conceptual technicalization) and the inherent operativity (i.e. practical, *fungierend* implicitness) of a (scientific, artistic, everyday...) complex and vital field.

4. A Programmatic and Experimental Sampling: Subject-Matter as *Lebenswelt*

47 The passages from *Experience and Nature* that have been experimentally sampled and are now going to be listed below serve precisely to show these programmatic aspects. The following is hence a path that, from my stance, namely from the stance of someone attempting to establish a connection between pragmatism and phenomenology starting from the former, seems to point to something that either as “inherent matter” or as a possibly “addressed matter,” eventually resembles the crucial notion of *Lebenswelt*, namely that qualitative, immediate and also historically and socially imbued living and lived world from which everything emerges and to which everything belongs and refers.

48 In this first passage from the preface, Dewey highlights the continuism between subject-matter as inherent matter as such and as potential addressed matter, by emphasizing the temporal and transformational dimension already mentioned in the passages above from *Art as Experience*, which bring him, interestingly enough, to use subject-matter in the plural, making its temporal, transformational and hence dynamic import more perspicuous.

The constant task of such thought is to establish working connections between old and new subject-matters. We cannot lay hold of the new, we cannot even keep it before our minds, much less understand it, save by the use of ideas and knowledge we already possess. But just because the new is new it is not a mere repetition of something already had and mastered. The old takes on new color and meaning in being employed to grasp and interpret the new. (Dewey 1925-1929/1981: 3)

49 The passage below comes from a *locus* in the book in which Dewey leans more toward the “scientific” side of the elaboration of the experience-nature hendiadys, and in which science is used as an example. Yet, this happens, according to Dewey, only insofar as theory, in its being thematic and thematizing, remains attached to experience in its operative and *fungierend* dimension,¹¹ that is, in its “start[ing] from and terminat[ing] in directly experienced subject-matter” (Dewey 1925-1929/1981: 11), which is the background from which and in which everyday life (“the man in the street”) and science (“the scientific man”) equally move, and to which, in particular the latter, must indeed always return.

Theory may intervene in a long course of reasoning, many portions of which are remote from what is directly experienced. But the vine of pendant theory is attached at both ends to the pillars of observed subject-matter. And this experienced material is the same for the scientific man and the man in the street. The latter cannot follow the intervening reasoning without special preparation. But stars, rocks, trees, and creeping things are the same material of experience for both. (*Ibid.*)

- 50 The radical *caveat* concerning the continuity between subject-matter as inherent matter and as *possible* addressed matter put forth by Dewey is quite strong:

As has been suggested, [mental and psychical objects] are not original, isolated and self-sufficient. They represent the discriminated analysis of the process of experiencing from subject-matter experienced. Although breathing is in fact a function that includes both air and the operations of the lungs, we may detach the latter for study, even though we cannot separate it in fact. So while we always know, love, act for and against *things*, instead of experiencing ideas, emotions and mental intents, the attitudes themselves may be made a special object of attention, and thus come to form a distinctive subject-matter of reflective, although not of primary, experience.

We primarily observe things, not observations. But the *act* of observation may be inquired into and form a subject of study and become thereby a refined object; so may the acts of thinking, desire, purposing, the state of affection, reverie, etc. Now just as long as these attitudes are not distinguished and abstracted, they are incorporated into subject-matter. It is a notorious fact that the one who hates finds the one hated an obnoxious and despicable character; to the lover his adored one is full of intrinsically delightful and wonderful qualities. (*Ibid.*: 21)

- 51 Here a passage in which Dewey also insists on the qualitateness and immediacy or, as he will maintain in the following one, “primacy” of the subject-matter of actual (still unanalyzed) experience:

Genuine empirical method sets out from the actual subject-matter of primary experience, recognizes that reflection discriminates a new factor in it, the *act* of seeing, makes an object of that, and then uses that new object, the organic response to light, to regulate, when needed, further experiences of the subject-matter already contained in primary experience. (*Ibid.*: 25)

- 52 And a scientific-philosophical method that is “genuinely empirical,” or experiential, i.e., that recognizes the primacy of experience *qua* experience in its ordinary, “ante-predicative” or “pre-categorical” import, also recognizes its “ultimacy,” namely its force as inherent matter, even when it is addressed in ways that tend instead to be “predicative-judgmental” and “categorical.” It seems possible to retrieve here pragmatism’s aforementioned golden rule (and phenomenology’s too, as a matter of fact, with its *Zu den Sachen Selbst!* maxim), namely, that every conceptualization, or thematization, must find its root and its testbed in lived, concrete, operative experience. This rule is illustrated by Dewey in a threefold way:

Reference to the primacy and ultimacy of the material of ordinary experience protects us, in the first place, from creating artificial problems which deflect the energy and attention of philosophers from the real problems that arise out of actual subject-matter. In the second place, it provides a check or test for the conclusions of philosophic inquiry; it is a constant reminder that we must replace them, as secondary reflective products, in the experience out of which they arose, so that they may be confirmed or modified by the new order and clarity they introduce into it, and the new significantly experienced objects for which they furnish a method. In the third place, in seeing how they thus function in further experiences, the philosophical results themselves acquire empirical value; they are what they contribute to the common experience of man, instead of being curiosities to be deposited, with appropriate labels, in a metaphysical museum. (*Ibid.*: 26)

- 53 One of the risks that Dewey warns about here, if one does not follow this methodological “mantra,” is that of intellectualism, by which it

[...] is meant the theory that all experiencing is a mode of knowing, and that all subject-matter, all nature, is, in principle, to be reduced and transformed till it is

defined in terms identical with the characteristics presented by refined objects of science as such. The assumption of “intellectualism” goes contrary to the facts of what is primarily experienced. For things are objects to be treated, used, acted upon and with, enjoyed and endured, even more than things to be known. They are things *had* before they are things cognized. (*Ibid.*: 28)

- 54 That is to say, the risk of reducing experience’s living and lived character into a merely cognized one, and thus the risk of denying its qualitative primacy:

The isolation of traits characteristic of objects known, and then defined as the sole ultimate realities, accounts for the denial to nature of the characters which make things lovable and contemptible, beautiful and ugly, adorable and awful. (*Ibid.*)

- 55 While

[...] it is literally impossible to exclude that context of non-cognitive but experienced subject-matter which gives what is *known* its import. (*Ibid.*: 29)

- 56 Last but not least, at least not in importance, but according to a progressive movement toward the elaboration of the 1934 explicitly aesthetic book, Dewey resorts to the example of art. This latter, understood as another mode through which experience is dealt with, turns out to be more effectively able to preserve the subject-matter in its experiential *inherence*, while still *addressing* it somehow, that is, able to overcome those dualisms that instead still afflict certain ways of articulating theory.

Experience in the form of art, when reflected upon, we conclude by saying, solves more problems which have troubled philosophers and resolves more hard and fast dualisms than any other theme of thought. As the previous discussion has indicated, it demonstrates the intersection in nature of individual and generic; of chance and law, transforming one into opportunity and the other into liberation; of instrumental and final. More evidently still, it demonstrates the gratuitous falsity of notions that divide overt and executive activity from thought and feeling and thus separate mind and matter. (*Ibid.*: 293)

- 57 So, in these pages it is possible to see already the outline of what will, in fact, be the thread running through *Art as Experience* as a whole. What is described just above does indeed take place because the artistic process “remains,” or “dwells,” in the field of subject-matter without denying its “freedom” and “activity” but by articulating it within the continuity of its *primacy* and *ultimacy*, namely, in its capacity as *sustainer* of consciousness.

In creative production, the external and physical world is more than a mere means or external condition of perceptions, ideas and emotions; it is subject-matter and sustainer of conscious activity; and thereby exhibits, so that he who runs may read, the fact that consciousness is not a separate realm of being, but is the manifest quality of existence when nature is most free and most active. (*Ibid.*: 294)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BEARLEANT Arnold, (1970), *The Aesthetic Field: A Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, Springfield, Charles C. Thomas.

- BELL Jason & Danilo MANCA (eds), (2022), "Pragmatism and Phenomenology: A Metaphilosophical Reconsideration," *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, 14(2). Online: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejpap.2945>.
- BRADLEY Andrew Cecil, (1926), "Poetry for Poetry's Sake," in Andrew Cecil Bradley, *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, London, Macmillan and Co., 3-34.
- BUONGIORNO Federica & Gioia Laura IANNILLI (eds), (2024), "Experiencing: Perception, Representation, and Action between Phenomenology and Pragmatism," *Azimuth. Philosophical Coordinates in Modern and Contemporary Age* (Special Issue). Online: <http://digital.casalini.it/9788855295338>.
- DEWEY John, (1903/1976), "Studies in Logical Theory," in *The Middle Works of John Dewey*, vol. 2, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 293-375.
- DEWEY John, (1906/1977), "The Experimental Theory of Knowledge," in *The Middle Works of John Dewey*, vol. 3, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 107-27.
- DEWEY John, (1912/1979), "Perception and Organic Action," in *The Middle Works of John Dewey*, vol. 7, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 7-30.
- DEWEY John, (1913/1979), "Psychological Doctrine and Philosophical Teaching," in *The Middle Works of John Dewey*, vol. 7, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 47-55.
- DEWEY John, (1925-1929/1981), *Experience and Nature*, in *The Later Works of John Dewey*, vol. 1, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press.
- DEWEY John, (1925/1984), "A Naturalistic Theory of Sense-Perception," in *The Later Works of John Dewey*, vol. 2, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 44-54.
- DEWEY John, (1930/1984), "Qualitative Thought," in *The Later Works of John Dewey*, vol. 5, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 243-62.
- DEWEY John, (1934/1989), *Art as Experience*, in *The Later Works of John Dewey*, vol. 10, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press.
- FINK Eugen, (1957), "Operative Begriffe in Husserls Phenomenologie," *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*, 11(3), 321-37. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20480927>.
- IANNILLI Gioia Laura, (2020), *The Aesthetics of Experience Design: A Philosophical Essay*, Milan, Mimesis International.
- IANNILLI Gioia Laura, (2024), "Il circolo operativo del percepire in Dewey," in John Dewey, *Il senso delle qualità. Saggi sulla percezione*, ed. and trans. by Gioia Laura Iannilli, Milano-Udine, Mimesis, 7-70.
- MATTEUCCI Giovanni, (2024), "Esperienza e giudizio: la matrice logica dell'estetica pragmatista," in Vincenzo Costa, Sebastiano Galanti Grollo, Luca Guidetti & Emanuele Mariani (eds), *Fenomenologia e realtà. Saggi in onore di Stefano Besoli*, Milano-Udine, Mimesis, 511-29.
- RENN Joachim, SEBALD Gerd & Jan WEYAND (eds), (2012), *Lebenswelt und Lebensform: zum Verhältnis von Phänomenologie und Pragmatismus*, Weilerswist-Metternich, Velbrück Wissenschaft.

SANTAYANA George, (1905-1906/2016), *The Life of Reason or the Phases of Human Progress*, in *The Works of George Santayana*, vol. VII, Book 5, ed. by Marianne S. Wockek, Martin A. Coleman, Boston, The MIT Press.

“Inherent,” Online Etymological Dictionary, https://www.etymonline.com/word/inherent#etymonline_v_9263, accessed January 5, 2024.

“Subject (matter),” Online Etymological Dictionary, https://www.etymonline.com/word/subject#etymonline_v_22245, accessed January 5, 2024.

“Subject matter,” Oxford English Dictionary Online, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/subject-matter_n?tab=factsheet&tl=true#20062320, accessed April 4, 2024.

NOTES

1. See Iannilli 2024.
2. But see Matteucci 2024, which partly focuses on the logical import of subject-matter in Dewey.
3. Not to mention also the fact that in the 1938 *Logic*, the term subject-matter occurs quite often (about 70 occurrences), proving, once again, its pervasiveness and weight in Dewey’s *corpus*. A further elaboration of this point is to be postponed to another occasion, though. My focus here will be more specifically on the suggestions provided by the minute linguistic and conceptual distinctions Dewey carries out in *Art as Experience* and how they shed (or hopefully can shed) light on other areas of Dewey’s thought.
4. Probably paraphrasing and not directly quoting his *The Life of Reason or the Phases of Human Progress* (1905-1906/2016) of which Dewey reviewed the first two volumes exactly in 1906.
5. The reader should note that the aim of this final comparison is not to provide a historically detailed reconstruction of the relationship between pragmatism and phenomenology. I am simply interested in comparing concepts that have a somewhat similar meaning, and as such may provide the ground for a further exploration. None of the historical aspects involved will be developed here. I refer the reader to recent studies which have gone in this direction, providing extensive analyses of the same relationship: see at least Buongiorno & Iannilli 2024; Bell & Manca 2022; Renn, Sebald & Weyand 2012.
6. For a detailed analysis of the side of “form,” and the distinctions made by Dewey in this regard in the chapter at issue, see Iannilli (2020: 73-108). We also refer to the same book for an exam of the relationship between substance and form in terms of a reconsideration of the relationship between function and form in the framework of designed experience.
7. Without any statistical-quantitative claims, however, but with the sole purpose of gathering qualitative insights from native-speaking philosophers.
8. The meaning of the term “inherent” has a certain degree of complexity *per se*. On the one hand, it is close to the semantic sphere of “adherens” and as such it pertains to a dimension involving a sticking, a clinging, an “attachment,” a close proximity, or even juxtaposition, as shown by the etymological reconstruction of the term “Inherent: 1570s, from Latin *inhaerentem* (nominative *inhaerens*), present participle of *inhaerere* ‘to be closely connected with, be inherent,’ literally ‘to adhere to, cling to’, from *in-* ‘in’ (from PIE root *en ‘in’) + *haerere* ‘to adhere, stick’” (Online Etymological Dictionary, accessed January 5, 2024). But on the other hand, it does not only denote adjacency because it implies an intimate relationship between the parts that are related to each other. And that is why it takes on the current meaning of deep-seated, deep-rooted, ingrained, which express the inextricable extent of density and pervasiveness which characterizes precisely the inherence of matter as subject-matter.
9. Online: Oxford English Dictionary, accessed April 4, 2024.

10. I am particularly grateful to Giovanni Matteucci for his generosity in discussing some of the excerpts from *Experience and Nature*.

11. Also in the sense put forward by phenomenologist Eugen Fink in his 1957 essay “Operative Begriffe in Husserls Phänomenologie.”

ABSTRACTS

The persistent occurrence of a locution that turns out to be far from trivially used, and the translation hurdles related to it are the core elements of this contribution. The term in question is *subject-matter*, which is used by John Dewey in many of his writings and of which he provides an explicit conceptualization in *Art as Experience*. Focusing on this term and its hyphenation allows to emphasize and shed new light on important aspects of Dewey's thought, in that: it is increasingly technicalized in Dewey's writings; it holds “antecedence” or “primacy”; in its double-barreled employment it keeps together the twofold meaning of “inherent matter” and “addressed matter”; and finally it epitomizes a number of traits shared by the notion of *Lebenswelt*, hence affording a programmatic and experimental comparison between the two.

INDEX

Keywords: Subject-Matter, John Dewey, Philosophical Translation, *Lebenswelt*

AUTHOR

GIOIA LAURA IANNILLI

Università di Bologna

gioialaura.iannilli2[at]unibo.it

Multilingual

Anthropologie philosophique et critique culturelle

Louis Quéré

- 1 De quelles fondations philosophiques une critique culturelle a-t-elle besoin? Par “critique culturelle” j’entends le repérage et la critique d’erreurs, de confusions, et d’illusions dans notre manière moderne de penser, dans les idéaux que nous nous sommes donnés, dans nos habitudes collectives et dans nos “imaginaires sociaux.”¹ Cette manière de penser, ces idéaux, ces habitudes et ces imaginaires imprègnent notre langage. Ils fournissent aussi, pour l’essentiel, leur cadre intellectuel aux sciences humaines et sociales. Ils sont des émergences historiques contingentes, liées à des conditions sociales, économiques et politiques déterminées.
- 2 Une telle entreprise critique requiert-elle l’élaboration d’une anthropologie philosophique libérée de toute une série de présupposés problématiques hérités du passé? Les réponses positives à cette question ne manquent pas, et je vais en évoquer quelques-unes. Laquelle est la mieux armée pour servir de base à la critique culturelle? Avec quels critères faire l’évaluation? Convenons d’emblée que l’idée même d’anthropologie philosophique ne va pas de soi, si, du moins, on entend par là l’élaboration d’un discours général sur la “nature humaine.” Quelle justification peut-on encore donner à une telle entreprise? Enfin, à supposer qu’un discours général puisse encore être tenu sur la “nature humaine,” comment peut-il avoir un impact réel sur la formation des représentations culturelles et des schémas intellectuels partagés?
- 3 Ces questions me sont venues à l’esprit à la lecture du beau livre de Roberta Dreon, *Human Landscapes: Contributions to a Pragmatist Anthropology* (Dreon 2022). L’anthropologie que la philosophe italienne y propose est une synthèse des contributions possibles des auteurs pragmatistes que sont John Dewey, William James et George Herbert Mead à ce genre d’entreprise. Il s’agit d’une anthropologie de type naturaliste, instruite par les découvertes de Charles Darwin. Les piliers sur lesquels elle repose sont l’analyse de la sensibilité comme une fonction vitale, et pas seulement cognitive, un développement de la théorie pragmatiste des habitudes et l’explication de l’enchevêtrement de la sensibilité et du langage.

- 4 Dans son ouvrage, R. Dreon confronte son anthropologie pragmatiste à celle que l'on peut dériver de la phénoménologie post-husserlienne, qui influence nombre de recherches actuelles sur le caractère incarné de l'esprit et de la cognition, notamment dans ce que l'on appelle l'"énactivisme," ou dans la théorie 4E de la cognition. Paradoxalement, au sujet du caractère langagier de l'expérience humaine, elle n'évoque pas le point de vue, qui ne manque pas de similitude avec le sien, de ceux qui s'inspirent de l'herméneutique philosophique. On peut en effet se demander en quoi l'approche pragmatiste est préférable.
- 5 Dans ce qui suit, je vais d'abord tenter de répondre à cette question, en partant du point de vue phénoménologique d'Hubert Dreyfus (discuté en plusieurs endroits du livre) et de Charles Taylor (jamais évoqué), qui mettent pareillement l'accent sur les dimensions incarnées et langagières de l'expérience humaine. Je présenterai ensuite les trois piliers de la construction de R. Dreon.

1. "Une *image* nous tenait captifs" (Wittgenstein)

- 6 La culture moderne est sous l'emprise d'une image profondément erronée de la connaissance, à laquelle il est difficile d'échapper car elle imprègne tout notre mode de vie. C'est ce qu'affirmaient Hubert Dreyfus et Charles Taylor, il y a quelques années, dans un livre commun, *Retrieving Realism*:

Il existe une grande erreur dans notre culture, une sorte de compréhension opérative déformée de ce que c'est que savoir, qui a eu des effets désastreux à la fois sur la théorie et la pratique dans quantité de domaines. Pour la résumer en une formule lapidaire, on pourrait dire que nous comprenons de travers la connaissance comme "médiationnelle." Dans sa forme originelle, il s'agissait de l'idée que nous saisissons la réalité externe à travers des représentations internes. [...] [La] connaissance consiste en états d'esprit qui prétendent représenter de façon précise ce qui est à l'extérieur. [...] Je n'accède à la connaissance des choses que par l'entremise de ces états internes, que nous pouvons appeler des "idées." (Dreyfus & Taylor 2015: 2-3)

- 7 Le principal coupable de ce représentationnisme serait Descartes, qui était "assuré que je ne puis avoir aucune connaissance de ce qui est hors de moi que par l'entremise des idées que j'ai eues en moi" (Descartes 1991: 201). La conséquence est l'émergence d'un point de vue désengagé, ou désenchanté sur le monde, l'abaissement de tout ce qui est corporel, l'oubli du rôle de l'affectivité, la négligence de la dépendance de la capacité cognitive des individus par rapport au contexte socio-culturel dans lequel ils vivent, et la promotion de la raison instrumentale.
- 8 Dreyfus et Taylor font remarquer que cette conception médiationnelle de la connaissance imprègne toute notre façon de penser et d'agir dans la modernité, car elle fait partie de nos idéaux, qui déterminent une manière générale d'être dans le monde, notamment ceux de la liberté et de la responsabilité personnelle, de la raison et de l'autonomie, ou encore celui de l'autogouvernement.
- 9 La conception que Dreyfus et Taylor opposent à cette théorie "médiationnelle" de la connaissance est une "théorie du contact":

Là où une théorie de la médiation conçoit la connaissance comme émergeant à travers un élément médiationnel, qui fait que, dans la connaissance, nous n'avons de contact avec le réel qu'à travers une représentation ou une catégorie intermédiaire, les théories du contact rendent compte de la connaissance en termes

de primat d'un contact non médiatisé avec la réalité connue. [...] Il s'agit du contact qu'ont les êtres vivants, actifs, dont la forme de vie implique d'agir dans et sur un monde, qui agit aussi sur eux. Ces êtres sont aux prises avec un monde et les uns avec les autres; ce contact premier leur procure le contexte générateur de sens pour leurs constructions épistémiques. (*Ibid.*: 17-8)

- 10 Ce contact direct, de nature pragmatique, qui confère leurs qualités et leurs valeurs aux choses et aux situations, précède toute saisie neutre de celles-ci. Il est le fait du corps. Dreyfus et Taylor font appel à Martin Heidegger et à Maurice Merleau-Ponty, et notamment au lien que ce dernier établit entre mouvement et perception, et à sa conception de l'intentionnalité motrice, pour justifier l'alternative réaliste qu'ils proposent au cadre "médiationnel." Ils mettent l'accent sur la façon dont un agent incarné traite ses situations en ayant un accès direct aux choses de la vie ordinaire, c'est-à-dire en faisant corps avec elles: "notre *coping* est expérimenté comme un flux continu d'activité intelligente en réponse au sens que nous avons de la situation. Fait partie de cette expérience un sens du caractère approprié ou pas de notre prise" (*ibid.*: 47). Une des conséquences est que l'idée que nous puissions "comprendre les choses telles qu'elles sont en elles-mêmes indépendamment des interactions que nous avons avec elles" est une illusion (*ibid.*: 131). C'est à travers notre engagement corporel et l'intelligence de notre corps dans le traitement des situations que nous accédons à la connaissance des choses.
- 11 Les auteurs soulignent par ailleurs le caractère constitutif du symbolique. Les êtres humains vivent en effet dans un monde constitué dans, et par le langage; ils sont, comme le dit Taylor, des "animaux langagiers" (Taylor 2019). Dreyfus et Taylor font leurs la thèse gadamérienne de la *Sprachlichkeit* de l'expérience, son paradigme de la conversation et sa problématique de la fusion d'horizons. On sait que Taylor, s'inspirant d'auteurs romantiques allemands de la fin du XVIII^e et du début du XIX^e siècles (Johann Georg Hamann, Johann Gottfried von Herder et Wilhelm von Humboldt), a fait de l'idée du caractère constitutif du langage une des pièces maîtresses de son anthropologie philosophique. Le langage a, selon lui, une fonction constitutive, et pas seulement désignative ou descriptive: il "entre dans nos sentiments, nos buts, nos relations et pratiques sociales" (Dreyfus & Taylor 2015: 122).
- 12 Ainsi Dreyfus et Taylor font-ils, à la fois, de l'immédiateté de la "connaissance par corps"² et de la disposition du langage les conditions de possibilité *a priori* de l'expérience cognitive.

2. Sortir de la théorie de la connaissance

- 13 Leur point de vue soulève, à mes yeux, trois problèmes. Le premier concerne ce que l'on peut appeler leur "immédiatisme phénoménologique," qui consiste à introduire l'idée de connaissance immédiate. Or, on peut estimer qu'il n'y a pas à proprement parler de connaissance sans médiation. Il existe bien une forme de saisie directe des choses, des événements et des situations, mais il ne s'agit pas de connaissance, fût-elle "une connaissance par corps" (Bourdieu). Comme le suggère Dewey (1938/1993: 213-4), pour nommer cette saisie directe, il vaut mieux utiliser le terme "appréhension," plutôt que celui de "connaissance." Appréhender "c'est prendre ou saisir, intellectuellement, sans mettre en question," comme lorsqu'"à la suite de nombreuses expériences, nous comprenons certaines significations directement, comme quand nous entendons une

conversation concernant un sujet familier ou que nous lisons un livre,” (*ibid.*) ou encore reconnaissons de vue certains objets. Ce genre d’appréhension fait partie de l’immédiateté de l’expérience, “mais c’est un produit obtenu par médiation par le moyen de certains mécanismes organiques de mémoire et d’habitude, et il présuppose des expériences antérieures et des conclusions intermédiaires qui en découlent” (*ibid.*). Bref, “l’appréhension immédiate d’un objet ou d’un événement n’est pas plus identique à la connaissance, au sens logique requis, que ne l’est l’entendement ou la compréhension immédiate d’une signification” (*ibid.*). Du point de vue herméneutique qu’adoptent Dreyfus et Taylor, cette compréhension immédiate reste de l’ordre d’une connaissance, et ils ne paraissent pas remettre en cause l’identification que fait Gadamer entre compréhension et interprétation, ni son “épistémocentrisme.” Ils paraissent rester fidèles à l’objectif du philosophe allemand, qui était d’élaborer une théorie de la connaissance appropriée aux *Geisteswissenschaften* (voir Quéré 2023).

- 14 Le deuxième problème a trait à la manière dont expérience corporelle sensible et langage s’articulent. Le risque est de faire de la première le fondement des formes de l’expression et de l’ordre des significations, et, par-là, de considérer les unes et les autres comme des ajouts à une sensibilité et une motricité pré-linguistiques fondatrices. Pour écarter ce risque de fondationnalisme il convient d’expliquer comment celles-ci sont elles-mêmes imprégnées de langage et de pratiques sociales et culturelles (cf. Dreon 2022: 36).
- 15 Le troisième problème concerne le transcendantalisme de cette anthropologie phénoménologique. Taylor a toujours revendiqué le caractère transcendantal de son entreprise. Il se définit comme un philosophe transcendantal, c’est-à-dire comme quelqu’un qui réfléchit sur les conditions de possibilité de ce qui est, et qui rapporte ces conditions à des constantes humaines ou à des structures générales d’expérience (“à ce qui est de tous les temps” (Taylor 1998b: 363)). Il place cependant le transcendantal dans l’histoire plutôt que dans la nature. Placer le transcendantal dans l’histoire signifie saisir les dimensions inéluctables de toute vie humaine “en approfondissant la compréhension de *notre* contexte historique” (Taylor 1998a: 45). C’est pourquoi il considère comme transhistoriques plutôt qu’anhistoriques les structures de l’expérience qu’il explicite (cf. Taylor 1998b: 362-3).
- 16 Ce transcendantalisme historiciste est, chez Taylor, un antidote au naturalisme. Le philosophe canadien ne conteste pas que l’homme fait partie de la nature, mais il entend souligner à quel point il est erroné de l’y insérer complètement, et de traiter la culture comme une émergence de la nature; l’humain comporte une part d’extra- et de sur-naturalité. Taylor ne peut donc pas accepter le continuisme des pragmatistes, dérivé de Darwin. Parler de “naturalisme culturel,” comme le fait Dewey, est, à ses yeux, une absurdité.³
- 17 Les pragmatistes ne sont pas moins convaincus que Dreyfus et Taylor qu’il y a une erreur dans notre culture, pour autant qu’elle a été profondément marquée par la philosophie moderne. Mais ils ne croient pas que c’est par une meilleure théorie de la connaissance que l’on y remédiera. En réalité, la philosophie dite “moderne” n’est pas si moderne que cela. Elle est en effet, explique Dewey, une rébellion contre la synthèse effectuée par l’Église médiévale de la philosophie d’Aristote, de la pensée hébraïque et de la théorie romaine de la loi naturelle, synthèse dont une des caractéristiques est la séparation surnaturaliste de l’esprit et de la nature, de l’interne et de l’externe. En fait les penseurs modernes ont conservé cette dichotomie, mais l’ont renversée; ils ont

donné la priorité à ce qui est interne (l'esprit), isolé la question de la connaissance qu'ils ont conçue en termes de représentation, et défini une méthode pour atteindre la certitude en ce domaine. L'"industrie épistémologique" qui a cherché une réponse à la question "La connaissance est-elle possible?" est issue de ce renversement (cf. Dewey 2012b).

- 18 Mais, aux yeux de Dewey, la culture moderne ne se caractérise pas seulement par une erreur dans la théorie de la connaissance qu'elle privilégie. Elle le fait aussi par l'écart qu'elle maintient entre le progrès des sciences de la nature, étayé sur l'adoption de l'"attitude scientifique" et sur l'usage de la méthode de l'enquête, et la persistance des "vieilles habitudes institutionnelles," c'est-à-dire d'attitudes et de méthodes préscientifiques, dans la fixation des croyances, dans la formation des désirs et des valeurs et dans le fonctionnement des institutions.⁴ D'où la question: comment intégrer l'"attitude scientifique" à la culture?:

Ce qui nous ramène à notre question fondamentale: la relation de la culture et de la nature humaine. Car le fait décisif lorsque l'on répond à la question de savoir si une connaissance vérifiée est, ou non, capable de façonner les désirs et les fins (ainsi que les moyens) est: "est-ce que les désirs qui sous-tendent l'établissement d'un cours d'action sont innés et fixés, ou bien est-ce qu'ils sont eux-mêmes le produit d'une certaine culture?" S'ils sont les produits d'une culture, le problème pratique revient à ceci: est-il possible pour l'attitude scientifique de devenir un constituant [...] tel de la culture qu'à travers le médium de la culture elle puisse façonner les désirs et desseins humains? (Dewey 1939: 163)

- 19 De ce point de vue, il y a moins une erreur dans la culture moderne, qu'une faille et un manque d'universalisation d'une attitude et d'une méthode, celles de l'enquête. C'est ce qui conduisait Dewey à considérer que "le 'moderne' nous apparaît comme informe et en attente de cohérence" (Dewey 1920/2014: 51).

3. Quelle place pour un discours sur la "nature humaine"?

- 20 Élaborer une anthropologie philosophique à partir des auteurs pragmatistes classiques n'a cependant rien d'évident. Pour au moins deux raisons, prises en compte par R. Dreon. La première est que l'idée même d'une anthropologie philosophique est plutôt associée à la tradition intellectuelle allemande, et a en général "un arrière-plan phénoménologique (Max Scheler et Martin Heidegger) enrichi par des emprunts à la biologie théorique (Jacob von Uexküll et Adophe Portmann)" (Dreon 2022: 6). La seconde raison est qu'une anthropologie philosophique se consacre à la spécification d'une "nature humaine," une entreprise épineuse s'il en est: "le concept a une histoire compliquée, souvent problématique et prête à confusion" (*ibid.*: 21). Il est, par exemple, souvent utilisé pour rendre compte, en termes de cause, ou de condition antécédente, de la contingence et de la variété complexe des comportements et des cultures humaines, pour en faire "la source d'autorité devant fournir les principes de la conduite" (Madelrieux 2024), ou encore pour en dériver les traits des phénomènes sociaux.
- 21 Dewey a attiré l'attention sur le mauvais usage que l'on fait fréquemment de la notion de "nature humaine." Il l'a notamment rapporté à la "logique absolutiste" des théories sociales: "les théories sociales qui invoquent la nature humaine ont postulé un certain 'individu,' fixe et standardisé, dont les traits que l'on attribue aux phénomènes sociaux

pourraient être déduits” (Dewey, 2010: 296; trad. mod.). Il cite un extrait de *La Logique* de John S. Mill illustrant cet usage problématique de l’idée de “nature humaine individuelle,” qu’il fait suivre de la critique suivante:

Évidemment, ce qu’une telle affirmation ignore, c’est que “les actions et les passions” des hommes individuels sont concrètement ce qu’elles sont – leurs croyances et leurs buts inclus – à cause du milieu social dans lequel ils vivent; c’est qu’ils sont intégralement sous l’influence de la culture contemporaine et transmise, tant lorsqu’ils se conforment que lorsqu’ils se rebellent. La seule chose qui soit générique et qui demeure partout la même, c’est tout au plus la structure organique de l’homme, sa constitution biologique. Bien qu’il soit évidemment important de prendre cela en considération, il est aussi évident qu’aucun des traits *distinctifs* de l’association humaine ne peut en être déduit. Ainsi en dépit de l’horreur de Mill pour l’absolu métaphysique, ses conceptions sociales dominantes sont d’un point de vue logique absolutistes. Il suppose que certaines lois sociales normatives et régulatrices existent de tous temps et dans toutes les circonstances d’une vie sociale correcte. (*Ibid.*: 296-7; trad. mod.)

- 22 Dewey ajoute que, quand elle n’est pas comprise de manière historique, la doctrine de l’évolution peut elle-même céder à cette logique absolutiste, par exemple quand on suppose “qu’il existe un cours prédestiné d’étapes déterminées d’avance à travers lequel le développement social doit passer” (*ibid.*).

- 23 Dewey ne renonce pas pour autant à parler de “nature humaine.” Un de ses livres importants est intitulé *Human Nature and Conduct*. Comme l’observe Stéphane Madelrieux, le maintien chez les pragmatistes de l’idée de nature humaine est “à première vue surprenant”: “malgré leurs critiques de l’essentialisme, du fondationnalisme et du déterminisme – positions couramment associées à l’idée d’une nature humaine fixe dont on pourrait dériver les principes de la conduite –, les pragmatistes n’entendent pas éliminer purement et simplement l’idée d’une ‘nature humaine’” (Madelrieux 2024: 26). Madelrieux cite à ce sujet la justification donnée par Dewey au maintien de cette idée, dans la postface à la réédition, en 1930, de *Human Nature and Conduct*:

Peut-être la tendance aujourd’hui pour beaucoup est de négliger l’identité de base de la nature humaine au sein de ses diverses manifestations. [...] [Dans ce livre], l’accent est mis comme il se doit sur la capacité des habitudes et des tendances culturelles à diversifier les formes de la nature humaine. Mais on y trouve aussi la volonté de montrer qu’il y a toujours à l’œuvre des forces qui sont intrinsèques à une nature humaine commune. (Dewey MW.14: 230)

- 24 Quelques années plus tard (1938), Dewey réitérera son point de vue dans l’article intitulé “Does Human Nature Change?”:

Il y a des tendances qui sont tellement partie intégrante de la nature humaine que celle-ci ne serait plus nature humaine si celles-là changeaient. On avait l’habitude d’appeler ces tendances des instincts. Les psychologues sont à présent plus réticents à utiliser ce terme qu’ils ne l’étaient auparavant. Mais le mot qui désigne ces tendances importe peu en comparaison du fait que la nature humaine possède sa propre constitution. (Dewey LW.13: 287)⁵

- 25 Quelle peut être cette constitution? Il s’agit pour l’essentiel d’instincts, c’est-à-dire de tendances innées ou naturelles à agir, qui demandent à être canalisées, redirigées et organisées dans des habitudes formées dans un milieu social et culturel. Un tel milieu est fait non seulement de coutumes et d’institutions, mais aussi d’artefacts et de procédés techniques. Madelrieux rappelle aussi que les pragmatistes donnent un sens biologique à “nature” dans l’expression “nature humaine”:

“Nature” est pris par les pragmatistes en un sens biologique et non métaphysique: ce n’est rien d’autre que la liste des instincts ou besoins innés telle que les méthodes empiriques de la biologie et de la psychologie nous permettent de la découvrir. Les propriétés constitutives ne sont pas déduites de l’idée générale d’homme, mais seulement inférées à partir de l’observation des êtres humains et des autres animaux. Et [...] ces propriétés sont définies de manière pragmatiste, en termes d’action ou de registre d’action (capacité à se déplacer, à communiquer, etc.) et non sous la forme de propriétés statiques: ce que sont les êtres humains est bien défini par ce qu’ils font ou peuvent faire. (Madelrieux 2024: 25)⁶

- 26 C’est donc vers la théorie pragmatiste des instincts, des impulsions et des habitudes – ces dernières émergeant à partir des instincts –, en partie inspirée de Darwin, qu’il faut se tourner pour comprendre que l’on puisse faire un usage strictement biologique et non métaphysique du concept de “nature humaine.”
- 27 C’est aussi la voie qu’a empruntée R. Dreon. La philosophe italienne insiste sur l’influence de Darwin sur la transformation de l’idée de “nature humaine” par les pragmatistes: leur lecture de Darwin a fait qu’ils “considèrent la nature des êtres vivants comme fixée dynamiquement et ouverte au changement plutôt que comme quelque chose de fixé une fois pour toutes” (Dreon 2022: 12). Leur darwinisme les a aussi conduits à mettre l’accent sur la continuité des êtres vivants, et sur l’histoire naturelle de l’homme (au lieu de traiter la “nature humaine” comme fixée de toute éternité): “ils ont adopté la continuité de la vie comme cadre général et considéré que les conditions réelles de la vie humaine procédaient de tendances fortuites, cependant irréversibles, dans les circonstances naturelles, et étaient ouvertes à de nouveaux changements et au cours de l’histoire” (*ibid.*).
- 28 Une des expressions de ce continuisme est la récusation du dualisme nature-culture: “[la culture] est enracinée dans les conditions organiques et environnementales de la vie humaine, sans qu’elle soit pour autant réductible à la simple association de ressources préexistantes” (*ibid.*: 23). Il ne s’agit cependant pas de faire dépendre causalement la culture de facteurs biologiques. C’est plutôt en termes de conditionnement mutuel qu’il faut raisonner: “facteurs organiques et caractéristiques socioculturelles de l’environnement humain doivent être compris comme se conditionnant mutuellement et comme se renforçant réciproquement” (*ibid.*: 24). Ce qui implique de reconnaître une rétroaction “de la niche culturelle-linguistique sur les fonctions biologiques” (*ibid.*: 24-5).
- 29 Leur darwinisme a aussi immunisé les pragmatistes contre tout transcendantalisme. Il y a bien des constances et des invariances dans les pratiques et conduites humaines, mais elles ne constituent pas un cadre *a priori* pour les événements empiriques, qui ne feraient qu’instancier des traits généraux:

[...] la nature humaine n’est pas derrière ou en dessous du cours des événements qui nous arrivent: elle est constituée par la riche complexité des circonstances organiques et environnementales – incluant les contraintes matérielles, les conditions culturelles et les facteurs sociaux –, ces circonstances étant exposées à une fixation et une stratification relatives, ainsi qu’à des changements et des effets de boucle. (*Ibid.*: 12)
- 30 Les effets de boucle correspondent aux changements dans l’environnement provoqués par des changements dans l’organisme, et réciproquement.
- 31 Il les a aussi immunisés contre une interprétation téléologique de l’évolution: celle-ci n’obéit pas à un principe téléologique; elle n’est pas non plus une progression de

formes de vie inférieures vers des formes supérieures: “l’émergence des formes de vie humaines – à travers le langage, les comportements symboliques et intelligents, les pratiques culturelles et les institutions – est contingente et fortuite” (*ibid.*: 26). Elle est en partie due à des mutations fortuites dans l’organisation des transactions entre les organismes et leur environnement.

- 32 On pourrait ajouter que l’empreinte de Darwin est aussi marquée dans le scepticisme des pragmatistes à l’égard de la psychologie. James, qui a pourtant été un promoteur de la psychologie scientifique moderne, considérait que la métaphysique continuait à suinter à toutes ses articulations, freinant sa biologisation (cf. James 1909). Le scepticisme de Dewey était encore plus radical. Il considérait notamment que la psychologie, telle qu’instituée au XIX^e siècle, ne pouvait pas couper ses racines cartésiennes et qu’il valait mieux lui préférer l’anthropologie culturelle (à la Boas, ou à la Malinowski). R. Dreon cite un extrait d’une lettre qu’il écrivit en 1947 à l’historien Robert V. Daniels (qui avait, lui aussi, des attaches familiales à Burlington dans le Vermont, ville de naissance de Dewey):

Je considère que l’anthropologie [...] est de loin [la discipline] la plus avancée en matière d’indication de méthode efficace. Face à cela, la psychologie est dans son ensemble, à mes yeux, l’outil et l’organe d’étude et de description le plus inepte et le plus retardé qu’il puisse y avoir. Elle est, pour une grande partie, réellement nuisible en raison de ses faux postulats de base [...], du type de problèmes auquel elle s’attaque et de la façon dont elle les attaque. (Dewey in Dreon 2022: 220)

- 33 Dewey (comme Mead d’ailleurs) s’en prenait surtout à l’individualisme et au mentalisme de la psychologie de son époque; il en appelait à une psychologie sociale qui tienne vraiment compte de la matrice socio-culturelle de la conduite humaine. Le sous-titre de *Human Nature and Conduct* est *An Introduction to Social Psychology*.⁷ Aux yeux de R. Dreon, *Human Nature and Culture* est moins un ouvrage de psychologie sociale que d’anthropologie philosophique.
- 34 R. Dreon n’est pas la première à proposer une anthropologie philosophique inspirée du pragmatisme. Dans l’introduction de son livre elle évoque au moins trois précédents: *Toward a Metaphysics of Culture* de Joseph Margolis (2016); *Pragmatism and Philosophical Anthropology*, de Sami Pihlström (1998); et *Paths toward a Clearing* de Michael Jackson (1996). Elle apprécie l’insistance de Margolis sur l’acquisition du langage comme trait caractéristique des humains, mais elle lui reproche de sous-estimer d’autres aspects importants, notamment la nature de la sensibilité humaine et sa relation au langage, ou encore le rôle des habitudes. Elle se distancie aussi du “naturalisme transcendantal” de Pihlström, qui lui paraît trop kantien. Enfin, bien qu’elle s’inspire de l’anti-intellectualisme de James et Dewey, l’anthropologie philosophique esquissée par Jackson lui paraît s’inscrire plutôt dans une veine phénoménologique qui n’a pas vraiment rompu avec le cartésianisme.
- 35 Un des intérêts du livre de R. Dreon est que, bien qu’elle privilégie l’œuvre de Dewey, elle se réfère à une diversité d’auteurs pragmatistes plus grande que d’ordinaire. Elle rappelle notamment l’apport de George Herbert Mead, ce qui n’est pas fréquent chez les philosophes, qui ont tendance à faire l’impasse sur l’œuvre de cette figure majeure des premières années du pragmatisme.⁸ Mead a développé une perspective fondamentalement sociale sur l’expérience humaine.⁹ L’intérêt de son anthropologie pour le projet de R. Dreon est qu’elle envisage le langage comme un outil de gestion de la conduite sociale et de régulation mutuelle du comportement social, avec un accent mis sur “la continuité entre les gestes émotionnels et la conversation verbale” (Dreon

2022: 187). Mead fait en effet reposer la “conversation de gestes” (et même l’émergence du *self* et de la conscience de soi) sur la sensibilité affective ou sur la “conscience émotionnelle.” Ainsi les gestes d’un partenaire d’interaction sont-ils ressentis (*felt*) comme favorables ou menaçants par une sorte de “proto-évaluation affective des conséquences possibles” de ses dispositions et attitudes. Dans cette perspective, les émotions sont des “gestes relationnels, dont la signification est constituée par la pertinence affective, pour ses propres actions et réactions, du comportement de l’autre” (*ibid.*: 191). Par ailleurs, Mead explique comment la communication verbale se développe à partir de formes d’accordage réciproque de nature affective-émotionnelle (*ibid.*: 196) – c’est Daniel Stern qui parle d’“accordage affectif” –, ou encore comment l’auteur du geste vocal est lui-même affecté par ce qu’il émet comme l’est son interlocuteur (et cela parce qu’il s’entend et se ressent lui-même comme il est entendu et ressenti par les autres). La “psychologie sociale” de Mead permet ainsi de faire ressortir la dimension affective de la réflexivité.

- 36 Toutefois R. Dreon considère que Mead n’a pas tiré de son point de vue toutes les conséquences qu’il aurait pu en tirer. Il n’a notamment pas envisagé les effets de l’émergence du langage et de la communication verbale utilisant des symboles signifiants sur les formes émotionnelles antérieures de la communication par gestes:

On pourrait soutenir que chez les humains les émotions deviennent des *feelings* et une conscience de soi affective, ou qu’à travers le développement d’échanges émotionnels dans une direction linguistique, ils subissent une reconfiguration ou une réorganisation telle que cela génère une nouvelle fonction par rapport aux précédentes: en plus de représenter un médium crucial pour coordonner le comportement social et s’orienter dans l’environnement, la sensibilité est devenue (sur le plan phylogénétique) et devient (sur le plan ontogénétique) un outil pour contrôler sa propre position et son rôle dans le monde partagé, et pour détecter l’impact sur soi des événements qui se produisent dans l’environnement. (*Ibid.*: 200-1)

- 37 R. Dreon se réfère aussi, en particulier sur l’analyse des habitudes et sur le rôle du langage dans le façonnement de la raison humaine, à un auteur peu connu, Frank Lorimer, auteur, en 1929, d’un livre intitulé: *The Growth of Reason: A Study of the Role of Verbal Activity in the Growth of the Structure of the Human Mind* (Lorimer a eu Dewey comme directeur de thèse). Lorimer a tenté d’expliquer comment “la signification, le symbolisme et la syntaxe émergent à partir d’une forme d’abord sociale-organique de communication linguistique” (*ibid.* : 180).
- 38 Un autre intérêt de *Human Landscapes* est, comme je l’ai déjà mentionné, que son auteur confronte son anthropologie pragmatiste à l’énactivisme, un courant d’inspiration phénoménologique, et à la théorie 4E de la cognition.¹⁰ L’énactivisme (lancé par le neurobiologiste chilien Francisco Varela, qui, avec son collègue Humberto Maturana, a développé une théorie de l’*autopoïèse*) met l’accent sur “l’autonomie des systèmes vivants, considérés comme des réseaux, opérationnellement clos, de processus qui se conditionnent et s’activent mutuellement” (*ibid.*: 55). Cette perspective “autonomiste” est cependant problématique du point de vue du pragmatisme, qui souligne plutôt l’interdépendance (de nature transactionnelle) entre l’organisme vivant et son environnement, ainsi que l’exposition du premier aux incertitudes du second, d’où résulte sa précarité.
- 39 L’énactivisme se veut une théorie hétérodoxe de la cognition ou du *sense-making*; il tend de ce fait à faire de la cognition le principal mode d’expérience, ce que ne fait pas le

pragmatisme. Pour tenir compte de la précarité du vivant, il faut, selon R. Dreon, relativiser la cognition au profit de la sensibilité et de l'affectivité: "en conséquence, l'incertitude sera radicalement réinterprétée en termes affectifs, plutôt qu'en termes principalement épistémologiques. [...] Chaque organisme doit toujours faire tout son possible pour se maintenir et s'épanouir parce que l'environnement ne garantit pas qu'il perdurera" (*ibid.*: 56). Sur cette réinterprétation, R. Dreon partage le point de vue de sa collègue Giovanna Colombetti, qui, dans le courant énéactiviste, soutient que l'esprit est imprégné d'une "affectivité première" (cf. Colombetti 2018).

- 40 L'énéactivisme tend aussi à sous-estimer la dimension passive de l'expérience, c'est-à-dire ce qui est subi (avec sa tonalité affective d'accablement, de sidération, d'affliction ou de désolation) par l'organisme dans un environnement qu'il ne maîtrise pas. Enfin, s'il souligne, dans une filiation phénoménologique, l'imbrication de la perception et du mouvement, l'énéactivisme n'intègre pas l'affectivité dans la perception (sauf chez G. Colombetti). Or "perception, affect et action, ou, mieux, la sensibilité affective incarnée et le mouvement participent d'une expérience intégrée dont on peut ultérieurement isoler les différentes phases et les différents aspects à des fins spécifiques" (Dreon 2022: 63).
- 41 Deux traits majeurs caractérisent à mes yeux l'anthropologie philosophique que R. Dreon élabore à partir du pragmatisme: une analyse inédite de la sensibilité humaine (un terme peu utilisé par les pragmatistes); un développement de l'argument de Joseph Margolis au sujet de la contribution du langage au façonnement de l'expérience humaine – dans les termes de R. Dreon, l'expérience humaine est informée par le langage (*enlanguaged*), qui façonne la sensibilité et est façonné par elle.
- 42 Le livre comporte aussi des développements importants sur les émotions et sur les habitudes, notamment une mise en perspective remarquable de la théorie de l'*habitus* de Pierre Bourdieu et de la conception pragmatiste de l'habitude. Je ne discuterai pas de ce que l'auteur écrit sur les émotions – l'originalité de son analyse tient à ce qu'elle aborde les émotions dans le cadre d'une problématique de la sensibilité (une autre originalité est sa prise en considération de la contribution de Mead et non pas seulement celles de James et Dewey). Par contre, je m'arrêterai sur sa discussion de la théorie de l'*habitus* de Bourdieu.

4. Le primat de la sensibilité

- 43 Comme le constate R. Dreon, le terme *sensibility* n'est pas d'usage chez les pragmatistes. Dans *Experience and Nature*, Dewey utilise plutôt le terme *sensitivity*, en lui donnant un sens un peu différent de celui que R. Dreon donne à *sensibility*. Pour cette dernière la *sensibility* est la capacité de l'être vivant de distinguer affectivement entre ce qui lui est favorable et ce qui lui est défavorable non seulement pour se maintenir en vie, mais aussi pour assurer le plein développement de son individualité. Elle reconnaît cependant que, s'agissant de l'humain, cette opposition binaire entre le favorable et le défavorable n'est pas satisfaisante: "la valence émotionnelle ou affective chez les humains est trop complexe pour être dichotomisée en acceptation et refus, approche et retrait, ou éloge et reproche" (*ibid.*: 69).
- 44 La *sensitivity* de Dewey n'a pas d'emblée de dimension affective. Elle est la capacité qu'a un être vivant de différencier ce qui est propice au maintien de la vie de ce qui lui est

défavorable, c'est-à-dire non seulement de sélectionner, mais de sélectionner en fonction de certains résultats plutôt que d'autres: "la discrimination est l'essence de la *sensitivity*" (Dewey 2012a: 238). La *sensitivity* est holistique: la sélectivité de l'organisme vivant dans ses interactions avec l'environnement vise non seulement le maintien de soi, mais aussi le maintien du tout dont il fait partie. Ce n'est que chez les animaux possédant la locomotion et des télérecepteurs que cette sélectivité téléologique et holistique revêt une dimension affective: chez eux, la *sensitivity*, comme capacité, est actualisée comme *feeling*, même si ce dernier est informe, "dépourvu d'articulation précise" – il ne consiste "qu'en quelque chose de vague, de grossier, un malaise, un vague sentiment de confort, de force ou d'épuisement" (*ibid.*). Ce *feeling*, qui est une sensibilité affective (que Dewey appelle *susceptibility*) à ce qui est favorable et défavorable dans l'environnement, devient chez ces animaux actifs et complexes "une prémonition, l'occasion de conséquences possibles à l'intérieur de la vie" (*ibid.*: 239). Du fait de la multiplication, chez eux, grâce notamment à la différenciation de leurs organes sensoriels et au développement de leurs organes moteurs, de "réactions discriminantes aux différentes énergies de l'environnement," ce qu'ils ressentent (leurs *feelings*) "varie de plus en plus en qualité et en intensité" (*ibid.*: 258-9). Ce qui est donc premier (et général) c'est la *sensitivity*, tandis que la sensibilité affective (*susceptibility*) est la modalité de la *sensitivity* chez les animaux actifs et complexes.

45 On notera que Dewey se limite à une caractérisation biologique de la *sensitivity*. Lorsqu'il considère la forme qu'elle revêt chez les animaux complexes, il la rapporte essentiellement aux innovations affectant leur appareil sensori-moteur. Dans le passage évoqué d'*Experience and Nature* il n'aborde pas la question de sa réorganisation chez les humains par le langage et la culture. Ce qu'il fera par ailleurs. Aux yeux de R. Dreon, cette question est incontournable: "la sensibilité humaine ne peut pas être considérée comme étant exclusivement liée à des besoins organiques fondamentaux. [...] Nos propensions biologiques à ressentir et à sélectionner sont toujours déjà modifiées et reconfigurées par nos pratiques culturelles" et notamment par nos pratiques linguistiques (Dreon 2022: 63). La manière dont nous éprouvons les choses de l'environnement, réagissons aux événements et traitons les situations, est façonnée par notre environnement de pratiques linguistiques et culturelles.

46 R. Dreon reprend le point de vue biologique-culturel de Dewey, mais elle met surtout l'accent sur l'étayage affectif chez les humains de la capacité de discrimination et de sélection. C'est ce qui lui fait sans doute considérer qu'il est préférable de parler de *sensibility* plutôt que de *sensitivity*. Le premier terme connote en effet davantage le caractère qualitatif et affectif de l'engagement vis-à-vis du monde. La sensibilité est "une expérience corporelle affective" (*ibid.*: 36):

Les organismes humains ressentent (*feel*) d'abord leur contexte naturel et social comme agréable ou menaçant, comme amical, accueillant, ennuyeux ou troublant, comme des lieux propices où séjourner ou comme des situations difficiles à éviter. Par conséquent, une conception pleinement incarnée et incorporée de la sensibilité devrait définir celle-ci comme la capacité affective de différencier les conditions de la vie qui sont favorables et celles qui sont défavorables. On pourrait même caractériser cette capacité comme "esthétique," au sens de James et de Dewey, c'est-à-dire comme principalement ancrée dans ce qui est ressenti organiquement (*organic feelings*) plutôt que dans une réflexion ou une cognition. (*Ibid.*: 35)

47 Il n'y a, notamment, pas lieu de séparer l'expérience sensorielle de l'expérience affective. Comme le rappelle Dewey, les qualités affectives ne sont pas séparées des

qualités saisies par les organes des sens, et cela parce qu'elles font partie du tout qualitatif indifférencié éprouvé par le corps. Bref la sensorialité est toujours empreinte d'affectivité (cf. Dewey 2012b: 192-3).

48 Dans un esprit pragmatiste, R. Dreon entend proposer une alternative biologique à l'approche "épistémologique" classique de la sensibilité, c'est-à-dire à l'idée que celle-ci est "essentiellement destinée à assurer la connaissance de la réalité": "la sensibilité n'est pas le fondement de la connaissance, considérée comme la représentation mentale d'une réalité indépendante" (Dreon 2022: 50). L'alternative biologique consiste à aborder la sensibilité organique dans une problématique du vivant et de sa dépendance par rapport à son environnement. Cette dépendance se décline sous deux aspects: un aspect négatif de passivité (au sens de subir), d'exposition et de vulnérabilité (on peut être affligé, accablé, ou accaparé par ce qui arrive); et un aspect positif ("proactif") de réponse aux situations et d'exploitation d'opportunités. Elle se décline aussi dans le caractère rythmique de l'expérience, qui comporte des phases d'agir et de subir dans les interactions entre organisme et environnement, ou encore des phases d'ajustement et de désajustement. Dans cette perspective la sensibilité "implique une forme de proto-évaluation de ce qui se passe autour de l'organisme – une évaluation qui n'est pas d'ordre discursif, [...] mais d'ordre essentiellement affectif-corporel" (*ibid.*: 52). Ce qui est favorable est agréable et attrayant; ce qui est défavorable est désagréable et répugnant. R. Dreon aurait pu reprendre à ce sujet la distinction proposée par Dewey, dans sa théorie de la valuation, entre les "*de facto* valuations," qui sont d'ordre "affectif-idéo-moteur," et les évaluations proprement dites, qui sont de l'ordre du jugement. Les "*de facto* valuations" saisissent directement ce qui importe à l'être vivant, ce à quoi il tient, et ce dont il lui faut se garder ou s'éloigner (cf. Dewey 1938/2011).

49 R. Dreon distingue enfin la sensibilité humaine de la sensibilité animale. La première est "reconfigurée à la fois par l'environnement hautement social spécifique aux humains et par la niche socio-culturelle dans laquelle ils vivent" (*ibid.*: 35). Leur expérience principale de l'environnement étant socio-culturelle, leur capacité de discrimination est beaucoup plus élaborée que celle des animaux. Ils peuvent notamment se focaliser sur ce qu'ils ressentent:

En raison de l'environnement culturel dont ils ont hérité, les humains sont capables d'éprouver une situation en fonction d'une variété significative d'affects et d'émotions nuancés, qui va au-delà de l'opposition binaire, que l'on trouve chez les animaux, entre ce qui est favorable et défavorable à la vie. Grâce aux ressources symboliques et linguistiques complexes impliquées dans leurs échanges avec les autres, les êtres humains deviennent capables de se sentir eux-mêmes et de se focaliser sur ce qu'ils ressentent ainsi que sur leur sens d'eux-mêmes comme étant distincts de ce que leurs interlocuteurs éprouvent. (*Ibid.*)

50 Une autre raison pour laquelle, selon R. Dreon, la sensibilité humaine diffère de celle des animaux, est que, du fait de leur forme de vie, les humains sont plus exposés à leur environnement et celui-ci est plus incertain; leur sensation de précarité et de vulnérabilité est plus grande: "à la naissance les humains sont plus immatures et plus vulnérables que les autres mammifères, leurs modes de comportement sont largement indéterminés et plastiques, et ils sont capables d'ajuster leur vie aux conditions matérielles les plus variées" (*ibid.*: 54). Une autre raison tient à la contingence de leur forme de vie: leur environnement naturel et social est contingent parce qu'il est continuellement modifié par ce qu'ils entreprennent et subissent en lui.

5. Le caractère hybride du langage naturel

- 51 R. Dreon insiste tout particulièrement sur la nécessité de ne pas séparer sensibilité et langage; il y a, selon elle, une configuration ou un façonnement réciproque de l'un et de l'autre. La sensibilité n'est donc pas le fondement du développement du langage, et le langage n'est pas "la condition quasi *a priori* de la sensibilité humaine" (*ibid.*: 36). Le chapitre 5 du livre est consacré à l'analyse de l'expérience humaine comme expérience informée par le langage (*enlanguaged experience*), et le chapitre 6 à l'exploration de la continuité entre sensibilité et langage. L'idée de continuité entre sensibilité et langage repose sur deux suppositions:

D'une part, une conception de l'affectivité et des émotions comme une fonction de la relation entre l'organisme et l'environnement, plutôt que comme une dimension privée [...]; d'autre part, une conception du langage comme une forme de comportement social largement étayé sur des ressources affectives et qualitatives, plutôt que sur un médium d'abord cognitif servant à référer des objets "là-dehors." (*Ibid.*: 186)

- 52 C'est à J. Margolis que R. Dreon emprunte l'expression "*enlanguaged experience*," qu'elle préfère à celle de "*linguistic experience*," qui laisse supposer que les êtres humains rencontrent le langage comme quelque chose d'isolé, ce qui n'est pas le cas. Nous n'expérimentons pas le langage comme un domaine séparé ou indépendant, et encore moins comme un outil ne servant qu'à faire des références et des inférences:

Le langage fait partie de notre conduite: il est profondément enchevêtré dans les autres composantes communicatives de notre comportement, que l'on pourrait grossièrement caractériser comme multimodales et sont en continuité avec des aspects plus strictement linguistiques [...] Le langage fait partie du tissu épais tant de notre expérience que du monde humain. (*Ibid.*: 145)

- 53 Notre perception elle-même est informée par le langage. Se demander comment l'on passe d'une expérience purement perceptive à une pratique linguistique est purement artificiel: il n'y a pas d'expérience perceptive, ou, plus largement sensorimotrice, antérieure au langage, et cela parce que "nous vivons dans un monde linguistiquement partagé qui affecte inévitablement la façon dont notre forme d'être vivant interagit avec son environnement" (*ibid.*: 148). D'un point de vue pragmatiste, le langage est un "mode de comportement" parmi d'autres, son premier usage étant la communication.

- 54 R. Dreon ne veut pas pour autant faire du langage une condition *a priori*, ou "une condition transcendantale (ou quasi-transcendantale) de possibilité de l'expérience" (*ibid.*: 146), ce qui serait contraire à un point de vue pragmatiste, d'inspiration darwinienne:

Le langage est le produit complètement fortuit et contingent d'une histoire naturelle, même s'il provoque des changements irréversibles et a un effet perturbateur sur l'organisation antérieure des transactions entre des formes de vie non humaines et leur environnement. Bien que le discours humain ait émergé à partir de ressources physiologiques et de modes de comportement intelligent préexistants, je pense que l'on devrait considérer le langage comme un phénomène émergent, provoquant une certaine discontinuité dans le *continuum* des formes de vie. (*Ibid.*: 146)

- 55 C'est sans doute ce refus du transcendantalisme et ce continuisme-émergentisme naturaliste qui séparent l'anthropologie philosophique pragmatiste de celle de Taylor et Dreyfus, qui met pareillement l'accent sur le façonnement de l'expérience humaine

par le langage. Leur anthropologie reste finalement dualiste. Elle ne prend pas ses distances avec l'explication phénoménologique de l'ajout du langage et de la réflexivité à une couche d'expérience corporelle sensible primordiale, ou avec l'explication herméneutique du primat du langage: "au lieu de suggérer l'existence d'un ordre fondationnel ou hiérarchique entre sensibilité et langage, l'un et l'autre devraient être compris comme des aspects qui s'enchevêtrent structurellement, qui se façonnent mutuellement, à l'intérieur des formes de vie typiquement humaines" (*ibid.*: 201).

6. Une théorie écologique de l'habitude

- 56 Dans l'anthropologie pragmatiste, la notion d'habitude occupe une place centrale. Aussi bien Peirce et James que Dewey et Mead ont contribué à en renouveler la théorie: "selon la tradition pragmatiste, les habitudes étaient les comportements humains: elles soutiennent et orientent la sensibilité humaine, opèrent dans la cognition, constituent le squelette de l'action et représentent l'arrière-plan préreflexif de la prise de décision implicite et explicite" (*ibid.*: 93). La volonté est elle-même constituée par des habitudes, en ce sens qu'elle repose sur les capacités réelles d'agir que sont les habitudes. Les habitudes humaines, formées dans un certain milieu socio-culturel constitué d'habitudes, de coutumes et de pratiques partagées, canalisent conjointement des énergies organiques et des ressources environnementales. Bien qu'elles soient formées à un niveau pré-personnel, les habitudes ne sont pas irréversibles.
- 57 Cependant il y a des nuances entre les conceptions de l'habitude des différents fondateurs du pragmatisme. On connaît la définition que donne Peirce de la croyance: établir une croyance c'est se donner une habitude d'action. Plus largement, Peirce pensait qu'il y avait une "loi de l'habitude," dans laquelle il incluait l'habitude de changer d'habitudes (en prendre de nouvelles et en laisser tomber d'autres). Pour Peirce, bien qu'elle soit un "état qui dure," l'habitude n'est pas quelque chose de figé: elle peut évoluer, être développée ou au contraire s'amenuiser. C'est l'habitude de changer d'habitudes ou la "tendance à prendre des habitudes" qui fait que les habitudes ne sont pas conservatrices par principe. Elles sont plus des pouvoirs que des contraintes ou des limitations. Sans la possibilité de former de nouvelles habitudes, il n'y aurait pas de vie intellectuelle possible.
- 58 C'est cette plasticité des habitudes qui a retenu l'attention de James et il lui a donné un fondement organique: "les phénomènes d'habitude sont dus, chez les êtres vivants, à la plasticité des matériaux organiques dont leur corps est composé" (James 1909: 186), et notamment à celle de leur système nerveux. Comme le rappelle R. Dreon:
- James considère le système nerveux humain non pas comme une entité fixe, complètement doté de toutes ses propriétés, mais comme un système qui se configure lui-même dynamiquement en relation avec ce qui se passe autour de lui [...]. James concevait notre cerveau comme une fonction de l'environnement et comme ayant une histoire. La structure du cerveau et la dynamique cérébrale n'étaient pas envisagées comme étant les causes physiques préexistantes gouvernant nos comportements signifiants, mais plutôt comme ouvertes à la rétroaction des usages et des normes culturels. (*ibid.*: 99)
- 59 Quant à Dewey, son propos est plus anthropologique. Dans *Human Nature and Conduct*, il expliquait qu'il donnait au terme "*habit*" un sens différent de son sens ordinaire:
- Nous avons besoin d'un mot pour désigner ce type d'activité humaine qui est influencée par une activité antérieure et, en ce sens, acquise; qui contient en elle-

même un certain ordonnancement, ou organisation d'éléments subordonnés de l'action; qui est projective, qualitativement dynamique et prête à se manifester ouvertement; et qui est opératoire sous une forme atténuée même si elle n'est pas l'activité manifestement dominante. (Dewey MW.14: 60-1)

- 60 Il avait proposé dès les premières pages de l'ouvrage la définition suivante de l'habitude:

Les habitudes sont des manières d'utiliser et d'incorporer l'environnement, dans lesquelles celui-ci a tout autant son mot à dire que [l'organisme]. [...] Les habitudes sont des arts de faire (*arts*). Elles comportent une habileté des organes sensoriels et moteurs, une adresse ou un art, et des matériaux objectifs. Elles assimilent des énergies objectives et mènent à une maîtrise de l'environnement. Elles requièrent ordre, discipline et technique manifeste. (*Ibid.*: 15)

- 61 Comme le souligne R. Dreon, Dewey proposait un cadre écologique à la compréhension de l'habitude: "il est clair que pour Dewey les habitudes ne sont pas d'abord la propriété d'un agent [...] mais des fonctions de l'interdépendance mutuelle et des transactions constitutives qui ont lieu entre les organismes et leur environnement" (Dreon 2022: 102). Cet environnement est à la fois naturel et "naturellement social." Ce qui permet de qualifier la conception des habitudes de Dewey (tout comme celle de Mead d'ailleurs) de "biosociale." Les habitudes dépendent de conditions sociales; dans sa conduite l'individu intègre les habitudes des autres, et celles qui sont constitutives du milieu social et culturel dans lequel il vit. Il acquiert ses habitudes en adoptant, en réinventant ou en rejetant un ensemble d'habitudes qui le précèdent:

Le rôle de l'individu dans l'acquisition d'habitudes ne se situe pas au début du processus, mais au milieu, là où les individus interviennent pour réorganiser des matériaux préexistants et des expériences antérieures, provenant à la fois de l'environnement social, de contraintes naturelles et culturelles, et de l'individu lui-même, de ses besoins organiques et de ses intérêts. (*Ibid.*: 112)

- 62 La deuxième partie de *Human Nature and Conduct* est consacrée aux impulsions et aux instincts. Dewey rappelle que les habitudes sont des excroissances "d'activités non apprises qui font partie de l'équipement de l'homme à la naissance," et que leur acquisition est conditionnée par la disposition d'instincts innés, "premiers, naturels et inévitables" (Dewey MW.14: 89). Elles ne sont pas pour autant secondes. Dans la conduite "c'est l'acquis qui est premier," tandis que les instincts sont seconds: "bien qu'elles soient premières dans le temps, les impulsions ne sont en fait jamais initiales; elles sont secondaires et dépendantes" (*ibid.*). Comment expliquer ce paradoxe?
- 63 Pour l'élucider, Dewey se réfère au fait qu'un enfant à la naissance ne peut survivre que pour autant qu'il est pris en charge par des adultes dotés d'habitudes. Son activité instinctive ne peut pas continuer sans l'interprétation, l'assistance et le savoir-faire de ces adultes: "[les bébés] doivent aux adultes l'opportunité d'exprimer leurs activités innées d'une façon qui a du sens" (*ibid.*: 90). En d'autres termes, l'activité purement instinctive d'un bébé est mort-née si elle n'est pas convertie en quelque chose qui a un sens dans un "milieu social mature" constitué d'habitudes de comportement et de manières de faire instituées. Les enfants acquièrent des habitudes "sous l'influence de l'association avec d'autres qui ont déjà des habitudes" et qui les manifestent dans la manière dont ils convertissent un comportement instinctif en un comportement qui a un sens. Est donc décisive la manière dont les autres répondent dans leurs propres comportements.

- 64 Par ailleurs, comme l'explique R. Dreon, l'expression d'une impulsion ou d'un instinct vital n'est jamais un phénomène séparé: elle a toujours lieu dans une situation dont elle dépend. C'est à des situations d'ensemble, et pas à des stimuli ponctuels, que l'individu réagit instinctivement, et sa réaction instinctive est moins une réaction particulière qu'une tendance générale à agir d'une certaine façon, donc une habitude. Comme le rappelle S. Madelrieux, c'est un point de vue holiste que Dewey applique à l'analyse de l'instinct:

Plus que James, et en accord avec sa propre analyse plus holiste du réflexe, Dewey insiste sur la *généralité* des instincts (notamment humains), en complément de leur modifiabilité et de leur pluralité. Du point de vue du corps, l'action instinctive n'est pas réductible à certains circuits nerveux spécifiques (bien que ces circuits en constituent la base nerveuse); c'est un comportement qui engage la totalité du corps: l'instinct de chasse intègre toutes les réactions réflexes aux multiples stimuli pertinents (odeur, vue, etc.) dans un seul et même comportement d'ensemble. Du point de vue de l'objet, ce n'est donc pas à des stimuli ponctuels que l'individu réagit impulsivement, mais à des situations d'ensemble, qui forment le corrélat du comportement, et qui intègre en un seul tout l'ensemble de ces stimuli pertinents (dans une situation de chasse, l'ensemble de ce qui est perçu reçoit la coloration de la prise recherchée). Du point de vue de l'impulsion elle-même, il ne s'agit donc pas d'une réaction particulière, déclenchée automatiquement par un stimulus particulier, mais d'une attitude générale qu'il vaut mieux traduire en terme de capacité et de tendance générale à agir plutôt que d'occurrences particulières spécifiques. (Madelrieux 2024: 34)

- 65 L'analyse pragmatiste des habitudes est bien antérieure à la théorie de l'*habitus* de Bourdieu, qui est plutôt d'inspiration aristotélicienne et phénoménologique. Les points de convergence sont nombreux, mais aussi les points de divergence. Pour ce qui est de ces derniers, R. Dreon relève que Bourdieu parle de l'*habitus* au singulier, qu'il conçoit comme "un dispositif comportemental quasi *a priori*, englobant toute la conduite de l'individu et le rendant conforme à un style généralement cohérent; il s'agit d'un principe unique, résistant au changement" (Dreon 2022: 128). Il reste quelque chose de kantien chez Bourdieu, en ce qu'il veut trouver un principe gouvernant tacitement "le tohu-bohu fertile de l'expérience" (*ibid.*: 132).

- 66 Bourdieu tend en effet à voir la conduite comme quelque chose qui est généré par une matrice unique cachée, garantissant l'uniformité et la cohérence d'une action à l'autre et d'un champ d'action à l'autre. Chez Dewey, au contraire, les habitudes ne sont pas des schèmes d'action prédéfinis. Par ailleurs, Dewey met l'accent sur leur pluralité, à la fois dans le milieu social et chez l'individu:

Dewey parle toujours d'habitudes au pluriel et considère le comportement d'un individu comme étant caractérisé par plusieurs habitudes qui sont non seulement différentes mais souvent aussi divergentes et en conflit. Il considère même la coprésence chez une personne d'habitudes contrastées comme un événement qui peut être fécond, car il constitue une occasion de crise, l'incitant à réfléchir sur ses habitudes, considérées jusque-là comme évidentes et non problématiques. Un tel événement constitue une opportunité pour rejeter, réviser ou même renforcer et réaffirmer ses habitudes. (*ibid.*: 129)

- 67 L'*habitus* bourdieusien est durable et résiste au changement: "la conservation et l'imposition du même semblent être la marque de l'*habitus*" (*ibid.*: 130). Il est aussi ordonné au maintien de relations de pouvoir et d'inégalités dans la vie sociale. Contrairement à Bourdieu, Dewey a insisté fortement "sur les processus dynamiques impliqués dans l'acquisition, la révision, la modification, le refus ou la nouvelle

acceptation d'habitudes, et le remplacement des habitudes routinières par des habitudes plus intelligentes (ou l'inverse)" (*ibid.*: 130). En d'autres termes les habitudes ne sont pas irréversibles, même si elles sont imposées par le contexte social. Bien que les habitudes soient formées de manière non consciente et non réfléchie, un individu peut en acquérir de nouvelles par un contrôle réfléchi de son comportement, ou bien lorsqu'il est exposé, dans son milieu de vie, à un changement de ses conditions d'existence, provoquant une crise, ou à une gamme différenciée d'habitudes et de coutumes (dans un environnement multiculturel, par exemple). Enfin aux yeux de Dewey, si les habitudes ont à voir avec le pouvoir, il s'agit plutôt "de la capacité effective de faire quelque chose, d'organiser et de gérer des ressources, même si très souvent elles entrent en crise et demandent à être révisées" (*ibid.*: 135).

- 68 Une autre grande différence entre les deux approches est une description plus précise, chez Dewey, du caractère biologique-organique des habitudes. Dans le sillage de Peirce et de James, Dewey relie les habitudes à des "fonctions organiques ou biologiques fondamentales, au lieu de se contenter de les considérer comme un lien ultime 'mystérieux'" (Dewey 1908/1993: 69, n. 3). Bref, l'approche de Bourdieu n'est ni naturaliste, ni écologique.

7. Pour conclure: le pouvoir limité de la philosophie

- 69 Je reviens, pour terminer, à l'une de mes questions de départ: en quoi une anthropologie philosophique peut-elle contribuer à réellement corriger les biais, erreurs et confusions de notre culture? Selon Wittgenstein, une conception non distordue de la nature humaine, élaborée par les philosophes, ne serait que d'un faible secours. On l'a vu, le diagnostic de Dewey n'était guère plus optimiste. Des reconstructions philosophiques, aussi fondées et élaborées soient-elles, ne nous permettront pas de nous libérer concrètement des images qui nous tiennent captifs. Que faut-il d'autre? "Un changement du mode de pensée et de vie" des gens, répond Wittgenstein, ce qui excède largement les pouvoirs de la philosophie (cf. Wittgenstein 1983, 2^e partie: 23). Faire contracter aux gens de nouvelles habitudes d'esprit et de caractère, et de nouvelles attitudes, à travers l'éducation, celle de la sensibilité et des dispositions affectives notamment, et les implanter dans les mœurs et les institutions, répond Dewey, qui considérerait que les biais et erreurs d'une culture ne tombent pas du ciel – ils résultent de conditions économiques, sociales et politiques, déterminées.
- 70 Une des difficultés de cette nécessaire reconstruction de la culture présente est que celle-ci ne se limite pas à des *Weltanschauungen*, à des imaginaires sociaux ou à des idéaux éthiques et politiques. Elle a aussi une composante matérielle, dont font partie des contenus intellectuels, et celle-ci est liée à des disciplines diverses et variées. C'est donc une totalité complexe qu'il s'agit de transformer. On sait que Dewey faisait volontiers sienne la définition de Bronislaw Malinowski, qui mettait l'accent sur "l'équipement matériel de la culture" (cf. Dewey 1925/2012a: 434-5).
- 71 Si l'on suit Dewey, la critique des confusions et distorsions présentes dans notre culture, et la reconstruction d'une conception moins distordue de la "nature humaine," doivent prendre appui non pas sur une théorie abstraite, souvent exposée à une forme ou l'autre de l'"erreur scolastique" (Bourdieu), mais sur le repérage des tendances contradictoires présentes dans l'état présent de cette culture. Aussi insatisfaisant soit-il, celui-ci comporte vraisemblablement des éléments positifs, qu'il faut débarrasser

“des scories qui leur sont imposées par des habitudes” héritées des périodes anciennes. C’est donc à l’intérieur de la culture présente, et notamment dans les possibilités qu’elle offre à la démocratie comme mode de vie, et au développement personnel de chaque membre de la société, qu’il faut découvrir les valeurs qui méritent d’être promues et qui peuvent servir d’appui à la critique de ses erreurs et confusions.

- 72 La philosophie peut contribuer à cette tâche, mais en association avec d’autres forces. On ne peut pas confier à la seule enquête philosophique la tâche de faire advenir une culture moins distordue. Ce que Dewey écrivait en 1948, dans sa nouvelle introduction à *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, au sujet de l’avènement du “moderne,” vaut aussi pour la correction des erreurs de notre culture:

Le moderne, ce qui est authentiquement moderne, n’est pas encore né et le faire advenir n’est pas de la responsabilité de la philosophie: ce n’est pas son affaire. Ce travail ne peut être accompli que par la coopération et l’action résolues et patientes des hommes et des femmes venant de toutes les vocations utiles, et ce sur une période indéfinie. [...] Le travail de reconstruction ne consiste pas à critiquer ou à se livrer à des controverses. Il s’agit strictement d’un travail intellectuel exigeant d’une part la culture historique la plus large possible permettant d’appréhender les liens entre les systèmes du passé et les conditions culturelles qui ont façonné leurs problématiques, et d’autre part une culture scientifique qui aille au-delà de la simple vulgarisation. (Dewey 1920/2014: 52)

BIBLIOGRAPHIE

- BOUVERESSE Jacques, (1982), “L’animal cérémoniel: Wittgenstein et l’anthropologie,” in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarques sur le rameau d’or de Frazer*, Lausanne, L’Age d’Homme, 39-124.
- COLOMBETTI Giovanna, (2018), “Enacting Affectivity,” in Albert Newen, Leon De Bruin & Shaun Gallagher (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of 4E Cognition*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 571-88.
- COOK Gary, (1994), “George Herbert Mead: An Unpublished Review of John Dewey’s *Human Nature and Conduct*,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 30(4), October, 374-9. Online: https://www.academia.edu/56795642/George_Herbert_Mead_An_unpublished_review_of_John_DeweysHuman_Nature_and_Conduct.
- DESCARTES René, (1991), “Letter to Gibieuf of 19 January 1642,” in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, vol. 3, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- DEWEY John, (1922), *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology*, in *The Middle Works, 1899-1924*, vol. 14, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale, Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 1-227. [“Foreword to the 1930 Modern Library Edition,” MW.14, 228-30.]
- DEWEY John, (1931), “George Herbert Mead as I Knew Him,” in *The Later Works, 1925-1953*, vol. 5, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale, Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 22-8.
- DEWEY John, (1938), “Does Human Nature Change,” in *The Later Works, 1925-1953*, vol. 13, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale, Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 286-93.

- DEWEY John, (1939), *Freedom and Culture*, in *The Later Works, 1925-1953*, vol. 13, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale, Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 63-188.
- DEWEY John, (1993 [1938]), *Logique. Théorie de l'enquête*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France.
- DEWEY John, (2010 [1927]), *Le Public et ses problèmes*, Paris, Gallimard.
- DEWEY John, (2011 [1938]), *La Formation des valeurs*, Paris, Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond.
- DEWEY John, (2012a [1925]), *Expérience et nature*, Paris, Gallimard.
- DEWEY John, (2012b), *Unmodern Philosophy and Modern Philosophy*, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press.
- DEWEY John, (2014 [1920]), *Reconstruction en philosophie*, Paris, Gallimard.
- DEWEY John & James Hayden TUFTS, (2021 [1932]), *Éthique*, Paris, Gallimard .
- DREYFUS Hubert & Charles TAYLOR, (2015), *Retrieving Realism*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.
- DREON Roberta, (2022), *Human Landscapes: Contributions to a Pragmatist Anthropology*, Albany, State University of New York Press.
- JACKSON Michael D. (ed.), (1996), *Things As They Are: New Directions in Phenomenological Anthropology*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press.
- JAMES William, (1909), *Précis de psychologie*, Paris, Marcel Rivière.
- LORIMER Frank, (1929), *The Growth of Reason: A Study of the Role of Verbal Activity in the Growth of the Structure of the Human Mind*, London-New York, Routledge.
- MADÉLRIEUX Stéphane, (2023), *La Philosophie comme attitude*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France.
- MADÉLRIEUX Stéphane, (2024), "Naturalisme et nature humaine: la théorie pragmatiste des instincts," *Archives de philosophie*, 87(2), 25-42.
- MARGOLIS Joseph, (2016), *Toward a Metaphysic of Culture*, London-New York, Routledge.
- MEAD George Herbert, (2006), *L'Esprit, le soi et la société*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France.
- PIHLSTRÖM Sami, (1998), *Pragmatism and Philosophical Anthropology: Understanding our Human Life in a Human World*, New York, Peter Lang.
- QUÉRÉ Louis, (2023), "Herméneutique, pragmatisme et 'épistémocentrisme scolastique'," *Pragmata. Revue d'études pragmatistes*, 6, 66-125. Online: <https://revuepragmata.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/pragmata-2023-n6-4-louis-quere.pdf>.
- TAYLOR Charles, (1998a), "Le fondamental dans l'histoire," in Guy Laforest & Philippe de Lara (eds), *Charles Taylor et l'interprétation de l'identité moderne*, Paris, Cerf, 35-49.
- TAYLOR Charles, (1998b), "De l'anthropologie philosophique à la politique de la reconnaissance. Entretien avec Philippe de Lara," in Guy Laforest & Philippe de Lara (eds), *Charles Taylor et l'interprétation de l'identité moderne*, Paris, Cerf, 351-64.
- TAYLOR Charles, (2004), *Modern Social Imaginaries*, Durham, Duke University Press.
- TAYLOR Charles, (2019), *L'Animal langage*, Montréal, Boréal.
- WITTGENSTEIN Ludwig, (1983), *Remarques sur les fondements des mathématiques*, Paris, Gallimard.

NOTES

1. J'emprunte à Charles Taylor cette notion d'"imaginaire social" (voir Taylor 2004).
2. Je reprends là une expression de Pierre Bourdieu.
3. L'expression "naturalisme culturel" "est une formule utilisée pour souligner que notre développement culturel prononcé en tant qu'êtres humains a ses racines dans notre constitution organique, qui ne peut pas être réduite à de simples structures physiques et à de simples processus chimiques. En d'autres termes, le développement social et culturel semble être requis par les conditions mêmes, de nature physiologique et environnementale, qui caractérisent les humains" (Dreon 2022: 21).
4. L'"attitude scientifique" est un *ethos*. Elle consiste à employer certaines méthodes (doute, questionnement, investigation, observation, réflexion, expérimentation, discussion, argumentation), et à adopter certaines lignes de conduite, plutôt que d'autres, pour former ses jugements: douter à bon escient; maintenir la croyance en suspens jusqu'à l'obtention d'une preuve suffisante; aller dans la direction pointée par les preuves au lieu de faire prévaloir une conclusion préférée personnellement; utiliser les idées comme des hypothèses à tester plutôt que comme des dogmes à affirmer; n'attribuer qu'un caractère instrumental et révisable à la reconnaissance d'une autorité, etc.
5. Dewey ancre l'éthique elle-même dans certaines constantes de la vie humaine: "*Les conceptions morales et les processus moraux émanent naturellement des conditions mêmes de la vie humaine. [...] Le désir fait partie intégrante de la nature intrinsèque de l'homme. Nous ne pouvons imaginer un individu qui ne connaîtrait pas le manque, le besoin, ni un autre auquel la réalisation d'un désir n'apporterait aucune satisfaction. [...] Les hommes vivent naturellement et inévitablement en société. [...] Les êtres humains approuvent et désapprouvent, éprouvent sympathie ou ressentiment, aussi naturellement et inévitablement qu'ils cherchent les objets qu'ils désirent, qu'ils expriment des exigences et y répondent. [...] Les faits que constituent le désir, la résolution, la demande sociale et la loi, l'approbation bienveillante et la désapprobation hostile sont des données permanentes. On ne peut imaginer leur disparition tant que la nature humaine demeure ce qu'elle est, et tant que l'on vit en association avec autrui*" (Dewey & Tufts 2021: 361-2). L'idéal démocratique s'enracine lui-même dans la nature humaine (*ibid.*: 407).
6. On trouvera une liste de ces instincts et besoins innés dans l'essai de Mead sur "l'individu biologique" (*in* Mead 2006).
7. Il semble que Mead n'ait pas été totalement convaincu par ce sous-titre (cf. Cook 1994).
8. Richard Rorty m'avouait lors d'un colloque à Paris, dans le milieu des années 1980, où j'avais présenté un exposé sur Mead, que l'œuvre de ce dernier était *terra incognita* pour lui.
9. Dans l'hommage qu'il a rendu à son ami après sa mort en 1931, "George Herbert Mead as I knew him," Dewey écrivait: "tous ceux qui sont familiers de l'œuvre de Mr. Mead connaissent son intérêt vital pour la psychologie sociale et pour l'interprétation sociale de la vie et du monde. C'est peut-être là-dessus que son influence s'est déjà fait le plus largement sentir. Je sais que ses idées sur ce sujet ont provoqué une révolution dans ma propre pensée, bien que j'aie mis du temps à saisir tout ce qu'elles impliquaient" (Dewey 1931: 27).
10. Un intérêt supplémentaire est la présentation des similitudes et des différences entre une approche pragmatiste et l'explication des origines de la cognition et de la communication humaines par Michael Tomasello.

RÉSUMÉS

Dans cet article je présente et discute l'ouvrage de Roberta Dreon, *Human Landscapes: Contributions to a Pragmatic Anthropology* (Suny Press, 2022). Je le fais à partir de deux questions. La première concerne les avantages d'une anthropologie pragmatiste par rapport à des tentatives similaires, inspirées soit de la phénoménologie post-husserlienne (notamment les recherches actuelles sur le caractère incarné de l'esprit et de la cognition), soit de l'herméneutique philosophique. La seconde question porte sur la contribution possible d'une anthropologie philosophique à une critique culturelle, c'est-à-dire à la critique d'erreurs, de confusions, et d'illusions existant dans notre manière moderne de penser, dans les idéaux que nous nous sommes donnés, dans nos habitudes collectives et dans nos "imaginaires sociaux."

INDEX

Mots-clés : éenactivisme, habitude, langage, médiation, nature humaine, sensibilité

AUTEUR

LOUIS QUÉRÉ

Centre d'Étude des Mouvements Sociaux (EHESS-CNRS), Paris

[louis.quere\[at\]orange.fr](mailto:louis.quere[at]orange.fr)

Multilingual

Guido Baggio e Maria Regina Brioschi (dir.)

Simposio su Rosa Maria Calcaterra, // ***progetto comune dei pragmatisti***

Introduzione al simposio

Guido Baggio e Maria Regina Brioschi

- 1 *Il progetto comune dei pragmatisti* (Calcaterra 2024) raccoglie una selezione di saggi del periodo di produzione di Rosa Calcaterra che va dal 2003 al 2016, rivisti o integrati in vista di questa nuova edizione. Il volume offre uno sguardo d'insieme del percorso teoretico di Calcaterra, focalizzandosi sugli autori pragmatisti che più hanno segnato il suo pensiero, segnatamente C.S. Peirce, W. James, J. Dewey, G.H. Mead, C.I. Lewis, H. Putnam e R. Rorty. Come hanno notato Michela Bella, Giovanni Maddalena e Marco Stango, autori dei contributi del simposio qui ospitato, leggendo i saggi selezionati si coglie bene la forza dell'interpretazione di Calcaterra, secondo la quale non vi sarebbero visioni filosofiche inconciliabili tra pragmatisti classici e neopragmatisti quanto piuttosto comuni obiettivi teoretico-metodologici accomunati dall'intento unitario di svolgere l'attività filosofica in modi diversi ma complementari. La novità delle proposte di Peirce, James, Dewey, Mead, Lewis, Putnam e Rorty emergerebbe quindi entro una continuità metodologica, epistemologica e ontologica che trova la sua forza nei termini della complementarità di interessi, obiettivi e stili filosofici.
- 2 In questi termini il lavoro filosofico di Calcaterra, che nasce dagli studi su Habermas e Apel (Calcaterra 1984, 1987) in quanto lettori di Peirce, ma anche dall'analisi dell'opera di Gadamer, ha posto le basi di una interpretazione, filologicamente confermata, che tende a superare la discutibile distinzione, ampiamente diffusa fin dalla prima ricezione del pragmatismo, tra un pragmatismo "logico" e un pragmatismo "psicologico" o, nel caso della ricezione italiana di Papini, "magico" (Maddalena & Tuzet 2021; Maddalena 2014; Baggio & Brioschi 2022).
- 3 Per evidenziare la validità della proposta del progetto comune pragmatista Bella si concentra nel suo contributo sul valore dell'esperienza della novità e sull'importanza della dimensione sociale e del sentimento di socialità. Secondo Bella "la difficoltà e la fecondità di questo intreccio di istanze individuali e sociali" è rintracciabile nel corso dell'intera produzione di Calcaterra, rappresentandone la "cifra" della sua filosofia. In particolare, Bella ritiene che sia possibile rintracciare un progressivo spostamento del focus di Calcaterra "dal ruolo che gioca il rapporto individuale-sociale nell'esperienza conoscitiva e valoriale dei singoli al suo ruolo intersoggettivo in vista del contributo alla costruzione di una migliorabile società umana." Questo spostamento muove la

lettura di Calcaterra del contingentismo rortiano verso una concezione dinamica, aperta e plurale della conoscenza e della società che tenga conto del valore delle esperienze personali. Sempre all'interesse per Rorty è rivolta la seconda osservazione di Bella, la quale rintraccia una profonda consonanza tra l'anti-fondazionalismo di Rorty e la tesi di Calcaterra dell'"unità dinamica" del pragmatismo. Tale consonanza riposa nel fatto che il progetto comune del pragmatismo non pretende offrire una visione univoca e immodificabile della verità, quanto piuttosto porsi come una voce che permetta di incrementare le possibilità di costruire vedute sempre più ricche e articolate sul mondo individuale e sociale, sulla realtà presente e futura, "offrendoci un qualche riparo dalle offese e le umiliazioni che accompagnano sempre i dogmatismi di ogni sorta" (Calcaterra 2024: 20-1). A questo si collega il terzo aspetto evidenziato, ovvero la visione dinamica e continuista di Calcaterra, che secondo Bella si inserisce nel percorso già tracciato da Addams, Du Bois, Follett e Dewey, in cui è possibile "rintracciare la comune attitudine a gestire il conflitto puntando su cooperazione, alleanze e integrazione sulla base di una visione che valorizza la pluralità di bisogni e desideri diversificati invece di esasperare le differenze e gli antagonismi."

- 4 Giovanni Maddalena interroga invece Calcaterra proprio sull'origine della sua lettura unitaria e complementare dei differenti pragmatisti. Maddalena rintraccia nel lavoro di Calcaterra tre concetti che permettono di consolidare la sua visione pragmatista: la concezione del fallibilismo, inteso come chiave epistemologica dell'intero movimento; la nozione di continuismo od olismo, che permette di legare la lettura calcaterriana del pragmatismo con la tradizione analitica derivante da Quine; l'idea del consequenzialismo, alleato dell'esternalismo, declinato in differenti forme dai pragmatisti di varie generazioni. Vi è un aspetto, però, che Maddalena trova problematico, nel percorso di Calcaterra: la questione del fondamento della ricerca e della conoscenza umana. Seguendo la lettura di Maddalena, Calcaterra si sarebbe mossa da una iniziale lettura anti-fondazionalista del pragmatismo verso una posizione più mediata che, mantenendo saldo il rifiuto per un fondamento apriori ed essenzialista, sembra accogliere una forma ("à la Dewey") di "metafisica naturalizzata." Ciò deriverebbe a Calcaterra da una maggiore aderenza a un continuismo che avrebbe portato alla dissoluzione del dualismo fondazionalismo/antifondazionalismo "in un rapporto più rispettoso del senso comune tra ciò che riceviamo e ciò che costruiamo, tra strutture epistemiche e avvenimento conoscitivo." Si tratterebbe, in questo caso, di una teoria ancora da precisare ed elaborare. Ammesso che questa sia la via intrapresa da Calcaterra, l'autore chiede se sia possibile applicare tale concezione all'intero movimento pragmatista e se, infine, essa resti "neutra riguardo a una dimensione metafisica."
- 5 Un'ultima questione che Maddalena pone a Calcaterra riguarda il rapporto tra Peirce e Kant, anch'esso all'origine del progetto unitario di cui l'autrice si fa promotrice. Le osservazioni che infatti elabora su questo rapporto, secondo Maddalena, la aiutano a dare voce alla "verità storica della rinascita degli studi pragmatisti verso la fine del secolo scorso" e a evidenziare la "sopravalutazione," da parte della filosofia analitica dominante, dell'opera di Peirce rispetto a quelle di James e Dewey. Proprio per contrastare questa interpretazione Calcaterra si impegna nella costruzione della propria visione unitaria dei pragmatisti. Nota, però, Maddalena, che nonostante la lettura di Calcaterra, rimane ancora aperta la questione del rapporto Peirce-Kant nel suo aspetto filologico e in quello culturale, al primo strettamente connesso. Sul lato filologico, Maddalena rileva che nella *scholarship* peirceana si fronteggiano negli ultimi

decenni due posizioni: da un lato quella che inserisce Peirce nel solco della filosofia trascendentale di stampo kantiano (Gava & Stern 2016), dall'altro la posizione che invece lo vede passare da un idealismo soggettivo iniziale a un idealismo oggettivo finale, in cui sono rintracciabili sia la matrice hegeliana che l'evoluzionismo, così come il realismo metafisico scotista (Colapietro 2004, 2020; Maddalena 2019). A questa ricostruzione e interpretazione storico-filologica sono associate, su un piano culturale, due prospettive rilevanti. La lettura che vede un'affiliazione kantiana di Peirce è abbinata a "una sostanziale approvazione del progetto analitico che è stato ed è così influente nella storia della filosofia contemporanea," mentre la seconda interpretazione sembra promuovere prospettive spesso "apertamente in contestazione con il progetto moderno e razionalista della filosofia." Tra queste due posizioni, nota Maddalena, si inserisce l'opera di Calcaterra, che sembra stabilirsi esattamente nel mezzo tra questi due versanti, così come testimoniano i suoi interessi per alcuni autori pragmatisti come C.I. Lewis. In questo senso, la posizione di Rosa sembra maggiormente suggerire una lettura del pragmatismo come una corrente che tende a superare Kant senza però abbandonarsi a un totale anti-kantismo.

- 6 L'intervento di Marco Stango muove dalla considerazione che il nuovo libro di Calcaterra, nell'articolare la sua visione unitaria dei pragmatisti, "propone il pragmatismo nuovamente, cioè rinnova per il lettore di oggi la persuasività di un modo organico, seppur vario, di fare filosofia." In questo senso, l'autore afferma che la lettura del libro di Calcaterra l'ha interpellato personalmente, facendo sorgere in lui molteplici domande, che vanno concepiti come "dubbi viventi," e non "di carta," per riprendere la felice immagine di Peirce. È proprio sulla co-presenza di unità e varietà, che caratterizza tutto il volume, che verte la prima domanda di Stango a Calcaterra: "come giustificare il criterio continuista su quello discontinuista?"
- 7 L'autore poi passa in rassegna tutti i capitoli, sollevando per ciascuno molteplici domande che, nella loro differenza, in gran parte rimandano alla questione dei fondamenti della conoscenza, di cui egli problematizza soprattutto l'aspetto metafisico. Il primo punto riguarda senza dubbio il tema del realismo. Rispetto alla trattazione offerta nel primo capitolo su Peirce, l'autore ripone la questione del "realismo metafisico," individuandolo come la via mediante cui il suo pragmatismo abbia tentato e possa ancora oggi superare "il vicolo cieco del soggettivismo e del dualismo gnoseologico" caratteristico della modernità. Il tema del realismo riemerge poi rispetto ai capitoli su Mead, per cui Stango si chiede se "non sia auspicabile continuare la grande impresa del pragmatismo seguitando a valorizzare, come fa Mead, la natura sociale delle attività cognitive [...] ma tentando di ricalibrare l'universalità del nesso di simbolo e risposta su di un più robusto realismo."
- 8 Un'altra questione ricorrente, e centrale, della trattazione di Stango riguarda la possibilità di leggere il progetto pragmatista, nell'interpretazione di Calcaterra, come correzione e ampliamento della metafisica tradizionale. Ad esempio, rispetto al capitolo terzo, dedicato all'approccio pragmatista di James alla verità, Stango si interroga se sia possibile sostenere, seguendo Calcaterra, che James espliciti "una virtualità essenziale ma prima rimasta nascosta dell'idea classica, corrispondentista, di verità, cioè, l'idea che la verità non solo sia provata dalle sue conseguenze ma [...] che si esprima come fecondità nell'esperienza e per l'esperienza, oltre la riduzione moderna della verità a certezza." Analogamente, rispetto a James Stango si chiede se "le relazioni che connettono diverse esperienze in modo continuo non possono essere considerate esse

stesse il modo (corretto!) tramite cui reinterpretare alcune categorie tradizionali, per esempio quelle di sostanza, come se tali categorie venissero riscoperte in modo spontaneo dal pragmatismo in opposizione a e come superamento dell'impasse di alcune versioni moderne.”

- 9 Infine, insieme ad alcune richieste di chiarimento sulla proposta normativa e politica del pragmatismo (soprattutto deweyano), Stango solleva alcune questioni relative ai rischi e alla percorribilità del progetto pragmatista avanzato da Calcaterra. In riferimento al capitolo su Putnam lettore di James, l'autore problematizza le possibili derive della proposta pragmatista ed anti-essenzialista del concetto di realtà affermando in modo radicale: “se è vero che una cattiva metafisica rischia di alienare il particolare, un pluralismo infondato non rischia di diventare un'accozzaglia?” La domanda viene diversamente riproposta relativamente all'interpretazione di Dewey offerta da Calcaterra, per cui Stango si chiede se “non c'è il rischio che l'uni-pluralità cara ai pragmatisti si frantumi in una molteplicità irrelata di frammenti.”

BIBLIOGRAFIA

- BAGGIO Guido & Maria Regina BRIOSCHI (eds), (2022), “Il pragmatismo nella tradizione filosofica italiana del secondo dopoguerra: introduzione al simposio,” *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, 14(1). Online: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejpap.2819>.
- CALCATERRA Rosa Maria, (1984), *Ideologia e razionalità. Saggio su Jürgen Habermas*, Roma, Gangemi.
- CALCATERRA Rosa Maria, (1987), “Oggettività e verità nella scienza: Habermas e Peirce,” *Il pensiero. Rivista di filosofia*, 28(1-2), 67-88.
- CALCATERRA Rosa Maria, (2024), *Il progetto comune dei Pragmatisti*, Lanciano, Carabba.
- COLAPIETRO Vincent, (2004), “Portrait of an Historicist: An Alternative Reading of Peircean Semiotic,” *Semiotiche*, 2, 49-68.
- MADDALENA Giovanni, (2014), “The Three Waves of Italian Reception of Peirce,” *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, 6(1). Online: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejpap.484>.
- MADDALENA Giovanni, (2019), “Anti-Kantianism as a Necessary Characteristic of Pragmatism,” in Krzysztof Piotr Skowroński & Sami Pihlström (eds), *Pragmatist Kant: Pragmatism, Kant, and Kantianism in the Twenty-first Century*, Helsinki, Nordic Pragmatism Network, 43-59.
- MADDALENA Giovanni & Giovanni TUZET (eds), (2021), *The Italian Pragmatists. Between Allies and Enemies*, Leiden-Boston, Brill-Rodopi.

AUTORI

GUIDO BAGGIO

Università degli Studi Roma Tre
[guido.baggio\[at\]uniroma3.it](mailto:guido.baggio[at]uniroma3.it)

MARIA REGINA BRIOSCHI

Università degli Studi di Milano
mariaregina.brioschi[at]unimi.it

Il pragmatismo: una filosofia in circolo

Michela Bella

- 1 Nel leggere il recentissimo lavoro di Rosa Calcaterra, una selezione di saggi pubblicati tra il 2003 e il 2016, rivisti o integrati in vista di questa nuova pubblicazione, emerge a chiare note la forza della sua interpretazione dell'unità programmatica dei pragmatisti vecchi e nuovi, o meglio del pragmatismo in quanto "stile di pensiero calibrato su precisi obiettivi teoretico-metodo-logici" (Calcaterra 2024: 7).
- 2 Anticipatrice rispetto al mainstream odierno che il suo lavoro ha senza dubbio contribuito a stabilire, nella prospettiva di Calcaterra i pragmatisti non avrebbero portato avanti visioni filosofiche inconciliabili quanto invece "modi differenziati ma complementari di svolgere l'attività filosofica" (*ibid.*: 11). Calcaterra ha il merito di aver messo in discussione la visione dualistica di un "pragmatismo logico," quello di Peirce, e di un "empirismo radicale" o "pragmatismo psicologico," quello di James. Nella tradizione italiana tale distinzione risale alla prima ricezione del pragmatismo (cfr. Maddalena & Tuzet 2021; Maddalena 2014) ed ebbe per diversi decenni un'ampia risonanza negli studi di settore.¹ La novità delle proposte elaborate da Peirce, James, Dewey, Mead, Lewis, Putnam e Rorty – questi i principali autori investigati nel libro – emergerebbe entro una continuità di fondo, metodologica, epistemologica e ontologica, che Calcaterra declina nei termini della complementarità di interessi, obiettivi e stili filosofici. La complementarità diviene via preferenziale per oltrepassare non soltanto i limiti di una certa storiografia filosofica ma più in generale i limiti del pensare secondo "dicotomie concettuali e operative" (Calcaterra 2024: 11) che esibiscono una fissità analitica e aspirano all'esaustività.
- 3 La contraddizione tra le teorie di questi autori sarebbe dunque solo apparente, si tratterebbe di false antitesi o distinzioni funzionali che rimandano a una visione sperimentale del procedere filosofico, come segnala Calcaterra, ricalcata su quello scientifico: "La filosofia dovrebbe imitare i metodi delle scienze che ottengono dei successi, almeno per quanto riguarda il procedere esclusivamente da premesse tangibili [...] e il fidarsi più della molteplicità e della varietà degli argomenti che della definitività di uno di essi" (Peirce 2005: 208-9). L'immagine della fune utilizzata da

Peirce per illustrare questo argomento richiama la forza del ragionamento filosofico che fa leva sul numero e sul saldo intreccio delle fibre, seppure molto sottili. Si tratta di una metafora che esprime bene sia la dinamicità del ragionare nell'apertura al futuro sia la sua organicità nello sconfinamento tra ambiti disciplinari differenti. La complementarità di ipotesi che si producono a rinsaldare l'intreccio delle fibre apre alla possibilità di "un dialogo costruttivo con i progetti filosofici e i movimenti culturali che man mano si presentano" in cui accogliere nuove esperienze che possono provenire da "tradizioni e campi di ricerca differenti o addirittura a prima vista inconciliabili" (Calcaterra 2024: 12). Infatti, se è vero, come scriveva Leibniz, che non tutti i possibili sono compostibili (Leibniz 1710/2005: §200), è anche vero che nella visione continuista dell'evoluzione accolta con differenti accezioni dai pragmatisti la complementarità possa manifestarsi in divenire sia nel senso che alcune complementarità possono prodursi nell'agire sia in quello che altre possono divenire tali nel tempo.

- 4 Delle molte piste che Calcaterra approfondisce per mostrare la validità della sua tesi del progetto comune pragmatista, vorrei soffermarmi sul suo insistere in modo originale su due aspetti comuni e profondamente intrecciati del pragmatismo: il valore dell'esperienza della novità e l'importanza della dimensione sociale (e del sentimento di socialità). Credo che la difficoltà e la fecondità di questo intreccio di istanze individuali e sociali possano essere rintracciate in molte delle intuizioni più profonde di Calcaterra e che anzi siano la cifra della sua filosofia pragmatista dagli esordi finanche alle analisi più tarde del contingentismo rortiano. Si tratta di un intreccio che è necessario mettere in circolo perché produca i suoi frutti senza inficiare il valore delle singole proposte teoriche – anzi, verrebbe da dire con Mary P. Follett che è proprio nell'integrazione che si preserva l'integrità delle istanze individuali e si produce progresso sociale (1924). Pragmaticamente, infatti, le nuove conoscenze emergono nelle situazioni vissute e non di volta in volta da una tabula rasa, situazione quantomai sconveniente evolutivamente per la mancanza di preservazione e accumulazione delle conoscenze acquisite.² Il cambiamento non soltanto fa leva sul vecchio ma è articolabile rispetto al rapporto con la tradizione e funziona nel momento in cui viene accolto dalla comunità e producendo nuove contaminazioni. Ecco allora che le innovazioni e le distanze tra i pragmatisti classici e i cosiddetti neo-pragmatisti vengono riconsiderate e rivalutate, nella prospettiva continuista di Calcaterra, rispetto al loro rapporto con i "punti saldi" che contraddistinguono l'identità del movimento pragmatista: il fallibilismo, il consequenzialismo, l'olismo e via dicendo (Calcaterra 2024: 13ss). Si tratta di un'analisi continuista raffinata e coraggiosa che consente di smussare asperità apparenti e dogmatismi imbriglianti per fare spazio a un confronto sostanziale e proficuo.
- 5 Il controverso rapporto tra logica e psicologia in Peirce e James, oggi al centro di nuovi e interessanti studi (Cristalli 2020; Bella & Brioschi 2022), è un buon esempio del modo di procedere di Calcaterra. Oltre a evidenziare l'interesse di Peirce per la psicologia fisiologica e ricordare l'esperimento condotto con Jastrow, Calcaterra sottolinea l'inadeguatezza dell'"etichetta di 'anti-psicologista,' se con questa espressione presupponiamo, come usualmente accade, un dualismo ontologico tra pensiero e natura, tra dimensione razionale e dimensione psicologica, infine tra spazio normativo e spazio fattuale" (2024: 78). Le incongruenze peirceane circa il ruolo cognitivo di emozioni e sentimenti – nonché fondativo nel caso della "infinita speranza" per il suo cosiddetto "socialismo logico" (*ibid.*: 69) – lavorano in due direzioni: da un lato, riconsiderare i sentimenti nella genesi e nel procedere del processo razionale, dall'altro, scongiurare approcci internalisti o privatisti al mondo interiore con il fine di

favorire l'emancipazione personale e sociale. A questo proposito, nel commentare il "conosci te stesso" socratico, Peirce sottolinea come il detto non significhi "Fai un esame introspettivo della tua anima," bensì 'Guardati come gli altri ti guarderebbero se fossero così in intimità con te, cioè guardati dal punto di vista della tua appartenenza alla comunità degli esseri 'ragionanti'" (*ibid.*: 83). Sul piano semiotico, la questione del potenziale normativo dei sentimenti e in particolare del sentimento sociale viene interpretata da Calcaterra come una possibilità che può (o meno) evolversi in abito:

Nei termini delle categorie semiotiche, possiamo dire che la socialità rappresenta una *Firstness*, una pura e semplice "possibilità" della natura umana, che può e dovrebbe evolversi in una *Thirdness*, ossia acquistare un valore normativo che però è squisitamente *pragmatico*: la sua giustificazione logica andrà, cioè, cercata sul versante della prassi, nella funzionalità del sentimento sociale all'interno di una pratica di ricerca delle credenze che voglia essere veicolo di emancipazione dalle idiosincrasie personali e di gruppo, espressione di consapevolezza della possibilità dell'errore che consegue all'accettazione della mancanza di fondamenti certi del nostro sapere, dunque veicolo di anti-dogmatismo. (*Ibid.*: 84)

- 6 D'altro canto, l'analisi calcatteriana dell'anti-intellettualismo jamesiano mira a rifiutare le interpretazioni irrazionaliste della sua concezione della razionalità sia alla luce di una più ampia conoscenza del corpus jamesiano sia in convergenza con la critica peirceana e, più in generale, pragmatista "dell'inadeguatezza di quelle immagini tradizionali della razionalità, che si basano su criteri astratti o su una concezione dell'intelligenza umana che non riesce ad apprezzarne la complessità concreta" (*ibid.*: 89).

In poche parole, la razionalità è un requisito sempre potenziale per i diversi punti di vista teorici e pratici che modellano le relazioni dell'essere umano con il mondo fisico, con la sua realtà individuale e con il suo ambiente sociale. La nozione di comportamento o agire, su cui si basa questa concezione dinamica della razionalità, costituisce il nucleo dell'intenzione del pragmatismo di fornire un'alternativa alla metafisica dogmatica e alle teorie della conoscenza come "corrispondenza" di marca sia razionalista sia empirista. Il criterio dell'azione rappresenta, infatti, un principio semantico ed epistemologico necessario, che implica l'abbandono dell'idea che nozioni filosofiche fondamentali come quelle di "verità" e "realtà" si riferiscano a entità metafisiche o logiche statiche, cioè a qualcosa di indipendente dalle prestazioni effettive del pensiero. In contrasto con questo punto di vista, si sottolinea la natura processuale sia delle proposizioni teoriche sia delle determinazioni di valore. (*Ibid.*: 91)

- 7 La centralità degli abiti d'azione, punto saldo di entrambi gli autori, assume così declinazioni differenti e complementari insistendo l'uno sul "valore logico e potenzialmente universale che l'azione può avere rispetto alle abitudini intellettuali e comportamentali" e l'altro sulla "convalida del significato soggettivo e contingente dell'azione, concepandola nei termini della teoria darwiniana delle varianti individuali" (*ibid.*: 92).³

[I]l significato e la validità delle nostre credenze va ricercato nei loro risvolti pratici, i quali – per James – riguardano appunto una necessità primaria dell'individuo umano: mitigare l'insicurezza che segna la sua condizione esistenziale. Probabilmente una simile concezione dello scopo pratico della razionalità potrebbe apparire banale o semplicemente retorica. Tuttavia, ciò che conta davvero è l'invito di James a trasformare il *pathos* dell'incertezza umana e cosmica in un *ethos della contingenza* incentrata sulla responsabilità degli individui di imprimere, attraverso le loro idee e le loro azioni, una direttiva sensatamente umana al corso degli eventi oggettivi. (*Ibid.*: 99)

- 8 La prima questione che vorrei porre a Rosa Calcaterra riguarda proprio il rapporto tra individuale e sociale, il filo rosso che annoda molte delle sue interpretazioni, compresa l'analisi del "realismo sociale" meadiano (*ibid.*: 223-78). Ripercorrendo i saggi scelti mi sembra possibile identificare un progressivo spostamento nell'attenzione dell'autrice dal ruolo che gioca il rapporto individuale-sociale nell'esperienza conoscitiva e valoriale dei singoli al suo ruolo intersoggettivo in vista del contributo alla costruzione di una migliorabile società umana. È evidente che le due dimensioni non siano di fatto sganciabili, anzi procedano insieme, tuttavia con bilanciamenti differenti. Gli autori e i temi al centro dell'interesse dell'autrice la supportano nell'iniziale messa in discussione da una prospettiva pragmatista della concezione moderna di razionalità, evidenziando in particolare il "profondo intreccio tra il piano estetico-affettivo e il piano logico-razionale" (*ibid.*: 368). In seguito, lo strumentalismo e lo sperimentalismo di Dewey (Calcaterra 2011a) e forse ancor più il pensiero di Rorty inaugurano un confronto aperto con le prospettive epistemologiche ed etiche di tale presa d'atto. In quest'ottica, il recupero da parte di Rorty di temi deweyani – tra cui l'attenzione al futuro, l'idea di filosofia come strumento di cambiamento di credenze e comportamenti e non come forma di conoscenza (cfr. Calcaterra 2024: 347ss) – ma anche jamesiani – quali la "tonalità etica del contingentismo di James" (*ibid.*: 9), il rapporto tra *pathos* ed *ethos*, il pluralismo ma anche il rapporto tra scelta, impegno e responsabilità (cfr. Voparil 2022) – innerva la lettura calcaterriana del suo contingentismo e la orienta in direzione di una concezione dinamica, aperta e plurale della conoscenza e della società che tenga conto del valore delle esperienze personali.⁴
- 9 Una seconda domanda riguarda il rapporto dell'anti-fondazionalismo rortiano con il progetto pragmatista. Anche in questo caso, mi sembra che la ben nota ostilità di Rorty nei confronti della necessità epistemologica di aspirare a raggiungere una visione coerente e univoca del mondo non si riversi sulla tesi di Calcaterra dell'"unità dinamica" del pragmatismo, anzi vi sia profonda consonanza tra le due prospettive. Il progetto comune del pragmatismo non aspira alla supremazia né a stabilire una definizione univoca e immodificabile di verità quanto invece a essere "una voce significativa nella 'conversazione dell'umanità' [...] cioè una voce che riesca ad incrementare la possibilità di costruire vedute sempre più ricche sul nostro mondo individuale e sociale, sulla nostra realtà presente e futura, offrendoci un qualche riparo dalle offese e le umiliazioni che accompagnano sempre i dogmatismi di ogni sorta" (Calcaterra 2024: 20-1).
- 10 E così arrivo a una terza e, per motivi di spazio, ultima questione, più generale. La visione dinamica e continuista di Calcaterra mi sembra sia anche espressione di una concezione del conflitto, profondamente pragmatista. Come ha ben sottolineato Santarelli (2021), analizzando in particolare le teorie di Addams, Du Bois, Follett e Dewey, è possibile sconfessare la critica alla mancata elaborazione da parte del pragmatismo di una teoria del conflitto. Quel che emerge, ad esempio in autrici come Addams e Follett, è la comune attitudine a gestire il conflitto puntando su cooperazione, alleanze e integrazione sulla base di una visione che valorizza la pluralità di bisogni e desideri diversificati invece di esasperare le differenze e gli antagonismi.⁵ In questo senso, l'esperienza traumatica della guerra di Secessione aveva ben mostrato i limiti delle posizioni dicotomiche e delle polarizzazioni estreme e suggerito di ricercare vie alternative alla lotta fratricida (Menand 2001; Santarelli 2021).

- 11 La visione dinamica e unitaria del pragmatismo di Calcaterra rispecchia l'animo sperimentale e anti-autoritario del movimento che non mira a unificare in senso oppressivo le differenze ma a farle emergere ed eventualmente prosperare nella conversazione umana. Per riprendere la metafora peirceana citata all'inizio, sulla scorta del metodo scientifico, la filosofia dovrebbe procedere da "premesse tangibili" e "fidarsi più della molteplicità e della varietà degli argomenti che della definitività di uno di essi" (Peirce 2005: 209). La potenza del mettere e rimettere in circolo idee e prospettive differenti guardandole e confrontandole sulla base di uno o più piani comuni consente di approfondire le distanze individuali e alimentare il dialogo della comunità di ricerca senza arroccarsi su posizioni di supposto privilegio. Questa concezione di lavoro filosofico circolare si riflette nella filosofia di Calcaterra, una filosofia profondamente radicata nella comunità di ricerca, una comunità ricca di metodi e stili differenti, ma anche di abiti comuni che è "l'eredità principale che le diverse voci del progetto comune dei pragmatisti lascia alla nostra cultura filosofica" (Calcaterra 2024: 21).

BIBLIOGRAFIA

- ALEANDRI Gabriele, (2024), *Disincanto del mondo e scienze della vita. Nuovi elementi di cosmologia filosofica*, Torino, Rosenberg & Sellier.
- BAGGIO Guido & Maria Regina BRIOSCHI (eds), (2022), "Il pragmatismo nella tradizione filosofica italiana del secondo dopoguerra: introduzione al simposio," *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, 14(1). Online: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejpap.2819>.
- BELLA Michela, (2019), *Ontology after Philosophical Psychology*, Lanham, Lexington.
- BELLA Michela & Maria Regina BRIOSCHI, (2022), "Two Neglected Arguments for a Pragmatist Metaphysics: Peirce and James on Individuals and Generals," *Rivista di storia della filosofia*, 77(3), 511-35. Online: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3280/SF2022-003010>.
- CALCATERRA Rosa Maria (ed.), (2006), *Pragmatismo e filosofia analitica. Differenze e interazioni*, Macerata, Quodlibet.
- CALCATERRA Rosa Maria, (2011a), *Idee concrete. Percorsi nella filosofia di John Dewey*, Genova, Marietti.
- CALCATERRA Rosa Maria (ed.), (2011b), *New Perspectives on Pragmatism and Analytic Philosophy*, Amsterdam-New York, Rodopi.
- CALCATERRA Rosa Maria, (2019), *Contingency and Normativity: The Challenges of Richard Rorty*, Leiden, Netherlands, Brill-Rodopi.
- CALCATERRA Rosa Maria, (2024), *Il progetto comune dei pragmatisti*, Lanciano, Carabba.
- CALCATERRA Rosa Maria & Hans Herbert KÖGLER, (2023), "Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (1979). Übers.: Der Spiegel der Natur: Eine Kritik der Philosophie (1981)," in Martin Müller (ed.), *Handbuch Richard Rorty*, Springer VS, Wiesbaden, 161-81.

- CALCATERRA Rosa Maria, MADDALENA Giovanni & Giancarlo MARCHETTI, (2015), *Il pragmatismo. Dalle origini agli sviluppi contemporanei*, Roma, Carocci.
- CALCATERRA Rosa Maria & Sarin MARCHETTI, (2023), *Richard Rorty. Filosofia, letteratura, politica*, Roma, Carocci.
- CASTELLI Federica, (2024), *Jane Addams, Chicago e la Hull House*, Roma, Castelvechi.
- CRISTALLI Claudia, (2020), *The Philosophical Psychology of Charles S. Peirce*, PhD Dissertation, University College London.
- FERRARIS Maurizio, (2021), *Documanità. Filosofia del mondo nuovo*, Bari-Roma, Laterza.
- FRANZESE Sergio, (2009), *Darwinismo e Pragmatismo e altri studi su William James*, Milano-Udine, Mimesis.
- FOLLETT Mary Parker, (1924), *Creative Experience*, New York, Longmans, Green and Co.
- LEIBNIZ Gottfried Wilhelm, (1710/2005), *Saggi di teodicea sulla bontà di Dio, la libertà dell'uomo e l'origine del male*, Milano, Bompiani.
- MADDALENA Giovanni, (2014), "The Three Waves of Italian Reception of Peirce," *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, 6(1). Online: <https://journals.openedition.org/ejpap/484>.
- MADDALENA Giovanni & Giovanni TUZET (eds), (2021), *The Italian Pragmatists: Between Allies and Enemies*, Leiden-Boston, Brill-Rodopi.
- MARCHETTI Giancarlo, (2021), *The Ethics, Epistemology, and Politics of Richard Rorty*, London, Routledge.
- MCGRANAHAN Lucas, (2017), *Darwinism and Pragmatism: William James on Evolution and Self-Transformation*, London, Routledge.
- MENAND Louis, (2001), *The Metaphysical Club*, New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
- PARRAVICINI Andrea, (2012), *Il pensiero in evoluzione: Chauncey Wright tra darwinismo e pragmatismo*, Pisa, ETS.
- PEIRCE Charles Sanders, (2005), *Scritti scelti. A cura di Giovanni Maddalena*, Torino, UTET.
- SANTARELLI Matteo, (2021), *La filosofia sociale del pragmatismo*, Bologna, Clueb.
- VOPARIL Chris, (2022), *Reconstructing Pragmatism: Richard Rorty and the Classical Pragmatists*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

NOTE

1. Per una disamina di alcune importanti voci della generazione italiana di studiosi del pragmatismo del secondo dopoguerra si veda il simposio a cura di Baggio & Brioschi 2022.
2. Ferraris (2021) ha scritto pagine interessanti sulla convenienza della possibilità dell'iterazione per i processi di acculturazione e capitalizzazione nel mondo digitale.
3. Da qui prende avvio anche il secondo saggio su James che mette a fuoco il ruolo della biologia darwiniana nella sua prospettiva etico-politica. Sul tema pragmatismo e darwinismo e sulle sue possibili letture contemporanee si veda Franzese 2009; Parravicini 2012; McGranahan 2017; Bella 2019; Aleandri 2024.
4. Sul contributo di Calcaterra alla rivalutazione della filosofia rortiana nel panorama italiano e internazionale e delle interazioni tra pragmatismo e filosofia analitica si veda Calcaterra 2006,

2011b, 2019; Calcaterra & Kögler 2023; Calcaterra & Marchetti 2023. Sull'attualità del pensiero di Rorty si veda il volume collettaneo a cura di Marchetti 2021.

5. Per quanto riguarda la prospettiva di Jane Addams, si veda Castelli (2024: 59ss).

AUTORE

MICHELA BELLA

Università del Molise

michela.bella[at]unimol.it

Anti-fondazionalismo e “metafisica naturalizzata”

Giovanni Maddalena

- 1 Il percorso di Rosa Calcaterra all'interno della filosofia pragmatista è segnato da un'intuizione principale e originale: nonostante tutte le differenze, il progetto pragmatista è unitario. Gli articoli della raccolta *Il progetto comune dei pragmatisti* mostrano questa unitarietà, che Calcaterra persegue con tecnica sofisticata, facendo emergere non solo ciò che la parola dice, ma anche ciò che essa tradisce. Prima di immergersi nelle pagine del libro e rivolgere all'autrice alcune domande che si aprono alla lettura del libro, occorre ricordare che ella è anche co-fondatrice della rivista internazionale *The European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, uno dei punti di riferimento delle pubblicazioni mondiali su questo tema, e dell'Associazione Pragma e del Centro Interuniversitario “Pragmatismo Costruzione dei saperi e Formazione,” hub degli studi pragmatisti in Italia. Da vera studiosa pragmatista, infatti, l'opera teorica e quella pratica sono andate di pari passo e con uguale successo.
- 2 Per parlare della pubblicazione in oggetto, occorre cominciare allora dal concetto di unitarietà. È un'unitarietà che coinvolge tutti i pragmatisti classici, contro ogni distinzione interna, e quelli più vicini a noi, spesso identificati come neo-pragmatisti. Si tratta di una posizione forte e originale, che è al centro dell'interpretazione calcatteriana di tutti gli autori del pragmatismo. Essa si oppone alla maggioranza della *scholarship* mondiale che ha quasi sempre identificato uno schieramento “buono” contro l'altro “cattivo,” che fosse poi il termine valoriale declinato a partire da punti di partenza logici o analitici, postmoderni o ermeneutici, metafisici o naturalisti. Così, nelle varie letture è spesso prevalso il pregiudizio dell'occhio dell'interprete che non poteva o non voleva accettare la novità intrinseca del movimento di pensiero nato negli Stati Uniti. L'interpretazione parziale e fuorviante è del resto spesso cominciata dagli autori stessi del movimento. Per fare solo gli esempi più classici: è Peirce a sottolineare in alcuni celebri passaggi la distanza tra il suo pragmaticismo e il pragmatismo jamesiano; è Rorty a indicare in Peirce un rappresentante di una vecchia concezione rappresentazionalista della conoscenza; è lo stesso Papini che divide i pragmatisti italiani in logici e magici. Sono solo alcuni esempi, tratti dai protagonisti stessi di quel

movimento, che rendono comprensibile l'atteggiamento dei critici che, in fondo, è partito quasi sempre dall'assunto dell'inesatta ma fortunatissima immagine di Lovejoy sull'indefinibilità del pragmatismo (Lovejoy 1908) per poi decidere di volta in volta se considerare il pragmatismo come quello di Peirce a scapito di James, quello deweyano a scapito di quello peirceano, quello neo- a scapito di quello classico. È un tipo di trappola che ha coinvolto la maggioranza dei critici e che, ovviamente, non ha escluso il panorama italiano nelle diverse ondate di lettura del pragmatismo (Maddalena 2014; Bella 2019). L'insistenza di Calcaterra nel rilevare invece la profonda unitarietà nasce certamente dagli studi su Habermas e Apel (Calcaterra 1984, 1987), in quanto lettori di Peirce, ma anche dall'analisi dell'opera di Gadamer. Tale convinzione si fortifica nel dialogo con molti amici e allievi interpreti del pragmatismo e si stabilizza intorno al concetto di continuità come principio antidualistico che pervade l'intero progetto degli autori che si riconoscono nel pragmatismo (Maddalena 2009; Baggio 2015; Bella 2019; Santarelli 2021). Tuttavia, l'occasione di questo simposio sul libro *Il progetto comune dei pragmatisti* permette forse di approfondire l'origine di questa profonda convinzione unitaria che gli studi filologici internazionali tendono a confermare con sempre maggior forza, come dimostrato, ad esempio, dalla pubblicazione del carteggio Peirce-James, pubblicato peraltro solo in italiano in una collana co-diretta dalla stessa Calcaterra (Peirce & James 2011). Da dove è nata in lei questa convinzione? Quali sono i suoi antecedenti culturali e temperamentali?

- 3 Il libro permette anche di domandare a Rosa Maria Calcaterra un secondo approfondimento. Se sono sbagliate le critiche che dividono e segmentano l'esperienza di pensiero pragmatista, occorre trovare quali siano i punti comuni dell'intero movimento, al di là dell'aria di famiglia di wittgensteiniana memoria. È uno sforzo che Calcaterra compie molte volte nel suo percorso, dall'*Introduzione al pragmatismo* del 1997, passando per il manuale *Il pragmatismo* del 2015 e finendo con questo volume (Calcaterra 2024). In questi sforzi di definizione permane la profonda concezione del fallibilismo, inteso come chiave epistemologica dell'intero movimento. I pragmatisti non sono fallibilisti per una sorta di *understatement*, falsamente umile, di origine morale. “Invero, l'obiettivo polemico dei pragmatisti, e dello stesso James, non è l'operatività della ragione umana quanto invece l'inadeguatezza delle immagini essenzialiste e statiche della razionalità, l'insufficienza dei criteri usati dalle filosofie tradizionali, la loro astrattezza e mancanza di attenzione all'estrema complessità del mondo umano” (*ibid.*: 15). Come detto, rimane anche centrale la nozione di continuismo od olismo, che è anche la chiave che lega la lettura calcatteriana del pragmatismo con la tradizione analitica derivante da Quine e giustamente accolta nel manuale già citato tra le varie forme di pragmatismo.
- 4 Negli articoli di Calcaterra si approfondisce inoltre l'idea del consequenzialismo, implicito nella massima pragmatica e che trova nella contestazione del linguaggio privato del Wittgenstein delle *Ricerche* un buon alleato. Più in generale e più in profondità forse il consequenzialismo si allea con l'esternalismo che del resto si trova declinato con sempre maggior forza man mano che il pragmatismo matura, dalla logica strumentale di Dewey all'idea di identità sociale di Mead fino ad arrivare alle attuali proposte di filosofie embodied o di filosofie del gesto (Maddalena 2015; Baggio 2024).
- 5 Più problematica mi pare rimanga, nel percorso di Calcaterra, la questione del fondamento della ricerca e della conoscenza umana. Mentre il testo del 1997 chiaramente indicava l'anti-fondazionalismo come una caratteristica del pragmatismo,

qui l'anti-fondazionalismo duro sembra scomparire a favore di una posizione più mediata che rifiuta sì il fondamento apriori ed essenzialista ma non quello che fa capo a ciò che Dewey avrebbe chiamato "metafisica naturalizzata." A me sembra che il continuismo già ricordato abbia operato anche nel pensiero di Calcaterra sciogliendo il dualismo fondazionalismo/antifondazionalismo in un rapporto più rispettoso del senso comune tra ciò che riceviamo e ciò che costruiamo, tra strutture epistemiche e avvenimento conoscitivo. In questo senso, l'olismo calcatteriano sembra andare più nella direzione del *foundherentism* di Susan Haack (a sua volta giustamente inclusa tra i grandi interpreti del pragmatismo) che non in quella di una negazione postmoderna di ogni fondamento, in ogni sua accezione (Haack 2009). Trovandomi di fronte alla medesima situazione epistemica, e con più frequentazione della proposta peirceana che afferisce a un realismo scotista, mi sono personalmente convinto della paradossale soluzione di un realismo metafisico a posteriori, che preveda non solo un'epistemologia ma anche una metafisica molto diversa da quelle conosciute. Tuttavia, è chiaro che si tratta di una teoria ancora da precisare ed elaborare mentre quella di Haack, che però l'autrice inglese-americana ascrive al solo Peirce e non all'intero movimento filosofico, si ferma all'aspetto epistemico che riesce a provare con adeguatezza e solidità.

- 6 È questa la via che Calcaterra ha imboccato? Ella considera di poterla applicare all'intero movimento pragmatista? Tale via resta neutra riguardo a una dimensione metafisica?
- 7 Un'ultima questione nasce dalle osservazioni di Rosa Maria Calcaterra sul rapporto tra Peirce e Kant.¹ Dopo aver ricordato che la lettura "kantiana" di Peirce proposta da Habermas e Apel è stato un lasciapassare importante per riaffermare la rilevanza filosofica di Peirce e del pragmatismo nella seconda metà del Novecento, Calcaterra riassume i caratteri kantiani dell'opera di Peirce: "Per puntualizzare in prima approssimazione tale influenza, può ancora oggi tornare utile lo schema suggerito da J. Feibelman in un saggio storiograficamente determinante, dove i punti basilari di raccordo tra il filosofo di Königsberg e Peirce vengono così elencati: (a) l'architettura della filosofia; (b) le basi logiche della metafisica; (c) i limiti del razionalismo; (d) i limiti dell'empirismo; (e) l'unità di logica ed esperienza; (f) il carattere logico dell'azione" (Calcaterra 2024: 9-10). Successivamente Calcaterra fa notare come, però, molte teorie – a cominciare alla rivisitazione della lista delle categorie – inaugurassero poi sentieri diversi, e alle volte opposti, nell'impianto epistemologico del filosofo americano. È chiaro che queste osservazioni servono a Calcaterra per stabilire da un lato la verità storica della rinascita degli studi pragmatisti verso la fine del secolo scorso e, dall'altro, il chiaro sbilanciamento – o addirittura la "sopravvalutazione" (*ibid.*: 10) – che la filosofia analitica dominante ha sempre operato a favore dell'opera di Peirce, considerata quasi opposta o comunque di rango superiore a quelle di James e Dewey, per limitarci ai cosiddetti "classici" del pragmatismo. Da qui Calcaterra comincia il proprio discorso unitario, come si è detto più rispettoso di quanto avvenuto storicamente, filologicamente e filosoficamente.
- 8 Rimane aperta la questione kantiana, nel suo aspetto filologico e in quello culturale. Sul primo, nella *scholarship* peirceana, anche degli ultimi decenni, si affrontano due posizioni. Da un lato quella di chi tende a far rientrare Peirce in una sorta di neo-kantismo. In questa lettura, Peirce comincerebbe il suo percorso intellettuale da un'interpretazione idealista di Kant per spostarsi progressivamente verso un trascendentalismo più fedele all'autore tedesco, sottolineando in quest'ultimo tutti i

caratteri “realisti” dell’estetica e dell’analitica trascendentale (Gava & Stern 2016). Dall’altro lato – in una posizione che condivido – si trova invece chi vede Peirce muovere da un idealismo soggettivo iniziale a un idealismo oggettivo finale, laddove quest’ultimo unisce il retaggio hegeliano con l’idea evoluzionistica e con il realismo metafisico à la Scoto che Peirce considerava corrispondente ai suoi studi matematici (Colapietro 2004, 2020; Maddalena 2019).

- 9 Queste due posizioni filologiche, che hanno ovviamente interesse limitato, diventano più intriganti e rilevanti sul piano culturale. Alla prima lettura è abbinata una sostanziale approvazione del progetto analitico che è stato ed è così influente nella storia della filosofia contemporanea. La correzione del trascendentalismo in senso realista è utilizzata per giustificare un’opposizione ad aperture metafisiche o politiche considerate estreme, rimanendo in fondo all’interno del razionalismo contemporaneo. Alla seconda interpretazione si collegano invece prospettive più aperte, spesso in contestazione con il progetto moderno e razionalista della filosofia. In questo senso, si trovano orizzonti unitari e paradossali tra il postmodernismo e la filosofia della matematica contemporanea, la riabilitazione di temi e filosofie medievali e orientali. L’opera di Calcaterra sembra stabilirsi a metà tra questi due versanti. La stima per l’opera di C.I. Lewis – testimoniata dal saggio su “Il ‘pragmatismo concettuale’ di Clarence Irving Lewis” – il rispetto del dettato scientifico, l’attenzione al linguaggio paiono confermare un appoggio al progetto razionalista che invece altre osservazioni – a partire da quella decisiva dell’anti-soggettivismo del pragmatismo (Calcaterra 2024: 16) – sembrano negare. Quest’ultima caratteristica, infatti, ricorda proprio l’etichetta di “filosofie della coscienza” che Jean Cavaillès aveva attribuito a tutti i tentativi di salvataggio del progetto razionalista kantiano. Anche Cavaillès si proponeva di partecipare a questo orizzonte ma voleva farlo senza incorrere nel medesimo soggettivismo o nel riduzionismo scienziato e a questo doveva collaborare la sua nozione di gesto matematico, superamento delle problematiche soggetto/oggetto, invenzione/scoperta, interpretazione/giustificazione (Cavaillès 2008). Cavaillès fu ucciso dai nazisti in quanto membro della resistenza francese e non poté mai verificare se la sua filosofia sarebbe riuscita nel compito di superare Kant senza abbandonarlo. È un compito che rimane aperto e al quale mi pare che l’opera di Rosa Maria Calcaterra tenda, preferendo questa posizione mediana a quella di un totale anti-kantismo sia come chiave di lettura del pragmatismo sia come prospettiva filosofica.
- 10 Quest’ultima questione può così chiudere la mia partecipazione a questo simposio ma non senza aver ricordato quanta gratitudine si debba all’opera di Rosa Maria Calcaterra per l’intuizione profonda di questa unitarietà che, credo, diventerà presto e giustamente la *koiné* dell’interpretazione mondiale del pragmatismo.

BIBLIOGRAFIA

BAGGIO Guido, (2015), *La mente bio-sociale. Filosofia e psicologia in G.H. Mead*, Pisa, ETS.

- BAGGIO Guido, (2024), "Gesturing language," in Giovanni Maddalena, Fabio Ferrucci, Michela Bella & Matteo Santarelli (eds), *Gestures: Approaches, Uses, Developments*, Berlin, De Gruyter.
- BELLA Michela, (2019), *Ontology after Philosophical Psychology*, Lanham, Lexington.
- CALCATERRA Rosa Maria, (1984), *Ideologia e razionalità. Saggio su Jürgen Habermas*, Roma, Gangemi.
- CALCATERRA Rosa Maria, (1987), "Oggettività e verità nella scienza: Habermas e Peirce," *Il pensiero. Rivista di filosofia*, 28(1-2), 67-88.
- CALCATERRA Rosa Maria, (1997), *Introduzione al pragmatismo americano*, Roma-Bari, Laterza.
- CALCATERRA Rosa Maria, (2013), "Logic, Semiotics, and Ontology: Peirce's amended Kantianism," in Roberta Lanfredini & Alberto Peruzzi (eds), *A Plea for Balance in Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Paolo Parrini*, Pisa, ETS, 411-22.
- CALCATERRA Rosa Maria, (2015), "Categorical Ways of Acting. Remarks on C. I. Lewis's Amendment of Kantian a priori," *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, 7(1), 40-53. Online: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejpap.368>.
- CALCATERRA Rosa Maria, (2024), *Il progetto comune dei pragmatisti*, Lanciano, Carabba.
- CALCATERRA Rosa Maria, MADDALENA Giovanni & Giancarlo MARCHETTI, (2015), *Il pragmatismo. Dalle origini agli sviluppi contemporanei*, Roma, Carocci.
- CAVAILLÈS Jean, (2008), *Sur la logique et la théorie de la science*, Paris, Vrin.
- COLAPIETRO Vincent, (2004), "Portrait of an Historicist: An Alternative Reading of Peircean Semiotic," *Semiotiche*, 2, 49-68.
- COLAPIETRO Vincent, (2020), *Acción, sociabilidad y drama: un retrato pragmatista del animal humano*, La Plata, EDULP.
- GAVA Gabriele & Robert STERN, (2016), *Pragmatism, Kant, and Transcendental Philosophy*, London and New York, Routledge.
- HAACK Susan, (2009), *Evidence and Inquiry*, Amherst, Prometheus Books.
- LOVEJOY Arthur O., (1908), "The Thirteen Pragmatisms. I," *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, 5(1), 5-12. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2012277>.
- MADDALENA Giovanni, (2009), *Metafisica per assurdo. Peirce e i problemi dell'epistemologia contemporanea*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino.
- MADDALENA Giovanni, (2014), "The Three Waves of Italian Reception of Peirce," *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, 6(1). Online: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejpap.484>.
- MADDALENA Giovanni, (2015), *The Philosophy of Gesture*, Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press.
- MADDALENA Giovanni, (2019), "Anti-Kantianism as a Necessary Characteristic of Pragmatism," in Krzysztof Piotr Skowroński & Sami Pihlström (eds), *Pragmatist Kant: Pragmatism, Kant, and Kantianism in the Twenty-first Century*, Helsinki, Nordic Pragmatism Network, 43-59.
- PEIRCE Charles Sanders & William JAMES, (2011), *Alle origini del pragmatismo: corrispondenza tra C.S. Peirce e W. James*, Giovanni Maddalena & Marco Annoni (eds), Torino, Aragno.
- SANTARELLI Matteo, (2021), *La filosofia sociale del pragmatismo*, Bologna, Clueb.

NOTE

1. Sul rapporto Peirce-Kant e Lewis-Kant si veda anche Calcaterra 2013 e 2015.
-

AUTORE

GIOVANNI MADDALENA

Università del Molise
maddalena[at]unimol.it

Alcune domande riguardo il progetto comune dei pragmatisti

Marco Stango

- 1 Il ricco testo di Rosa Maria Calcaterra (2024) ha, tra i molti altri, il pregio di esprimere nel titolo l'interpretazione complessiva che si ritrova poi dettagliata nel corso delle sue quasi quattrocento pagine: "Il progetto comune dei pragmatisti." Come è noto agli studiosi, che il pragmatismo possa essere considerato o meno un'impresa unitaria è sempre stato tema di disputa sin da quando il nome "pragmatismo" è stato introdotto. Tra gli scettici che rispondono con un no risoluto e i dogmatici che controbattono con un altrettanto risoluto sì, stanno studiosi più cauti, come Calcaterra, per i quali i pragmatisti americani, pur esibendo differenze anche radicali quanto a personalità filosofica e conclusioni, sono ciononostante coinvolti in un'impresa di pensiero unitaria.
- 2 Ci sono diverse e interessanti discussioni di tipo storico-filologico su questo problema (West 1989; Bernstein 2010; Menand 2001; Koopman 2009; Brandom 2011; Misak 2013; Pearce 2020; Girel 2021), e nel resto di questo breve intervento avrò qualcosa da dire al riguardo. Da un altro punto di vista però, diciamo così, più speculativo, mi sembra di poter dire che Calcaterra, assieme con chi non solo possa dirsi studioso di pragmatismo, ma anche voglia effettivamente praticare la filosofia nel solco aperto dai pragmatisti, debba, e a ragione, considerare il pragmatismo come un'impresa unitaria di pensiero. Il libro di Calcaterra è infatti un grande gesto di filosofia pragmatista e, come tale, pur non disprezzando l'analisi, deve da ultimo privilegiare la sintesi.¹ Sebbene Calcaterra, a quanto mi è dato di capire, non proponga una nuova versione di pragmatismo, ella tuttavia propone il pragmatismo nuovamente, cioè rinnova per il lettore di oggi la persuasività di un modo organico, seppur vario, di fare filosofia. Ciò conferma ancora una volta quanto molti filosofi negli Stati Uniti d'America spesso ammettono con stupore: che gran parte della vitalità contemporanea del pragmatismo americano si esprime oltreoceano, in Europa e certamente in Italia.²
- 3 Intervenire su questo libro non è cosa facile a farsi, proprio a ragione dell'ampiezza degli autori e dei temi trattati. Non sapendo bene da che parte prendere, ho deciso, forse in modo poco saggio, di dire qualcosa su ciascuna (o quasi) delle parti del libro

(una introduzione più undici capitoli), sottolineando gli aspetti più interessanti della lettura di Calcaterra e sollevando di volta in volta le questioni che mi sembrano più pressanti per poter continuare questo comune progetto del pragmatismo. Mi sembra inutile sottolineare che, in buono spirito pragmatista, le mie domande sono l'espressione di un "dubbio vivente," fatto dunque non solo di "carta," ma anche e soprattutto di una reale incapacità da parte mia di fornire a esso una soluzione che mi paia del tutto soddisfacente.

- 4 Nell'Introduzione al volume, che porta per titolo "L'unità dinamica del pragmatismo," Calcaterra propone le linee essenziali della sua lettura continuista del pragmatismo. Anche il Putnam di cui Calcaterra tratta nel decimo capitolo aveva sottolineato che una certa unità di visione e di intenti orientava i pragmatisti classici, identificando quattro tesi caratteristiche: (1) l'antiscetticismo; (2) il fallibilismo; (3) il non-dualismo tra fatti e valori; (4) l'anti-intellettualismo, cioè la tesi secondo cui, in una certa misura, la pratica è prioritaria in filosofia. E, sempre secondo Putnam, sarebbe il mix di antiscetticismo e fallibilismo l'aspetto più caratteristico e originale dei pragmatisti. Calcaterra esplicita altri due capisaldi dell'atteggiamento pragmatista: il rifiuto del fondazionalismo moderno, sia di matrice empirista che di matrice razionalista, come controparte del fallibilismo;³ e la messa in crisi del soggettivismo moderno di origine cartesiana a favore di un alquanto robusta e, ovviamente, non-soggettivista, nozione di esperienza.
- 5 Non ci si faccia ingannare da tutti questi "anti-" e "non-," come se il pragmatismo fosse esclusivamente, o innanzitutto, una forza filosofica di opposizione e negazione. Chiunque abbia letto una sola pagina di pragmatismo saprà infatti che il pragmatismo è innanzitutto una filosofia positiva e propositiva, diciamo pure un'opera di costruzione e ricostruzione. Ciononostante, è pur vero che sono innanzitutto questi "anti-" e "non-" di natura metodologica ad accomunare i pragmatisti da Peirce a Rorty (e Calcaterra).⁴ E mi pare ugualmente indiscutibile che, da un punto di vista metafisico, per citare un esempio fondamentale anche se non unico, la storia del pragmatismo evidenzia un progressivo abbandono della posizione realista, perseguita da Peirce nella forma di un rinnovato realismo scolastico estremo, a favore di varie forme di nominalismo, da quelle tecnicamente più raffinate, soprattutto di Dewey e Mead, a quelle forse meno tecniche ma certamente più pirotecniche e iconoclaste del costruttivismo linguistico di Rorty.⁵ La prima domanda, dunque, sorge sulla base di questa osservazione: come giustificare il criterio continuista a favore di quello discontinuista, che pure sembra essere avallato dai testi? Si dovrà forse vedere nel pragmatismo l'inverarsi dello spirito della filosofia moderna per cui è la questione del "metodo" quella che decide tutto? O forse, come suggerivo sopra, il pragmatismo deve essere necessariamente letto unitariamente e sinteticamente da chiunque ne voglia continuare il progetto?
- 6 Il primo capitolo, "Emozioni e sensazioni nella semiotica di Ch. S. Peirce," propone una interpretazione logico-semiotica dell'esperienza che prende le mosse da ma va ben oltre la questione delle emozioni e delle sensazioni. Semplificando di molto il contenuto del capitolo, si potrebbe dire che nella lettura di Calcaterra la nozione peirceana di esperienza conduce alla possibilità di porre di nuovo la questione del realismo metafisico in un modo, diciamo così, non ingenuo. Peirce infatti, pur sottolineando l'irriducibile "secondità" dell'esperienza, non cede mai alla tentazione di affermare un realismo ingenuo, basato su una presunta oggettività immediata, cioè priva di mediazione (si pensi, a questo riguardo, alla critica peirceana dell'intuizione). Inoltre, la mediazione entro cui si dà la realtà non è quella stabilita dal soggetto moderno con le

sue leggi e condizioni (nelle sue varie versioni, dal cogito di Cartesio all'io trascendentale di Kant), bensì quella, appunto, dell'esperienza intesa come segno, come organismo logico-semiotico in crescita. Alla luce di ciò, si potrebbe forse dire che, con Peirce, il pragmatismo riapre in grande stile, e con maggior rigore, la questione del realismo metafisico, facendo propria la lezione della modernità (che, cioè, l'oggettività immediata di certa metafisica pre-moderna è nozione parziale e quindi da ricalibrare con una riflessione sulle condizioni di possibilità dell'esperienza) ma andando oltre i suoi vicoli ciechi, e in particolare, come si diceva, il vicolo cieco del soggettivismo e del dualismo gnoseologico?

- 7 Il secondo capitolo estende la trattazione di Peirce con una riflessione sulla natura del pensiero dal titolo "Psicologia e logica normativa in Peirce: Un legame incerto?" Calcaterra propone un'interessante lettura "naturalista" non-riduzionista secondo cui c'è continuità tra fenomeni psicologici e logici. Il punto centrale del capitolo consiste nel tentativo di comprendere come vada intesa questa unità nella differenza di fenomeni psicologici e pensieri sottostanti a leggi logiche. Il tema è posto alla luce del problema della relazione tra logica normativa e psicologia descrittiva. In questo caso, mi chiedo se sia possibile intendere la continuità tra fenomeni psicologici e pensieri logici facendo appello alla nozione di servizio, cioè il servizio che gli atti descritti dalla psicologia debbano rendere alle leggi logiche di cui la mente è capace. O in altre parole: è corretto esplicitare la posizione di Peirce dicendo che è come se gli atti che la psicologia descrive dovessero rispondere a una doppia teleologia, una propria (funzionare in un certo modo secondo leggi psicologiche più o meno fisse, al di fuori delle quali c'è patologia) e una in qualche modo a essi superiore (corrispondere alle leggi della logica, alle fuori delle quali c'è l'errore)?
- 8 Nel terzo capitolo, intitolato "La verità in corso d'opera: Razionalità e sentimenti in William James," Calcaterra introduce l'annoso problema della teoria (delle teorie?) pragmatista della verità, un tema che ricorre spesso in diversi punti nel resto del libro. Calcaterra mostra, in modo convincente e tramite una ricostruzione esaustiva, che per James, preso qui come caso emblematico dell'approccio pragmatista alla verità, non è possibile trattare della verità in modo soddisfacente senza mostrare il modo in cui le credenze che prendiamo per vere strutturano e danno ordine alla nostra esperienza. E proprio il tema centrale dell'esperienza o, forse ancora meglio, delle esperienze, a richiedere un più ricca elaborazione del concetto di verità. Infatti, l'idea vera è un fatto interpretato e messo in pratica che diventa criterio di mediazione delle esperienze – una "strada," se si vuole usare questa metafora, che mi permette di andare con successo da questa esperienza a quella. Avendo speso un po' di tempo a riflettere sull'approccio pragmatista alla verità (Stango 2022), vorrei dire che la proposta del pragmatismo mi sembra ancora largamente fraintesa (nonostante i continui tentativi di chiarificazione, da James a Calcaterra), la qual cosa è tanto più difficile da accettare quanto più la proposta del pragmatismo mi sembri avere un valore filosofico indiscutibile. Mi chiedo dunque se, come ulteriore tentativo di esplicitazione o chiarificazione, non si possa dire la cosa seguente. Non solo la teoria corrispondentista della verità soffrirebbe di una certa parzialità – la sua astrattezza rispetto al formarsi e al riformarsi delle credenze e rispetto al ruolo di mediazione di successo tra esperienze che credenze vere hanno – bensì anche di una certa degenerazione dovuta alla logica interna del fondazionalismo moderno. Tale degenerazione consisterebbe nell'intendere la verità innanzitutto o esclusivamente come "certezza" e nel aver dunque occultato che la verità è, per dirla in termini cristiani, anche e soprattutto "via" e "vita." In altre

parole, è possibile dire che James in particolare e il pragmatismo in generale esplicitino una virtualità essenziale ma prima rimasta nascosta dell'idea classica, corrispondentista, di verità, cioè, l'idea che la verità non solo sia provata dalle sue conseguenze ma, più profondamente, che essa si esprima come fecondità nell'esperienza e per l'esperienza, oltre la riduzione moderna della verità a certezza? Anche Peirce, d'altra parte, fa proprio l'unico principio di logica esplicitamente insegnato da Gesù: "Li riconoscerete dai loro frutti."

- 9 Il quarto capitolo, "Dal pathos all'ethos della contingenza. James e la biologia darwiniana," tratta dei vari temi e problemi collegati all'"umanesimo radicale" di James. Di notevole interesse è la ricostruzione del continuismo metodologico che secondo James deve attraversare, sempre senza univocizzazioni riduzioniste, saperi diversi quali la biologia darwiniana, la psicologia sperimentale e la filosofia, in specie la metafisica. Una questione tanto interessante quanto spinosa emerge rispetto alla nozione di esperienza, con particolare riferimento al tema dell'auto-sussistenza dell'esperienza in chiave antiplatonica. Calcaterra descrive a questo proposito una certa insofferenza del pragmatismo rispetto a quelle filosofie ritenute "metafisiche" in senso deleterio le quali, a discapito dell'esperienza, cercherebbero al di là dell'esperienza qualcosa o qualcuno in grado di rendere conto dell'esperienza stessa. Ora, il pragmatismo di James, ma non solo il suo, ha sempre giustamente sottolineato la necessità di dare il giusto peso alle relazioni tra cose ed esperienze che si evidenziano all'interno dell'esperienza. Mi chiedo dunque: perché le relazioni che connettono diverse esperienze in modo continuo non possono essere considerate esse stesse il modo (corretto!) tramite cui reinterpretare alcune categorie tradizionali, per esempio, quella di sostanza, come se tali categorie venissero riscoperte in modo spontaneo dal pragmatismo in opposizione a e come superamento dell'impasse di alcune versioni moderne (penso qui, in particolare, alla teoria della sostanza nell'interpretazione di Locke). A ma pare, infatti, che sia proprio in virtù del principio continuista che si possa e si debba riscoprire la verità del fatto che, se di sostanza si può parlare, se ne deve parlare precisamente nel senso di ciò che si dà nell'esperienza o come esperienza, e non come un qualcosa di misteriosamente presupposto all'esperienza o introdotto nell'esperienza per permettere una fuga da essa. Mi sono spesso chiesto se il pragmatismo, nei momenti in cui rifiuta principi quali la sostanza, non faccia rientrare dalla porta quello stesso dualismo che esso aveva gettato, e giustamente, dalla finestra. Il ragionamento sbagliato qui sarebbe: la sostanza (o l'idea platonica, o qualunque simile retaggio metafisico) deve essere quello che esiste al di là dell'esperienza; ma l'esperienza è assoluta e auto-sussistente, ergo, non c'è sostanza. Al contrario, mi pare, è proprio nell'esperienza e come esperienza che la sostanza si manifesta. Si potrebbe forse dire, tentando una formulazione un po' ardita, che alcune esperienze "sostanzializzano" proprio in base a quelle relazioni continue di cui si discute nel capitolo. Si potrebbe forse tentare questa strada per superare una certa diffidenza nei confronti di alcune metafisiche classiche che è ancora possibile rinvenire in molti pragmatisti?
- 10 Un altro tema degno di nota in questo capitolo, che mi limito semplicemente a segnalare, è l'idea di James secondo cui il significato profondo del darwinismo consisterebbe, in fin dei conti, nel mostrare che l'indeterminatezza, la casualità e l'ambiguità sono tratti irriducibili della realtà. Mi pare che questa tesi vada inclusa in modo più esplicito e chiaro di quanto venga solitamente fatto nelle varie discussioni del pragmatismo come progetto comune, e il libro di Calcaterra ha anche il merito di fare

precisamente questo. In effetti, che il caso sia un tratto strutturale e positivo della realtà, in specie come ingrediente necessario al fenomeno della crescita, mi pare un aspetto di vera innovazione del pragmatismo, non solo rispetto alle varie forme di determinismo moderno, ma anche rispetto all'eredità platonico-aristotelica.

- 11 Il capitolo cinque è dedicato a una presentazione generale della filosofia di Dewey e ha per titolo "Idee concrete. John Dewey e la forma strumentalista del pragmatismo." Sono molti i temi affrontati, dal lascito del cristianesimo e dell'idealismo nel pensiero di Dewey alla centralità della teoria dell'indagine come perno intorno a cui ruotano le diverse parti della sua filosofia, dal nesso essenziale tra idee e vita concreta alla democrazia come "fatto spirituale" e principio architettonico del deweyanesimo. Uno dei punti più interessanti del capitolo è la discussione di come Dewey renda esplicito un caposaldo del pragmatismo, e cioè che la razionalità è sempre "sociale." Questo è tema di grandissima importanza, che in Dewey ha ascendenze filosofiche e scientifiche (il metodo sperimentale!) e implicazioni ovunque, specie in ambito etico e politico. E la sua importanza sta nel fatto che ancora oggi, nelle discussioni in cui si adopera la categoria di "ragione pubblica," si finisce, erroneamente a mio avviso, per assumere come evidente che ci sia anche una ragione privata. Il pragmatismo ci ricorda, a suo modo, che la figura originaria della razionalità va di pari passo con l'intersoggettività.
- 12 Il capitolo affronta anche la ben nota teoria deweyana dell'indagine, secondo cui il pensiero è motivato da e si esprime in forma genuina nel contesto di una situazione problematica e ha per fine la risoluzione del problema, la ricostruzione dell'esperienza oltre il problema secondo sintesi sempre più intelligenti, significative e inclusive. Chiederei a questo riguardo (ma mi rendo conto che la domanda sia di una vastità notevole): c'è spazio nella filosofia di Dewey per un tipo di pensiero che non sia orientato alla soluzione di un problema? È possibile rapportarsi nel modo del pensiero a qualcosa che non si possa risolvere?
- 13 Nel capitolo sei, "John Dewey e la grammatica della democrazia," Calcaterra affronta molteplici problemi di natura epistemologica e metafisica prima di giungere al tema centrale della democrazia. Accenno a due di questi temi. Il primo tema è quello del rapporto tra logica descrittiva e logica normativa, tra psicologismo e antipsicologismo, che Dewey cerca di affrontare offrendo una visione d'insieme non-dicotomica (la quale, come si sa, non parve soddisfacente a Peirce). Il secondo tema è la tesi deweyana del pensiero come fenomeno naturale. Nell'affermare ciò, Dewey intende sostenere che il pensiero, alla stregua degli altri fenomeni naturali, esercita un potere di trasformazione su ciò su cui si esercita. In questo senso, di "oggetti reali" si potrà parlare solo nel senso di quegli agglomerati logico-semantici (e semiotici!) derivanti dalla sistemazione dei risultati dei diversi processi di indagine. Qui si pone un interessante problema: infatti, da una parte, è vero che di "realtà" si può parlare non come di ciò che sta "prima" o "al di là" del pensiero (o dell'indagine), come vorrebbe invece il realismo ingenuo, bensì come di ciò che si mostra "nel" pensiero, cioè, nei processi di indagine e nelle risultanti risoluzioni delle situazioni problematiche che li hanno generati. D'altra parte, però, la semantizzazione del concetto di "essere" o "reale" sulla base dei soli contenuti delle conclusioni dei processi di indagine sembra risultare in uno smembramento del reale. Se non si ammette, infatti, una qualche nozione trascendentale dell'essere (in senso scolastico), che cos'è che potrà tenere assieme tutti questi "oggetti reali"? Non c'è il rischio che l'uni-pluralità cara ai pragmatisti si frantumi in una molteplicità irrelata di frammenti? Sarà forse l'indagine

in quanto tale il loro unico collante metafisico? Sarebbe questa preoccupazione semplicemente un altro retaggio deleterio della metafisica classica? La domanda, per me, non è retorica.

- 14 Un punto cruciale connesso a questo problema emerge nel capitolo su Putnam lettore di James, a cui vorrei riferirmi qui sempre per parlare del capitolo sei. Calcaterra scrive:

A differenza di Peirce per il quale lo standard esterno al soggetto è anche concepito nei termini del suo realismo scolastico, James si limita a sostenere la connessione tra l'esistenza di una comunità pensante e la possibilità di distinguere tra soggettività e oggettività. Putnam osserva che questa idea jamesiana della comunità non costituisce un presupposto logico della giustificazione oggettiva, bensì rappresenta un requisito esistenziale e fenomenologico dell'esistenza dell'unica forma di giustificazione che noi conosciamo, cioè quella che attiene al confronto delle nostre opinioni con quelle altrui. (Calcaterra 2024: 329)

- 15 In effetti, la posizione di James rivela una verità importante ma pone anche un problema, entrambi ereditati dal Putnam che cerca di svincolarsi dal “realismo metafisico”: la verità non può significare omologazione, come se i punti di vista necessariamente particolari e limitati degli esseri umani e la molteplicità delle competenze dei diversi saperi dovessero essere superati (da Dio, da un io trascendentale, ecc.). In questo senso, il “pragmatismo poetico” di Rorty è davvero una manna culturale e filosofica (Rorty 2016). Ma tutto questo significherà perciò rigettare “la versione anti-essenzialista del concetto di realtà” (Calcaterra 2024: 331)? Putnam sottolinea il passaggio in James “dall’universo al pluriverso,” ma, perlomeno secondo una certa tradizione metafisica, quella che pratica l’analogia, la visione della realtà non può che essere uni-plurima. E se è vero che una cattiva metafisica rischia di alienare il particolare, un pluralismo infondato non rischia di diventare un’accozzaglia?
- 16 Sul piano strettamente politico, il capitolo sei affronta inoltre il tema della democrazia deweyana, forse l’aspetto più rappresentativo del pensiero di Dewey in quanto “filosofo pubblico d’America.” Come nel capitolo precedente, anche qui Calcaterra mostra efficacemente che la democrazia va intesa secondo Dewey come la concretizzazione più alta e comprensiva della razionalità umana. Sorge a questo riguardo un dubbio, e un dubbio tanto più urgente se si tiene conto del clima e dei dibattiti politici attuali. È certamente lodevole l’idea che la democrazia non si possa ridurre semplicemente a procedura, ma vada invece intesa e praticata come robusta forma di vita e di pensiero e addirittura come oggetto di una fede civica. Tuttavia, il pensiero della democrazia di Dewey sembra rivelare un’aporia dovuta a un conflitto interno. Da una parte, infatti, l’attenzione di Dewey alle pratiche concrete richiede la cura delle tradizioni. D’altro canto, un certo ideale “liberale” di eliminazione della differenze, magari perseguito sotto l’insegna della protezione delle minoranze,⁶ e una certa tendenza all’omologazione culturale, nel senso, appunto, dell’unica possibile visione “democratica” della vita, collidono drammaticamente con la tradizione, e c’è il rischio che la sacrosanta fede democratica e il lavoro per il progresso (cioè, l’aspirazione a una meno deficitaria realizzazione della giustizia e del bene comune) si trasformino in un ideologico progressismo (cioè, il progresso per il progresso). E ciò che sembra avvenire oggi è che, per perseguire il secondo punto dell’ideale democratico (la giustizia come inclusivismo indifferenziato e il progresso per il progresso), non solo si debba sacrificare il primo (la cura delle tradizioni), ma anche si debba creare un sistema statale-federale sempre più capillare e potente, certamente contrario all’idea originale del governo federale americano, il quale abbia la forza di proteggere legalmente il

progresso contro il “dogmatismo” delle tradizioni. È corretto vedere nel pensiero della democrazia di Dewey il rischio di un tale corto circuito? In caso di risposta affermativa, è possibile salvare Dewey da questa deriva? Inoltre, può l’insistenza sull’ideale democratico, come dimensione politica della mente empirico-scientifica, essere sottratto alla sua trasformazione in un monopolio di un’aristocrazia di “esperti”?

- 17 I capitoli sette e otto trattano del pensiero di Mead e hanno rispettivamente per titolo “Individuo e socialità nella scienza. Il ‘realismo sociale’ di George Herbert Mead” e “G. H. Mead: Lo spazio ambiguo della creatività.” In essi Calcaterra dettaglia in modo illuminante l’immagine socio-bio-logica dell’essere umano elaborata da Mead. Mi si permetta di ribadire qui una questione a cui ho già accennato sopra e che, forse, rappresenta l’unico punto di perplessità circa la lettura proposta da Calcaterra, secondo cui il realismo epistemologico di Mead, centrato sull’idea della natura sociale delle attività cognitive, sarebbe quasi identico alla posizione di Peirce, considerata alla luce della sua semiotica cognitiva. Calcaterra scrive: “è pur vero che bisogna fare i conti con la diversità dei linguaggi filosofici che i due autori adottano, fermo restando che è alquanto improprio segnare una linea di netta demarcazione appellandosi alla qualità metafisica del discorso peirceano e, viceversa, al naturalismo ‘antimetafisico’ di Mead” (Calcaterra 2024: 273-4). Si tratta davvero di una differenza puramente linguistica? E, pur con tutte le precisazioni necessarie, è davvero impossibile individuare una netta demarcazione tra Peirce e Mead? A me pare che una differenza fondamentale esista e ha a che fare col tema del realismo. Il “realismo epistemologico” di Mead, infatti, è “realista” se si oppone tale nozione a quella di costruttivismo, idealismo linguistico di certo postmodernismo, ecc.; ma allo stesso tempo esso non è “realista” nel senso classico e, direi, più fondamentale del termine, in quanto Mead, radicalizzando una posizione già di Dewey, mi pare essere un nominalista. E dunque, essendo il nominalismo, storicamente, l’anticamera del costruttivismo (un’anticamera molto ampia, a dire la verità, visto che ci sono voluti molti secoli per condurci da lì a qui), forse è opportuno sottolineare che il realismo epistemologico di Mead sta in un rapporto di rottura nominalista con il realismo estremo di Peirce.
- 18 Da un lato, Mead ha di nuovo il merito, al pari degli altri pragmatisti, di evitare le varie forme di realismo ingenuo, basti pensare al tema, secondo me ancora poco apprezzato nella sua flessione meadiana, dell’“oggettività delle prospettive.” Inoltre, nell’affermazione di Calcaterra secondo cui “la vera natura dell’esperienza riflessiva” sta nella “scoperta di ‘eccezioni’ agli universali e la ‘formazione di nuovi universali’,” in conformità con “l’andamento interpretativo, costruttivo e fallibilista del sapere scientifico” (Calcaterra 2024: 273), si dà giustamente voce all’importanza di tenere sempre in considerazione la natura storica e quindi rivedibile e aperta dell’umana conoscenza dell’universale. Il punto problematico però, a me pare, è che, come ho anticipato, l’universale di Mead è un universale nominalista, basato su una certa concezione del simbolo. Ora, come spiega Calcaterra, il significato universale ha a che fare con la risposta pratica, o l’azione, che il simbolo induce. Da una parte, i simboli sono il risultato di pratiche sociali. Dall’altro, proprio perché non ci sarebbe significato senza azione, l’universale non è una pura convenzione, in quanto “l’azione è strumento primario di una conoscenza ‘oggettiva’ delle cose” (Calcaterra 2024: 244). Tuttavia, come si sa, l’universale nominalista non è, almeno in prima battuta, cioè prima di passare il Rubicone del costruttivismo, una pura convenzione. Esso è invece il simbolo la cui universalità è istituita come funzione di pratiche universali giustificate sulla base di interazioni individuali con enti individuali ai quali non è ascrivibile alcuna

universalità che non sia, appunto, quella del simbolo così istituito. Mi chiedo, dunque, se non sia auspicabile continuare la grande impresa del pragmatismo, seguitando a valorizzare, come fa Mead, la natura sociale delle attività cognitive (altri direbbero la natura originariamente pubblica e intersoggettiva della ragione) ma tentando di ricalibrare l'universalità del nesso di simbolo e risposta su di un più robusto realismo.

- 19 Ciò non significa affermare, vale la pena ribadirlo, che il pragmatismo non sia stato e non possa ancora essere una grande impresa unitaria di pensiero e di azione, un “progetto comune” di ricostruzione e trasformazione filosofica. Può però significare che chi ha la bella responsabilità di portare avanti questo progetto, il quale ha ormai sedimentato per più di un secolo e si è mostrato nelle sue più varie, anche se non inconcluse, più o meno riuscite versioni, abbia anche la responsabilità di aggiustarlo, ricalibrarlo, di esaminare ogni cosa pragmatista trattenendo ciò che è buono (e lasciandosi alle spalle ciò che è meno buono). Il lavoro di Calcaterra fa questo in modo mirabile, e, come Calcaterra ha insegnato col suo lavoro a tanti, incluso il sottoscritto, che il pragmatismo sia un “progetto comune” non significa affatto che esso non possa ospitare al suo interno differenze anche notevoli (come quella del sottoscritto, che continua, spero senza cieca ostinazione, a vedere nel nominalismo di certo pragmatismo qualcosa da superare).
- 20 I miei pochi commenti e le mie ampie (forse troppo) domande in questo scritto sono un tentativo, parziale, di dare ascolto all'invito a pensare in modo pragmatico che Calcaterra ci offre. Sono moltissimi i temi e problemi affrontati da Calcaterra di cui non ho potuto trattare, ma anche questa impossibilità, io spero, può forse dare testimonianza alla vastità e importanza del suo lavoro.

BIBLIOGRAFIA

BERNSTEIN Richard J., (2010), *The Pragmatic Turn*, Cambridge, Malden, Polity Press.

BRANDON Robert, (2011), *Perspectives on Pragmatism: Classical, Recent, and Contemporary*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.

CALCATERRA Rosa Maria, (2024), *Il progetto comune dei pragmatisti*, Lanciani, Carabba.

CALCATERRA Rosa Maria, FREGA Roberto & Giovanni MADDALENA (eds), (2014), “The Reception of Peirce in the World,” *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* 6(1). Online: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejpap.479>.

GIREL Mathias, (2021), *L'Esprit en acte. Psychologie, mythologies et pratique chez les pragmatistes*, Paris, Vrin.

KOOPMAN Colin, (2009), *Pragmatism as Transition: Historicity and Hope in James, Dewey, and Rorty*, New York, Columbia University Press.

MADDALENA Giovanni, (2015), *The Philosophy of Gesture: Completing Pragmatists' Incomplete Revolution*, Montreal, London, Chicago, McGill-Queen's University Press.

MADDALENA Giovanni, (2023), “Prefazione,” in Marco Stango, *The Ideal and the Real: Studies in Pragmatism*, Sesto San Giovanni, Mimesis International.

MENAND Louis, (2001), *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

MISAK Cheryl, (2013), *The American Pragmatists*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

PEARCE Trevor, (2020), *Pragmatism’s Evolution: Organism and Environment in American Philosophy*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.

RORTY Richard, (2016), *Philosophy as Poetry*, Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press.

STANGO Marco, (2022), “Truth, Scholastic Transcendentals, and the Implications of Ideal-Realism,” *Filosofia*, 67, 201-24. Online: <https://ojs.unito.it/index.php/filosofia/article/view/7254/6255>.

WEST Cornel, (1989), *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press.

NOTE

1. Sulla nozione di gesto, si veda la proposta pragmatista di Giovanni Maddalena (2015).
2. In Europa ma non solo. Con particolare riferimento a Peirce, si veda il numero monografico curato da Rosa Maria Calcaterra, Roberto Frega e Giovanni Maddalena “The Reception of Peirce in the World” (Calcaterra, Frega & Maddalena 2014).
3. Probabilmente il tentativo pragmatista più esplicito di combinare gli aspetti positivi dell’empirismo e del razionalismo senza ricadere nelle loro strettoie è rappresentato dalla “teoria dinamica dell’a priori” e dal “metodo riflessivo” di C.I. Lewis, di cui Calcaterra tratta nel capitolo nove, “Il pragmatismo concettuale di Clarence Irving Lewis.”
4. Giovanni Maddalena sottolinea anche un altro “anti-,” cioè l’anti-kantismo, come ragione sia storico-filologica che filosofica per poter intendere il pragmatismo come un movimento unitario. Si veda Maddalena 2023.
5. Il capitolo undici discute il pragmatismo di Rorty con il titolo “Post-filosofia e migliorismo. La sfida estetica di Richard Rorty.”
6. Calcaterra (2024: 212): “Allo stesso modo, vi è una profonda corrispondenza tra il pluralismo deweyano con la suggestione di Richard Rorty che la democrazia consista ‘nel saper togliere importanza a più e più differenze tradizionali (di tribù, religione, razza, usi e simili)’ e ‘saper includere nella sfera del ‘noi’ persone immensamente diverse da se stessi’.”

AUTORE

MARCO STANGO

St. Bernard’s School of Theology and Ministry, Rochester, NY
marco.stango[at]stbernards.edu

Risposte

Rosa Maria Calcaterra

- 1 Ringrazio molto Guido Baggio e Maria Regina Brioschi per aver voluto organizzare e curare questo simposio sulla raccolta di saggi da poco pubblicata dalla casa editrice Carabba, che ha generosamente accolto il progetto del volume. A Michela Bella, Giovanni Maddalena e Marco Stango va la mia sincera gratitudine per l'attenzione puntuale e la cura con cui hanno letto i miei scritti, per i commenti e le questioni sicuramente importanti che hanno presentato e che continueranno ad alimentare le mie riflessioni. Infine ma non per ultimo, il mio ringraziamento va agli Executive Editors di *EJPAP*, Roberta Dreon e Sarin Marchetti.
- 2 Cercherò di replicare ad alcuni dei commenti che mi sono stati rivolti, certo senza completezza ma solo sperando di mantenere viva la conversazione filosofica sui temi più condivisi dalla comunità degli studiosi di pragmatismo. Sono tutte considerazioni che apprezzo molto, anche perché si inquadrano in una presentazione complessiva del mio modo di leggere gli autori cui sono dedicate le pagine del volume in discussione, cogliendo con precisione i motivi e i fili conduttori cui ho riportato la proposta di valorizzare il “progetto comune” dei pragmatisti classici e contemporanei.
- 3 Michela Bella ha subito richiamato l'immagine della ricerca filosofica offerta da Peirce per indicarne la decisiva importanza rispetto allo stile teoretico e metodologico che ho cercato di mettere in opera nei miei studi. La nota metafora della fune composta da fili numerosi e sottili come appello a raccogliere lo spirito della ricerca scientifica nello svolgimento dell'attività filosofica, difatti, mi ha guidata fin dall'inizio, suggerendomi man mano uno stile di lettura delle opere dei pragmatisti classici e contemporanei che potesse individuare le consonanze e le possibili integrazioni oltre che le loro differenze.
- 4 Con ciò rispondo a Giovanni Maddalena che mi chiede da dove è nata la mia convinzione che vi sia un “progetto comune” nelle filosofie pragmatiste, rintracciabile nei testi al di là delle specifiche divergenze che gli stessi rappresentanti del pragmatismo dichiarano di portare avanti. Maddalena parla di “unitarietà” e mi interessa mantenere l'idea del dinamismo che la intesse, come appunto si evince dal titolo del capitolo introduttivo del volume in discussione – “L'unità dinamica del pragmatismo.” Credo che ciò permetta di afferrare un requisito molto importante del

movimento pragmatista, vale a dire la concezione della filosofia come attività sempre *in fieri*, come apertura a domande, prospettive e teorie sempre da rinnovare ovvero da mettere alla prova della concretezza della realtà umana, piuttosto che come costruzione di credenze e sistemi filosofici più o meno tendenzialmente conclusi. Mi si chiede ancora quali siano gli “antecedenti culturali e temperamentali” della mia lettura “unitaria” del pragmatismo e qui mi limito a dire che ho sempre diffidato delle chiusure reciproche che le diverse linee di pensiero hanno spesso manifestato specialmente in ambito accademico. Forse è anche una questione di temperamento, ma ritengo infruttuose e, a dire il vero, nocive le diatribe tra scuole di pensiero, le battaglie sulle parole, l’acribia filologica che si esercita spesso a sfavore della comprensione del significato teorico più profondo ma anche dell’importanza culturale che ciascuna posizione filosofica porta con sé. Quest’ultimo aspetto mi ha sempre interpellata a partire dalla mia tesi di laurea in Filosofia Morale, che era dedicata al rapporto tra ideologia e razionalità, con specifica attenzione ai rappresentanti della Scuola di Francoforte, segnatamente a Jürgen Habermas. L’approfondimento del pensiero di Habermas, il suo interesse per Peirce e, successivamente per le riflessioni di Mead sull’attività linguistico-simbolica, mi hanno portata a confrontarmi con l’importante interpretazione della filosofia peirceana proposta da Karl O. Apel e con l’ermeneutica gadameriana, specialmente riguardo alle rispettive concezioni del linguaggio e della comunicazione come risposte post-cartesiane ai problemi del rapporto tra conoscenza e prassi. Di qui, la necessità di verificare sui testi di Peirce le critiche habermasiane al suo realismo e, in parallelo, la lettura trascendentalista di Apel della semiotica peirceana. Su tutti e due i versanti di ricerca mi sono trovata in parziale disaccordo poiché, da una parte, non riscontravo in Peirce la forma di realismo metafisico imputatagli da Habermas; dall’altra parte, l’interpretazione neo-kantiana di Apel mi sembrava perdesse di vista le novità introdotte da Peirce, per esempio la sua recezione dell’evoluzionismo e il conseguente influsso sulla sua visuale epistemologica. Resta il fatto che la mia formazione nell’ambito della filosofia morale ha favorito una costante attenzione al rapporto tra teoria e pratica, al quale evidentemente l’intero movimento pragmatista riserva uno spazio filosofico centrale.

- 5 La metafora peirceana della fune, richiamata da Michela Bella, ci parla di fili numerosi benché sottili da intrecciare per la costruzione di una filosofia che, del resto, sappia partire – come ogni attività sperimentale – da “premesse tangibili.” Per quanto mi riguarda, queste ultime risiedono nella forma polivalente che i pragmatisti classici hanno dato al concetto di esperienza, vale a dire la loro basilare attitudine a declinarlo secondo i criteri della verifica intersoggettiva la quale, a sua volta, si specifica nell’analisi e valutazione dell’agire, degli abiti attuali e virtuali che di volta in volta si producono. Ma analisi e verifica sono di per sé esperienze relazionali e dinamiche, cioè fonti di nuovi potenziali conoscitivi e pratici, oltre che test di validazione, correzione oppure negazione di credenze e asserzioni teoriche e pratiche. Perciò credo che il punto di forza della nozione pragmatista di esperienza si trovi nell’idea che essa costituisca un processo dinamico che definisco “circolarità virtuosa” nel senso che forma il punto di abbrivio, il punto di approdo e ancora di nuova partenza delle attività cognitive e comportamentali. In altre parole, il concetto pragmatista di esperienza “mette in circolo” – per usare un’espressione di Michela Bella – il campo concreto dell’azione, la sfera logico-semantiche e la sfera cognitiva, sotto l’egida della dinamica di individualità e socialità.

- 6 Da questa angolatura, ho potuto ritrovare “fili numerosi e sottili” che legano il pensiero dei pragmatisti ad un progetto comune di rinnovamento della filosofia tradizionale. Persino in Rorty che, com'è noto, ha voluto accantonare la nozione di esperienza a favore di un'attenzione quasi esclusiva alle pratiche del linguaggio, credo vi sia un preciso richiamo a valutare criticamente ciò che queste ultime presuppongono e comportano sul piano intersoggettivo, politico e sociale, oltre che nella costruzione dell'identità personale. Mi riferisco in particolare alle sue tesi sui *final vocabularies* e all'invito a un confronto interpersonale e interculturale che Rorty rimanda alla possibilità di incrementare la conoscenza di vocabolari diversi dal proprio. Inoltre, a dispetto della presunta opposizione di pubblico e privato, credo che il suo neo-pragmatismo rappresenti – come Bella stessa suggerisce – una forma interessante dell'intreccio tra dimensione sociale o “sentimento di socialità” (come dice Peirce) e istanze individuali, che infine si condensa nella centralità delle pratiche linguistiche – intersoggettive, sociali per loro intrinseca natura – teorizzata da Rorty anche mediante il superamento della contrapposizione tra sentimenti e ragioni. Tornerò in seguito su quest'ultimo aspetto, intanto non posso che concordare con il suggerimento di Michela Bella della necessità di “mettere in circolo” l'intreccio di individualità e socialità, seguendo la visuale di Mary P. Follett che teorizza un progresso sociale basato sull'ascolto e l'integrazione delle istanze individuali nel tessuto della società.
- 7 C'è poi il problema dei fondamenti della conoscenza umana, sul quale mi interpellano sia Maddalena sia Stango. Ed è interessante notare che entrambi introducono al riguardo un chiaro riferimento alla metafisica. La prima replica a quest'ultimo argomento ricalca il punto di vista di Merleau-Ponty, il quale ha asserito che tutta la filosofia è di per sé metafisica, semplicemente perché è un discorso che eccede la materialità degli oggetti e dei fenomeni. Peirce stesso affermava che tutti hanno una metafisica, anche quelli che non la riconoscono. Del resto, la parola metafisica comprende molte accezioni (per esempio si parla anche di metafisica dei concetti) e, nel caso del pragmatismo, sono favorevole alla proposta di ricostruirne le diverse sfumature sviluppando l'ipotesi di un “realismo metafisico a posteriori” (Maddalena), che però salvaguardi il superamento delle cosiddette metafisiche del soggetto così come delle posizioni fondazionali incentrate sull'idea che si possa definire un *primum ontologico* o epistemologico dei nostri saperi. Perciò, non ho molta simpatia per il *foundherentism* di cui parla Susan Haack e preferisco invece applicare all'intero movimento pragmatista il concetto di “fondamento pragmatico” della validità delle asserzioni epistemiche ed etiche, benché rispettando le differenti sfumature logico-semantiche che vanno dalla semiotica di Peirce al pragmatismo concettuale di Lewis fino al costruzionismo linguistico di Rorty. Come ho cercato di sostenere, l'idea di “fondamento pragmatico” è tutt'altro che una resa al contingentismo radicale oppure allo scetticismo, collocandosi piuttosto a coronamento, per così dire, della concezione dinamica, relazionale e fallibilista delle esperienze e delle conoscenze umane.
- 8 Vengo così ad alcune delle tante e validissime questioni sollevate da Marco Stango, che ringrazio per la lettura capillare del mio lavoro e per le provocazioni teoriche di cui terrò debito conto nel proseguire i miei studi. La sua prima domanda mette in tensione il punto cruciale della mia lettura del movimento pragmatista, cioè il “continuismo” del pensiero dei suoi principali rappresentanti. Concordo con Stango nel riconoscere che molti testi avvallano piuttosto una certa discontinuità, in particolare per quanto riguarda le questioni del realismo sia metafisico sia epistemologico, le quali sono

evidentemente le questioni che maggiormente premono a Stango. Tuttavia, ho cercato di mettere in chiaro che la mia interpretazione “unitaria” riguarda i punti che mi sembra restino fermi in ciascuna delle posizioni considerate, ossia il fallibilismo, l’anti-soggettivismo, l’olismo e il consequenzialismo. Sono convinta che è soprattutto su questi aspetti che bisogna continuare a sviluppare il progetto pragmatista.

- 9 Per restare al tema più scottante, cioè alla questione della metafisica e del realismo, sono senz’altro d’accordo con Stango nel dire che “con Peirce, il pragmatismo riapre in grande stile, e con maggior rigore, la questione del realismo metafisico [...] andando oltre il vicolo cieco del soggettivismo e del dualismo gnoseologico.” Ho però difficoltà a riconoscere nel realismo metafisico dell’ultimo Peirce un tratto decisivo dello spirito del pragmatismo, perché piuttosto ritengo che i suoi scritti più innovativi e comunque maggiormente accolti dai suoi compagni di strada siano quelli che vanno dal periodo giovanile fino agli anni Novanta del 1800. In questa luce ho riscontrato una continuità, benché sottile e comunque sottaciuta, persino tra la semiotica di Peirce e il costruzionismo linguistico di Rorty, fermo restando che occorre ridimensionare le provocatorie asserzioni rortiane che dichiarano un antirealismo sovente difficilmente distinguibile dal nominalismo di vecchio stampo. Infatti, ciò che più conta filosoficamente nonché culturalmente è l’istanza antidogmatica sottesa ad espressioni del genere, quella sorta di ossessione che Rorty mostra di avere nei confronti delle posizioni realiste che mettono in ombra l’inevitabile interferenza del *medium* linguistico nella costruzione di immagini della realtà cui attribuire certezze o verità stabili e avulse dal contesto delle pratiche linguistiche che, invece, di per sé, sono “fatti,” “azioni,” vale a dire *pragmata* la cui realtà si rende tangibile nelle forme di vita concrete cui si interconnettono.
- 10 Così, nei miei lavori ho cercato di evidenziare i passaggi della filosofia rortiana in cui prevale l’idea che il problema del rapporto linguaggio-realtà si risolva infine in un esercizio intellettualistico se non si tiene conto che, in concreto, la relazione tra parole e oggetti/fatti reali è data per scontata nelle pratiche ordinarie del linguaggio così come nei loro riflessi sulle pratiche di conoscenza scientifica. Ho parlato della “banalità” del problema del rapporto tra sfera del linguaggio e sfera reale, nel pensiero di Rorty, tenendo presente anche l’importanza dell’influsso heideggeriano e gadameriano per cui il linguaggio non è certo un rivestimento qualunque dei rapporti tra i soggetti umani e le loro esperienze del mondo fisico-naturale, bensì un’espressione dell’essere. Insomma, sarebbe ingiusto attribuire al fondatore del neo-pragmatismo l’insostenibile tesi che non vi sia nient’altro se non il linguaggio: quanto meno, ciò non troverebbe spazio nel naturalismo non riduzionista nel quale si è evoluto il materialismo che egli sosteneva negli scritti giovanili di filosofia analitica della mente (Calcaterra 2016a). L’anti-fondazionalismo rortiano, al quale Michela Bella e Marco Stango fanno più o meno esplicito riferimento, mi sembra interessante anche perché implica tutto questo, benché la foga provocatoria e antiautoritaria di Rorty obblighi troppo spesso a leggere solo in filigrana i criteri ermeneutici ed etici che sostengono la sua battaglia contro i rischi di autoritarismo che si annidano nelle pretese fondazionaliste.
- 11 Per cercare di rispondere alle altre importanti e acute questioni sollevate da Stango in merito all’eventuale opportunità di “correggere” il contingentismo e il pluralismo apparentemente “infondato” che si ritroverebbe in James e Dewey, mi permetto di richiamare la mia ipotesi di una somiglianza tra il nucleo concettuale della teoria

peirceana del rapporto tra caso e regolarità e la forma di contingentismo rortiano che ho altrove chiamato “tichismo postmoderno” (Calcaterra 2016b). I concetti di “regolarità” e “casualità” possono comparire, a livello di senso comune e di pratiche comunicative ordinarie, come due termini opposti che hanno dato luogo, sul piano filosofico, alle posizioni del casualismo/contingentismo e del necessitarismo/determinismo. La prima posizione è rappresentativa della cultura post-postmodernista e ha trovato sostegno nella biologia del Novecento che ha dato resoconti sempre dettagliati dell’idea darwiniana che il caso intervenga a vari livelli della vita della natura e, anzi, sia un fattore determinante delle novità che si verificano nella biosfera.¹ Certo l’idea di casualità agisce come un’inquietante sfida al nostro bisogno di sicurezza che invece l’idea di regolarità riesce in qualche modo a soddisfare. Ma porre l’accento sulla regolarità porta, in estrema analisi, a chiudere lo spazio della libertà e della responsabilità umane mentre la nozione di caso offre quanto meno la possibilità di principio che gli eventi che ci riguardano non formino una catena meccanica tanto ferrea da non poter essere mai spezzata o, persino, che il caso sia solo uno dei nomi che diamo a ciò che ci sembra imponderabile nel qui e nell’ora. Le regolarità dei rapporti tra i fenomeni “fanno appello alla nostra intelligenza come fossero suoi parenti” – scriveva Peirce – mentre il concetto di caso “è di per sé stesso inintelligibile,” cioè non spiega nulla. Eppure, il caso irrompe sulla scena della vita umana così come nella ricerca scientifica ogniqualvolta ci si rende conto che l’analisi dei “fatti” non riesce a generare alcuna spiegazione delle irregolarità che si verificano (Peirce CP 6.63; tr. it., Peirce 1956: 142-3).

- 12 Ora, a dispetto della decisione rortiana di accantonare la filosofia di Peirce dal novero delle proprie fonti di ispirazione, è interessante rilevare che l’ipotesi ontologico-metafisica dell’occorrenza del caso, che egli propone in parallelo alla sua teoria della legalità/necessità dei fenomeni naturali, sta ad escludere la possibilità che il caso o, viceversa, la regolarità/legalità possano essere indicati come un *primum* ontologico autosufficiente. Perciò, il *tichismo* di Peirce va letto come un passo del progetto pragmatista di oltrepassare il fondazionalismo tradizionale, un progetto che il contingentismo di Rorty spinge verso le sue più estreme conseguenze, in base alla convinzione che qualsivoglia attitudine fondazionalista finisca col coincidere con la tendenza al dogmatismo, vuoi epistemico vuoi valoriale o socio-politico. Si sa che Rorty esclude volutamente le questioni ontologico-metafisiche, dunque un raffronto tra il suo contingentismo e il *tichismo* di Peirce sul piano del discorso metafisico potrebbe sembrare del tutto incongruo. Tuttavia, conviene chiedersi se il contingentismo rortiano non sia infine esso stesso una costruzione metafisica e, più precisamente, non possa essere considerato come la traduzione post-moderna – cioè una versione centrata sulla dimensione storica e linguistica – della metafisica tipica del pragmatismo classico, secondo la quale la realtà – umana e non – è processuale, indeterminata e pertanto esposta anche ai controlli e alle trasformazioni seppur minime che possono essere apportate dall’intelligenza umana. Il fondatore del neo-pragmatismo si vieta – per programma – di usare il vocabolario della metafisica, data la sua costante attitudine a identificarlo con quello del fondazionalismo e le sue implicazioni autoritarie. Ciononostante, si può far valere la “somiglianza di famiglia” tra la dialettica di caso e regolarità proposta da Peirce e l’intreccio tra le nozioni di storia e casualità, che emerge dal contingentismo rortiano. Infatti, nei diversi contesti argomentativi si nota un continuo slittamento tra un’accezione del caso in quanto *potere causale meramente fortuito* delle evoluzioni storiche e un’accezione del caso in quanto *opportunità* o

potenzialità che si prestano all'intraprendenza umana, benché sempre sotto il segno della sua radicale finitudine e fallibilità. È in quest'ultima accezione del concetto di caso che la nozione di libertà umana e, in parallelo, la normatività epistemica ed etica vengono ad essere recuperate, alimentando entrambe una visuale filosofico-antropologica che riecheggia il nesso tra contingentismo e migliorismo illustrato da William James con l'affermazione che le possibilità del mondo umano diventano "sempre più una probabilità quanto più numerose diventano le condizioni effettive" del suo miglioramento (James 1975: 168 [tr. it.]).

- 13 Il ruolo normativo della speranza (cfr. Calcaterra 2024: 345-73) recupera l'approccio *empirico* alla sfera dei valori morali, poiché è proprio da questo punto di vista che si può parlare di obbligazione morale senza incorrere nella mera precettistica, sia essa di stampo filosofico oppure teologico. Invero, su questo punto la posizione di James e Dewey è molto vicina a quella di Rorty, per il quale parlare di criteri etico-morali empirici corrisponde a non accettare altri vincoli nelle nostre indagini sia scientifiche sia etico-politiche "se non quelli discorsivi," vale a dire i vincoli dell'argomentazione e delle giustificazioni che si vengono man mano a proporre (Rorty 1982: 172 [tr. it.]). Ma tutto ciò non è altro che l'asserzione di un criterio normativo da implementare, vale a dire una possibilità umana da porre in essere come una pratica regolare. Non è chiaro – egli scrive – che formulare principi metodologici generali dell'indagine razionale o un metodo universale per "fissare le credenze" sia un nostro dovere, mentre è chiaro il dovere di mantenere aperta la conversazione umana.²
- 14 Senza dubbio serve un dialogo senza pregiudizi tra pragmatismo e altre forme di indagine filosofica per portare avanti una concezione della normatività epistemica ed etica che superi la contrapposizione tra logiche normative e logiche descrittive, contrapposizione alla quale il nostro panorama filosofico continua ampiamente a conformarsi, rischiando un improduttivo iper-intellettualismo.³ Intanto, alla domanda di Stango circa la possibilità di dire che per Peirce il piano psicologico e quello logico rispondano ad "una doppia teleologia," cioè funzionino l'uno in base a "leggi più o meno fisse" e l'altra "in qualche modo superiore ad esse," risponderei provvisoriamente in senso sfavorevole. Infatti, a mio parere, l'idea di una "doppia teleologia" rischia di introdurre una discontinuità in evidente contrasto con il *sinechismo* ontologico e metodologico di Peirce. Seguendo questa linea sono invece favorevole alla suggestione di accreditare a James il merito di aver cercato di dissolvere il nesso tra verità e certezza istituito dal corrispondentismo tradizionale, salvaguardandone invece "l'idea che la verità non solo sia comprovata dalle sue conseguenze ma, più profondamente, che essa si esprima nella e per l'esperienza." Argomentando sulla vena realista dell'epistemologia jamesiana, ne ho infatti evidenziato il nuovo concetto di "corrispondenza ai fatti" che i testi introducono in base alla definizione processuale e sperimentale della verità, cercando inoltre di difendere l'idea che per James niente è più utile della ricerca della verità e del suo assestamento fattuale, sia per quanto riguarda la relazione dinamica delle esperienze di vita personali sia per quanto riguarda l'attività scientifica.
- 15 C'è poi la questione della sostanza sollevata da Stango, che davvero meriterebbe una replica adeguatamente articolata ma devo limitarmi a qualche battuta. Posso dire che non condivido l'idea per cui "in virtù del principio continuista si possa e debba scoprire la verità del fatto" ovvero si possa parlare della sostanza "precisamente nel senso di ciò che si dà nell'esperienza." Credo, infatti, che ciò forzerebbe la posizione epistemologica

ed ontologica dei pragmatisti, i quali mostrano di giovare di una recezione della biologia darwiniana che esclude il concetto di immutabilità e completezza cui quello di sostanza è strettamente legato nella nostra tradizione filosofica. Pur ammettendo che le “relazioni continue,” di cui parla James ma che si possono ritrovare anche nella cosiddetta “metafisica dell’esperienza” di Dewey, siano interpretabili in senso ontologico-metafisico, penso che occorra tener presente l’istanza dinamica, evolutiva, che regge il concetto pragmatista di esperienza e, di conseguenza, anche il concetto dei nessi reiterati o reiterabili che essa può rilevare. Questo non significa consegnarsi al cosiddetto “mobilità assoluta” contestato da Platone nel Teeteto, ossia ricadere in una posizione di pluralismo “infondato” che frantuma la realtà in “una molteplicità irrelata di frammenti,” rischiando di diventare “un’accozzaglia.” Diversamente, ciò che si rivela nel pensiero dei pragmatisti è l’avvicinamento del concetto di sostanza con quello di potenzialità, che a sua volta riguarda tanto lo svolgersi delle esperienze umane quanto la realtà fisico-naturale. Probabilmente, questo cambiamento concettuale non è sufficiente a fugare l’ansia della ricerca di un unico punto archimedeo su cui appoggiare le une e le altre, tuttavia è probabile che uno degli insegnamenti cruciali del pragmatismo stia proprio nel coraggioso invito a saperne fare a meno per contare invece sulla responsabilità umana di comprendere le potenzialità reali, sia positive sia negative, che si prestano alla nostra esperienza e individuarle come occasioni per esercitare scelte responsabili di esclusione o implementazione ai fini di un mondo umano proficuo.

- 16 Per ragioni di spazio, rimando ad altra occasione gli interrogativi sollevati a proposito della concezione deweyana della democrazia. Mi permetto solo di dire che essa è principalmente l’espressione di una fede e pertanto va misurata con i mutamenti delle situazioni concrete ma sempre alla luce del principio di partecipazione e discussione sociale: un principio che – come documenta la polemica di Dewey con Lipman – esclude “il monopolio di un’aristocrazia di esperti” paventato da Stango. Né credo si possa attribuire a Dewey l’auspicio di un sistema che “abbia la forza di proteggere legalmente il progresso contro il ‘dogmatismo’ delle tradizioni,” poiché ciò che egli cerca di mettere in gioco è la continuità tra tradizione e innovazione, come ad esempio si evince da *Individualismo vecchio e nuovo* (Dewey 1930/2013). Infine, ringrazio per l’allettante domanda su Mead che lancia una sfida notevole alla mia interpretazione del suo “realismo sociale” e, principalmente, alla mia idea che non vi sia una netta linea di demarcazione tra il discorso di Peirce e il realismo epistemologico di Mead. Accolgo molto volentieri la sfida a riconsiderare quest’ultimo alla luce delle osservazioni con cui Marco Stango sostiene una lettura del pensiero meadiano nei termini di una radicalizzazione del nominalismo di Dewey. Per il momento mi sia consentito di pregiarmi modestamente del parere di Hans Joas, il più accreditato interprete di Mead, il quale ha commentato il mio articolo sottoscrivendo la mia tesi che quest’ultimo era un realista benché di un tipo molto particolare (Joas 2020).
- 17 Concludo esprimendo ancora molta gratitudine per questo simposio, nella speranza di poter continuare a riflettere sugli autori cui sono dedicati i saggi raccolti nel libro in discussione giovandomi di tutte le questioni e i suggerimenti che mi sono stati offerti con tanta finezza filosofica.

BIBLIOGRAFIA

- CALCATERRA Rosa Maria, (2016a), *Filosofia della contingenza. Le sfide di Richard Rorty*, Genova, Marietti.
- CALCATERRA Rosa Maria, (2016b), "La storia e il caso. Il tichismo postmoderno di Richard Rorty," in Veronica Pravadelli (a cura di), *Modernità nelle Americhe*, Roma, Roma Tre Press, 207-18.
- CALCATERRA Rosa Maria, (2024), *Il progetto comune dei pragmatisti*, Carabba, Lanciano.
- DEWEY John, (1930/2013), *Individualismo vecchio e nuovo*, Parma, Diabasis.
- FREGA Roberto, (2014), *Les Sources sociales de la normativité*, Paris, Vrin.
- FREGA Roberto, (2015), "The Normative Structure of the Ordinary," *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, 7(1), 54-76. Online: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejpap.370>.
- JAMES William, (1975), *Pragmatism, The Works of William James*, vol. 1, ed. by Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers & Ignas K. Skrupskelis, "Introduction," by Ignas K. Skrupskelis, Cambridge, Mass., London, Harvard University Press; trad. it. (2007), *Pragmatismo*, Torino, Nino Aragno.
- JOAS Hans, (2020), "The Objective Reality of Subjective Perspectives: Rosa Calcaterra's Defense of Meadian Social Realism," in Guido Baggio, Michela Bella, Giovanni Maddalena & Matteo Santarelli (a cura di), *Esperienza, contingenza, valori. Saggi in onore di Rosa M. Calcaterra*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 107-10.
- MONOD Jacques, (1970), *Le Hasard et la nécessité. Essai sur la philosophie naturelle de la biologie moderne*, Paris, Seuil; trad. it. (1974), *Il caso e la necessità*, Milano, Mondadori.
- PEIRCE Charles Sanders, (1935), *Tychism, in Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, volume VI, ed. by P. Weiss & C. Hartshorne, Cambridge, Mass., The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press; trad. it. (1956), *Caso, amore e logica*, Torino, Taylor.
- RORTY Richard, (1982), *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Minneapolis, University of Minneapolis Press; trad. it. (1986), *Conseguenze del pragmatismo*, Milano, Feltrinelli.
- RORTY Richard, (1991), *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers*, New York, Cambridge University Press; tr. it. (1994), *Scritti filosofici*, vol. I, Roma-Bari, Laterza.

NOTE

1. Restano al riguardo paradigmatici gli studi di Jaques Monod, il quale tuttavia sottolineava come l'emergere delle questioni etico-morali e, più in generale, delle idee di valore all'interno dell'evoluzione della realtà segnino "una frontiera dell'ignoto" (Monod 1970: 11 [trad. it.]).
2. Cfr. Rorty (1991: 91 [tr. it.]): "certamente abbiamo il dovere di parlarci l'un l'altro, di conversare sulle nostre concezioni del mondo, di usare la persuasione piuttosto che la forza, di essere tolleranti nei confronti della diversità, di essere fallibilisti contriti."
3. Cfr. Frega 2015. Per un'analisi dettagliata della possibilità di implementare una visuale pragmatista sulla normatività che eviti la contrapposizione tra trascendentalismo e sperimentalismo/naturalismo, segnalo Frega 2014.

AUTORE

ROSA MARIA CALCATERRA

Università Roma Tre

rosamaria.calcaterra[at]uniroma3.it

Book Reviews and Critical Notices

Review of Núria Sara MIRAS BORONAT & Michela BELLA (eds), *Women in Pragmatism: Past, Present and Future*

Springer, Cham, 2022

Federica Castelli

REFERENCES

Núria Sara MIRAS BORONAT & Michela BELLA (eds), *Women in Pragmatism: Past, Present and Future*, Springer, Cham, 2022

- 1 *Women in Pragmatism* investigates the entanglements and resonances between pragmatism and the issues, struggles, and voices of women and feminist thought. As well as describing the theme and contents of the volume, *Women in Pragmatism* also describes the posture of women who wrote the essays holding together their being women and pragmatists and making the two approaches interact with respect to their own specific disciplines and fields of research.
- 2 Far from being a collection of individual papers held together by an overarching framework, as academic publishing often understands curatorship and collective scholarly works (especially in the humanities), the text organizes itself – its structure, themes, approach, and the issues it raises – in an unexpected, rich and enlivening way that reflects the pragmatist and feminist ideas of knowledge. Thus, this is a pragmatist text not only because it is concerned with pragmatism, but because it itself rehearses many of its precepts. The volume *embodies* its theoretical posture. It puts it into practice. And importantly, it combines this with a tapestry of knowledge practices that are-and-must-be cooperative and corporeal; where gender and difference are not cast as incidental, as objects of study or as tokens of academic knowledge.
- 3 Right from the introduction, the editors put this perspective into practice, questioning the meaning of producing a collective and cooperative volume aimed not so much at

the exclusive production of a scholarly text (which is of very high quality anyway) but at the creation of a *community of research*. Not a closed volume, then, but one that opens to the multiplication of relationships, approaches and research. In this sense, the book takes up the feminist and pragmatist challenge to the traditional academy, moving from an individualistic idea of knowledge as an end in itself to knowledge that creates alliances, *makes kin*, and produces practices. The intent of this collective gesture, in which women and non-binary queer subjectivities re-think and re-write pragmatist genealogies, is to give life to, and nurture, a kinship which is at once feminist and pragmatist; a kinship that has been beginning to coalesce since the 1990s, when pragmatist genealogies and voices of women within the pragmatist tradition first began to be claimed. This volume takes up its challenge by reconnecting with that inaugural gesture and reframing it in the contemporary context; one which has radically changed in just a few decades. Of course, being part of the community is not just about being an expert scholar of pragmatist authors. It means becoming mentors, colleagues, and friends of others, putting “sympathetic understanding” into practice.

- 4 The fact that the volume was preceded by an international Conference – the “*Women in Pragmatism Conference*” held in Barcelona in 2020 (the first of its kind in Europe) – reveals the nature of the volume’s project, which precisely blooms from a context of dialogue and confrontation and aims to build a bridge to continue the exchange and help foster a supportive community of thought and research. During the decades preceding this meeting, several authors and academics had opened spaces to explore possible entanglements between feminisms and pragmatism; those that have occurred, and those yet to occur. The introduction by Marilyn Fischer and Barbara J. Lowe reconstructs a genealogy of proximity made up of meetings, panels, and groups. And challenges. Charlene Haddock Seigfried recounts the play of these entanglements over the years by recovering and building on women’s contribution to pragmatism, putting before us a galaxy born out of a sense of urgency shared by Jane Addams herself: to create channels, to open spaces, in which new energies can flow (p. 9).
- 5 The volume is organized into three parts. The first – *Past: The Recovery of the Classics* – focuses on the recovery of a long-sidelined – or forgotten – tradition linking women and pragmatism. The aim is not to focus on individual voices as isolated, but to look at reflections and practices to naming approaches and epistemologies outside traditional, universalizing, phallogocentric lines. In this section we find the essay by Sara Núria Miras Boronat (p. 27-40), editor of the volume together with Michela Bella, who demonstrates how a pragmatist feminist theory of oppression “can enrich our views on how oppression is originated, maintained and resisted” (p. 29), in an essay centered on the tools offered by three experiences. First, the projects connected to Hull House (in particular Hull House’s *Maps and Papers* and its approach to the intersection of gender, race, class) and the creation of a social method aimed at cultivating shared and cooperative knowledge of social situations that lends to the acquisition of political and social agency by marginalized groups in Chicago. Second, Charlotte Perkins Gilman and her book *Women and Economics* (1898), in which an organic theory of economics is intertwined with the denaturalization of women’s oppression, shown as social and not justified by any natural predisposition or characteristic, and the relationship between the sexes is read as an economic relationship. And finally, we find Anna Julia Cooper, the double oppression of black women, her idea of sympathetic knowledge as “the art of ‘thinking one’s self imaginatively into the experience of others’.”

- 6 Similarly, in their essays Susan Petrilli (p. 41-54) and Zoe Hurley (p. 55-66) focus on the contribution made to the reflection on language by Victoria Welby, and her non-anthropocentric, relational, contextual, ethical view of meaning. Michela Bella (p. 67-81) writes on Mary Whiton Calkins, placing her into dialogue with William James, focusing on the possibilities opened up by a “relational” and non-reductionist posture of psychology, which was typical of the analytic tradition flourishing in the United States in those years. Paloma Pérez-Ilzarbe then focuses on Christine Ladd’s innovative view of logic (p. 82- 94).
- 7 The second part of the volume – *Present: Contributions to Current Pragmatist Debates* – focuses on current debates within pragmatism from an embodied, gendered, and situated position. This section features essays on the intertwining of pragmatism and feminism between linguistic, ethical, and epistemological issues, such as those by Llanos Navarro (p. 97-109), Spivey (p. 110-21), and Wellan (p. 123-34). Here, Teresa Roversi (p. 135-45) reflects on how Dewey can be a useful interlocutor for rethinking the historical, relational and social dimensions of personhood, going beyond individuality and selfhood, and showing how the anti-metaphysical positions of pragmatism can meet the situated, relational and embodied ontologies of feminism. Dina Mendonça’s (p. 146-58) and Maura Striano’s (p. 159-70) essays focus on the contribution of the pragmatist vision to Philosophy for Children and educational theories by virtue of the pragmatist approach centered on emotions and care, mental non-resistance, sympathetic knowledge, which redefine the idea of subjects and democracy with both epistemic and practical implications. Adopting a pragmatist view of truth – which renders truth a function of context –, sound judgment can only emerge from knowledge of the complexity of social situations. Logical processes and political ideals are validated not by formal processes, but from a contextual and social perspective (p. 161). Truth, therefore, develops and changes over time. This requires an experimental, flexible, imaginative, resilient, open and above all situated approach (which meets Sandra Harding’s feminist standpoint epistemology), with obvious moral and social implications. Focusing on the epistemic and educational value of experience is, according to Striano, particularly urgent in the contemporary setting: “The challenge of immigration and intercultural education is, indeed, an exemplary political and social test for contemporary democratic societies and a good test bench for Addams’s ideas” (p. 169).
- 8 Finally, the third part – *From the Past to the Future: Interdisciplinary Approaches and Global Changes* – explores the chances and challenges of this dialogue made of interdisciplinarity and contaminations. Laura Camas Garrido (p. 173-86) takes into account the Playground Movement and the attention given by Addams to the nexus of play, sociality and citizenship as tools for today, in order to rethink roles and agency in the public sphere and “socialize” our democracies. In a similar vein, Ager Pérez Casanovas (p. 187-98) brings Maxine Green’s notion of “aesthetic education” into dialogue with the Philosophy of education, proposing a redefinition of the role of education with respect to democratic life, whilst Ann Warde (p. 199-212) explores resonances between Addams’ approach and art education.
- 9 Pauline Lefebvre (p. 213-23) questions proximities and distances, encounters made and missed, between a feminist and a pragmatist view of architecture. Another relevant theme is raised by Agnieszka Hensoldt (p. 237-49), who reads degrowth and environmental issue from a pragmatist and feminist perspective, through Addams,

Gilman, Crane, and their intertwined critique of capitalism and patriarchal domination. Finally, in this section we find Brosseau's essay (p. 225-35) on the use of pragmatist tools in the analysis of feminist issues, geared toward the production of knowledge of oppressed groups. In reimagining the group not in terms of shared "identity" but as shared social experience, the author puts Young and Dewey in dialogue: Is it possible to apply Dewey to feminism? If so, to what effects?

- 10 These three sections show the possibility of doing feminist and pragmatist genealogy along different, intertwined lines: pragmatism and women; pragmatist women who have pursued struggles and research with a posture that we now call feminist; pragmatist women who are feminists because they root into this intertwining; women who revive the reflections of women who have crossed pragmatism to respond to new questions opened by the contemporary world; the genealogy of a feminist and pragmatist community. And many others. The approaches of the essays vary according to the varied philosophical orientations and disciplinary modes that each embodies. But rather than organizing the essays according to such disciplinary divisions, the volume brings them together organically, teasing-out on the concatenations and correspondences between the issues and approaches of each contribution.
- 11 Plural and intertwining genealogies, situated knowledge, relation, contamination (which is not the assimilation of each other's thought), intersectional approach, embodied gaze, neither neutral nor universalizing, cooperative intelligence: the vitality and richness of this kinship are vivid and perceptible in each essay. The volume, therefore, exposes in a plural, lively, yet articulate way how pragmatism and feminism are connected to one another and why it is necessary for both to recognize each other. It works on entanglements and conjunctures, showing how debates about oppression, domination, exploitation, and discrimination are now central to both feminist and pragmatist debates. For this reason, the volume works at the interweaving of various disciplines, realizing in practice the interdisciplinarity intrinsic to both feminism and pragmatism.
- 12 In the *Introduction*, moreover, the situatedness of the feminist personal-political nexus emerges clearly. The lives of the authors and editors during the pandemic are recounted, foregrounding how this volume is born of relationships and shared experiences that accompany the volume over time, amid difficulties, surprises, and desires. The editors name the ties – scientific and relational – that bound them through years. In this sense, the volume is really the fruit of the intertwining experiences of a community that comes to life in an embodied sense, not merely with a view to a specific scholarly or editorial product, nor in the abstract, almost ideological sense of a convergence of knowledge. Knowledge is *made and remade together*, day by day, enfolding lives lived and prefiguring lives to be lived. The text, as the editors say in the introduction, stands as "testimony of the sorority growing within the pragmatist and feminist community" (p. xii). What emerges is the absolute necessity of occasions like this in every field of research. A radical new sense of what it is to be a scholar, against and beyond the individualizing and neoliberal logics that mark academic contexts. A space to name connections, debts, and esteem for the work of others. As a woman and as a feminist interested in approaches to knowledge that can open up spaces, can create support, and can engender networks, I think the volume is precious and inestimable, for practices, posture, and content.

AUTHORS

FEDERICA CASTELLI

Roma Tre University

`federica.castelli[at]uniroma3.it`

Review of Daniel R. HUEBNER, *Reintroducing Mead*

London, Routledge, 2022

Francis Douville Vigeant

REFERENCES

Daniel R. HUEBNER, *Reintroducing Mead*, London, Routledge, 2022

- 1 The *Mead Renaissance*, as announced by Guido Baggio (2017: 2) has yet taken a new turn. For a long time, Mead's posthumous editions – including the most discussed *Mind, Self and Society*, and the less considered *The Philosophy of the Present* (Huebner 2014a) – were the only way for researchers to gain an insight into his thought. These texts have since been the subject of commentaries, critical re-editions and in-depth analyses like the work of Hans Joas (1980/1997), Gary A. Cook (1993) and more recently Côté (2015). Most books that tackle the pragmatism movement circle around the trinity of James, Dewey and Peirce. Recent scholarship about Mead, however, reveals insights that have been overlooked for decades. We argue with confidence that with this new thrust, the thought of George Herbert Mead has risen amongst the most influential of our days and age. We take note of the multiplicity of writings related to his thought, of which the book *Reintroducing Mead* by Daniel R. Huebner stands as a major contribution.
- 2 For once, it seems that Mead's sociological thought has been freed from an overly "interactionist" historical reading and that it has acquired its letters of nobility. There is no longer doubt that the perspective inherited from the Chicago philosopher is finally included in the classical canons of sociology. Intended not only for Mead scholars and those with a thorough knowledge of his works, but also for undergraduates who are determined to grasp the topicality and relevance of Mead's sociological ideas, the book is divided into four chapters, each of which examines a different aspect of Mead's sociological and philosophical thought. The Mead scholarship in the last ten years has to be one of most active in the sociological and

social theory field, and Daniel R. Huebner has been a major contributor to its rediscovery.

- 3 Chapter 1, titled “Mead as Public Intellectual and Social Theorist,” is organized so that Huebner can paint a sociological portrait of Mead, while also emphasizing the need to understand him from the time in which he lived. By exploring Mead’s biographical content, he puts him back into his personal but also social context. Influences such as his upbringing in rural Massachusetts, USA and the influence of his mother, Elizabeth Mead (née Stors), who herself grew up in an educated family; his friendship with Henry Castle, who dragged him to Harvard, then Leipzig; political events, like the Hawaiian revolution and the First World war, are amongst the main elements that helped shape Mead’s path and perspective. Mead ended up marrying Helen Castle, Henry’s sister, with whom he discovered parenthood and drew his interest into education and pedagogy. The Meads, Huebner notes, were very interested in social reform and social education, as evidenced by their involvement in the Hull House Social Settlement in Chicago, upon their arrival in 1894. Mead was also a very active member of the Faculty at the newly founded University of Chicago, taking part in the creation of multiples groups (i.e. the City Club), associations, schools and laboratories, and even showing public support for women’s right to vote in the United States. The picture painted by Huebner is far from that of an armchair philosopher: Mead was an inherent part of the community in which he lived, and was working to the betterment of it. Huebner also discusses the central role that the Hawaiian question played in the lives of the Meads, a topic he pioneered a few years ago (Huebner 2014b; Côté 2016: 48-53). Mead’s legacy is as strong, if not stronger, today as it was in the decades following his death, especially through his former student, Herbert Blumer, and the development of symbolic interactionism which he attributes to Mead’s influence. Recent scholarly efforts to revisit Mead’s sociological thought challenge earlier interpretations that closely align him with symbolic interactionism, offering promising new perspectives in contemporary literature.
- 4 The second chapter explores the logic of action central to Mead’s work. Huebner addresses the key components of Mead’s original sociological thought with remarkable clarity. Core concepts, such as the social self, which individuals internalize through social interaction, are discussed in detail, with a particular emphasis on Mead’s focus on analyzing processes as dynamic phenomena in their own right. Avoiding overly philosophical exposition, Huebner highlights the impact of Hegelian dialectics and Darwinian evolutionary principles on Mead’s thought. “Mead also put an emphasis on the dynamic, changing nature of society and on the spontaneous activeness of people in exploring and interacting with the world around them, especially with other people,” writes Huebner in a remarkable passage on the embodied human mind that stresses out how the humans are “biological organisms that adapt and respond practically to their physical and social environments, rather than abstracted mental processes or substances” (p. 25). The constant back and forth between Mead’s concepts, which he clearly explains, and the links they establish with other intellectuals influential for him (Dewey, Darwin, Wundt) tends to present his sociology in a synthetic and relevant way.
- 5 In the third chapter, Huebner’s reintroduction shifts toward a more traditional sociological analysis, emphasizing the social structures that arise through the interaction of social selves. Once the processes that enable the emergence of the self are completed (Ch. 2), Huebner continues his presentation with the so-called “problem

of society” in Mead. The most pertinent aspect of Huebner’s analysis is the convergence of Mead’s micro- and macro-sociological perspectives, which had not been adequately addressed so far in the Mead scholarship. This entails not only an intriguing examination of the genesis of the self, but also a meticulous examination of the social and political organization. Mead’s era coincided with a period of significant upheaval in Chicago and across the United States, including the Spanish-American War and the First World War. These events provided a backdrop for Mead’s understanding and theorization of democracy. Along with his view of how symbols play a role in the formation of the self, democracies represent the institutions that defend and preserve this right to express oneself in the social setting. Huebner provides a comprehensive account of how the war years influenced Mead’s perspective on democracy, its role, and its function.

- 6 Finally, chapter four addresses a central theme in the organization of Mead’s sociological theory, that of time. The Chicago professor, in the words of Huebner, “sought to develop a social-relational theory of the natural world itself, to explain how human role-taking and self-reflective intelligence emerge within this natural world, and to consider how this uniquely human perspective is capable of transforming the world in turn” (Huebner 2022: 77).
- 7 In addition to this new introductory work, we also acknowledge the depth of the bibliographic references of the book. Huebner’s bibliography includes an up-to-date version of the bulk of Mead’s publications. Presented in a synthetic format, it includes the vast majority of articles written by Mead and published in scientific journals from the first ones dated from 1894. Furthermore, the bibliography section, which also provides reference works on his thought, offers researchers of all levels a rich and complete overview of contemporary works, in addition to identifying the main studies that have been carried out and that are still among the most widely read and cited today. The thematic division is also highly appreciated. In conclusion, Huebner’s book represents the culmination of over a decade of fine research and provides a comprehensive introduction to Mead’s theoretical framework as well as the origins of American sociological thought.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BAGGIO Guido, (2017), “Book Review: Hans Joas & Daniel R. Huebner (eds), *The Timeliness of George Herbert Mead*,” *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, 9(2). Online: <https://journals.openedition.org/ejpap/1046>.

COOK Gary, (1993), *George Herbert Mead: The Making of a Social Pragmatist*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press.

CÔTÉ Jean-François, (2015), *George Herbert Mead’s Concept of Society: A Critical Reconstruction*, New York, Routledge.

CÔTÉ Jean-François, (2016), "George Herbert Mead on Hawaii: An Introduction," *The American Sociologist*, 48(1), 48-53.

HUEBNER Daniel R., (2014a), "La fabrique de *L'esprit, le soi et la société*: Aux origines de la psychologie sociale de George Herbert Mead," in Alexis Cukier & Éva Debray (eds), *La Théorie sociale de G. H. Mead*, trans. from English to French by Olivier Gaudin, Paris, Éditions du Bord de l'Eau, 106-26.

HUEBNER Daniel R., (2014b), *Becoming Mead: The Social Process of Academic Knowledge*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.

HUEBNER Daniel R., (2022), *Reintroducing Mead*, London, Routledge.

JOAS Hans, (1980/1997), *G. H. Mead: A Contemporary Re-Examination of His Thought*, Cambridge, The MIT Press.

AUTHORS

FRANCIS DOUVILLE VIGEANT

Université du Québec à Montréal

douville_vigeant.francis[at]courrier.uqam.ca

Review of Alexis DIANDA, *The Varieties of Experience: William James after the Linguistic Turn*

Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2023

Sarin Marchetti

REFERENCES

Alexis DIANDA, *The Varieties of Experience: William James after the Linguistic Turn*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2023

- 1 Advertised by Cornel West as “the best philosophical treatment of the great William James in this generation,” Alexis Dianda’s *The Varieties of Experience: William James after the Linguistic Turn* meets the reader with high expectations, which it indeed fulfills. Her volume is a seminal contribution to Jamesian scholarship in its defense of some of the most puzzling aspects of James’s conception(s) of experience for us readers past the linguistic turn. The task has been attempted before, with at least three generations of readers defending James from the manifold attacks to his allegedly outmoded focus on experience as the better methodological tool and topic of inquiry, praising his healthy resistance to the intoxication with language which eventually diminished philosophical thinking if not compromised it altogether. The novelty of Dianda lies in trying the harder way of showing the virtues of the Jamesian bet on experience *in light of* the distinctive unfolding of pragmatism and philosophy at large in the century and half elapsed. That is, Dianda shows us the fecundity of the concept of experience elaborated by James, preventing our inquiries into mind, morals, and reality to fall prey of idealizations, either in the guise of the immediately given or of the linguistically sayable. Dealing with the varieties of experience is thus for James an inescapable fact of life and hence of philosophy. The book tackles the issue head-on, making it the very cipher of James’s contribution to the Western philosophical canon.

- 2 James took language seriously, and yet he resisted the distrust of experience at the heart of the linguistic turn. The turn to language, which started to get traction in philosophical circles, analytic and continental alike, from the 1930s as a way out of the swamps of a helplessly amateurish (read: childish) and not-yet-professional (read: grown up) philosophy of experience, offered the promise of standardization. It could tidy up philosophical discourse, either in the direction of its axiomatization or in the attempt to free it from constraints other than human/conversational. This is a feature neopragmatism picked up from the 1970s thanks to the seminal work of Richard Rorty and others in his wake (and today represented by thinkers as diverse as Brandom, Price, and Misak). What we would need to appreciate, to get his conception of experience (as well as of language) right, would then be James's very critique of the requests we pose on philosophical thinking itself: on its nature, purpose, and scope. James foresaw a number of philosophical adjustments that would feature in a great part of twentieth-century philosophy, and tried to balance the need for clarity exemplified by language with that of vagueness or even ambiguity provided by experience. Dianda's book invites us to review our attitude towards James's variegated treatment of experience as his attempt to get rid of a picture of philosophy as a tool for either the dependable foundation of our thoughts, words, and deeds, or their unbounded transformation. James's focus on experience is one with his aim to portrait philosophy as an activity equally skeptical of outright (vertical) authority and disordered (horizontal) *laissez-faire*.
- 3 Titling the book *The Varieties of Experiences*, Dianda puts the plural feature of James's signature philosophical move *within* experience up front. Dianda aims to explore the richness and multi-faced character of that puzzling activity and state we call *experience*: experience as a making (experiencing, as Dewey would have said) and as an undergoing (being experienced, Jimi Hendrix style). The key charge to trusting, and trading in, experience raised by the linguistic turn has historically been the inbuilt incapacity of experience to account for the active and selective element in our mindedness and worldliness. The latter would have been otherwise secured by the emphasis on our being linguistic users, with language equally able to (genuinely) represent reality (being transparent to it, so to say) and assure our take on it (language being of our own making). Now, by depicting experience in active rather than in passive terms, as in experiencing and being experienced, James would have saved empiricism from itself – that is, from its passive classical versions – avoiding in this way the charges addressed to it by the linguistic turn. Dianda ventures to show the details and opportunity of such revision, and she denounces the dangers awaiting language and linguistic philosophy when they let experience go and play no role in constraining our thoughts, words, and deeds. As she writes at the very beginning of the volume, philosophy constrained by language alone falls prey of that vicious intellectualism consisting in the “reduction of the complexities of our existence to excessively limiting concepts or categories; it is vicious to the extent that by focusing on our abstract conceptions we cut ourselves off from engagement with the very things we purportedly attempt to understand or engage” (p. 15). Getting the world and ourselves at our feet by taming both through language (and hence sharp and linguistically articulable concepts) would mean for James to give way to the wrong (read: dangerous) kind of activity: one disrespectful of the resistances played on us by the world and by ourselves alike. The analysis of such resistances and their importance is at the heart of the volume under review.

- 4 Dianda puts it quite clearly in the introductory chapter: by privileging the notion of experience as the best methodological tool and goal of inquiry, pragmatism of the Jamesian kind runs the risk of being accused of either trading in the processing of brute stimuli (as in “immediate sensory events”) or eventually falling back into the lap of enculturation, hence in the domain of language (acquisition and transformation): “either we abandon experience as a meaningful concept and any residue of realism, or we accept a form of foundationalism and givenism with all the paradoxes such approaches entail” (p. 22). There would simply be no space for a middle ground between being exposed to the world (and to ourselves) and calling the shots of those encounters, or so the rhetoric of the linguistic turn variously preached. Hence replicating the battle between experience-first and language-first philosophies which has driven the best part of the Twentieth Century, both within and without pragmatism, to an unfruitful stall. But such a middle ground is exactly what James eyed and struggled to achieve in his writings. What else was he looking for when he wrote his *Principles of Psychology* (1890), *The Will to Believe* (1897), *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), or *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909), if not a way to account for the life of the mind, the moral and religious life, or our epistemological practices via a notion of experience plastic enough to make space both for our contribution and for its frustration in the everlasting business of minding and meaning reality? Experience would work best precisely when we would expect it to disappoint us: namely, in showing when we might fail to get things right because of its being opaque to us and yet telling of our distinctive take on the world and ourselves. It would indeed be language, understood as something *other than* a dimension of our experiencing and our being experienced, to run the risky business of being incapable of failing to mean reality, because of its fully transparent character, equally capable of getting the world and ourselves right and of fixing itself when it goes astray. What allows experience to welcome both confirmation and rejection is its being a *practice*, a piece of *conduct*, the way we navigate reality and tentatively explore its dark places. Both experiencing and being experienced in fact suggest the idea of an active and mobile self, but also a fallible and tentative one. Hence the “existential character” bestowed by Dianda to James’s conception of experience: “It is central to my argument that James’s notion of experience is seen in an existential light – by existential here I mean simply that it is attuned to questions of conduct, belief, and our moral self-images” (p. 10). The suggestion is clear, and it is a pragmatist one: to get a glimpse at what experience is, let us see what it does for us. Let us see how it performs *in deed*. Let us see what it is of experience in our lives: psychological, ethical, religious, epistemological, or otherwise.
- 5 After a first chapter on the advantages and disadvantages of dismissing experience from one’s philosophical landscape, where Rorty is taken as the staunchest of enemies within the pragmatist camp, hence qualifying his very affiliation to the tradition, Dianda dedicates three chapters to as many fields (or aspects, or topics) in which the Jamesian notion of experience turns its healthy (and healing) gaze: namely, psychology, ethics, and that peculiar blend of epistemology and metaphysics going under the name of “radical empiricism.” Each chapter shows how holding dear to a notion of experience as experiencing and as being experienced contributes to the disentanglement of philosophical and existential knots holding us captive: respectively, the character of consciousness (is it subjective or objective?), the willingness of beliefs (are they active or passive?), and the nature of concepts (are they fixed or rather mobile?). Where in each case what is at issue is precisely our availability to negotiate

the range of control over our experience (that is, over what we experience in the first place, what we do when we experience at all, and what are the consequences of experience on ourselves) and accepting the compromise inbuilt in being in charge of experience without being guaranteed of the success of such leading.

- 6 In closing, I would like to stress the novelty and promises of each of the four master moves performed in the chapters. In chapter one, what I find particularly compelling is the author's charge of what according to her is Rorty's unpragmatic prejudice against experience: rather than leaving the possibility to have philosophically interesting things to say and think about experience open, Rorty read the trajectory of pragmatism as a foreclosure on it via a progressive disenchantment of the world. Not only the Divine should be banned from our moral and epistemological horizons, but also Reality (with the capital letter, that is a Reality which simply imposes on us), with conversation as the only game in town (see in particular p. 36-44 on linguistic nominalism). But what about those situations (moral and epistemological) in which growth seems to be a matter of enduring or even abiding by forces external to one's individual or communal horizons, so to put our conversation in check? The current global political situation, with several civil wars and as many humanitarian disasters, would suggest better.
- 7 Chapter two is quite adamant in that the author refuses to portray consciousness as anything other than our way of experiencing the world and ourselves in it. Far from picturing the mind as a thing (the brain organ) or as a mere epiphenomenon (an incident of the brain organ), James understood it as the very seat of human subjectivity understood as the capacity for agency *in light of* experiencing and the experienced. A subjectivity which, the very minute it determines what to mind and what to ignore, faces the risks of meeting reality the wrong way and hence frustrates its best aspiration to navigate it successfully.
- 8 Chapter three moves things from minding to acting: what it is that we do when we believe or disbelieve that something is the case is a matter of decision and choice as much as attention to the way we experience previous and past such resolutions. In depicting belief as torn between selection of and surrender to experience, Dianda claims that what is at stake in believing is our very capacity for self-transformation of and through action: "We are not led from belief to a transcendental meditation on the structure of reality but to a pragmatic description of human activity" (p. 142-3); "there is, and needs to be, a dialectic between the world and the possibilities for change, such changes and new modes of experience: this relationship is one that can only be captured through James's specific treatment of experience" (p. 169).
- 9 Finally, chapter four sheds light on James's late understanding of "pure experience," and hence of the relationship between percepts and concepts within experience. The gist of Dianda's reconstruction is that, contrary to the common philosophical understanding, experiencing and being experienced are not processes of ascension from the merely subjective to the more objective, but rather of unfolding from what we consider evidence to its personal transformation. This means that, in making and undergoing experience, we enrich and deepen the world and self, rather than make them thinner and more rarified. But this is not because knowing is essentially a linguistic affair, but rather because we can only speak of something we have introspected and elaborated. As Dianda writes, "For James, we must experience differently before we can begin to speak differently" (p. 170). Concepts, then, far from ordering the chaos of experience, contribute to its plasticity, and the quest for purity

cries for a reconstruction of past experiences which would impede it from being disproved by future ones. A world, and life, stuck in the moment, and cursed to stillness at pain of being either canceled by later developments or anticipated by earlier ones.

- 10 All in all, then, Dianda's James is a philosopher of practice and conduct, a philosopher of experience understood as readiness to be proven otherwise and yet encouraged to roll its contingent dices. We should then beware of language if and only if through it we dream of a world and self finally free from criticism and even delusion. We are pragmatists because we praise experimentation over conformity, but also because we are ready to let our experiments go as long as they do *not* meet resistance worth the name.

AUTHORS

SARIN MARCHETTI

Sapienza Università di Roma
 sarin.marchetti[at]uniroma1.it