KNOWLEDGE AS CONVERSATION: RICHARD RORTY
AND THE LEGACY OF AMERICAN PRAGMATISM

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by
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ABSTRACT

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Patrick B. Smith

This thesis examines the place of philosopher Richard Rorty in the American pragmatist tradition. To locate him within this rich tradition, I outline the major tenets of classical pragmatism that constitute the core aims of the early pragmatists—Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey. These three figures are examined thoroughly to identify the consistencies and inconsistencies in their individual pragmatist doctrines and to define the context in which pragmatism was born. This examination serves as the jumping off point for the central portion of the thesis: Richard Rorty and the revival of American pragmatism during the 1980s.

Rorty's place within the pragmatist tradition is highly contentious. With the publication of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979), Rorty successfully brought American pragmatism back into academic discourses after a moribund period lasting almost thirty years. However, many scholars question his pragmatist credentials, arguing that Rorty's philosophy resembles a number of traits consistent with postmodernism. Against this charge, I argue that Rorty can appropriately be classified as a pragmatist and that he deserves a place within the tradition. Although Rortyan pragmatism maintains several differences with respect to the philosophy of the early pragmatists, these differences represent historically-contingent refinements to the classical tradition. That is, Rorty has employed a number of conceptual tools unavailable to the early pragmatists to clear up some of the more problematic assertions made by the early group. Moreover,

when his background is pressed by historical inquiry, a picture emerges of Rorty that illustrates a lifelong commitment to pragmatism and pragmatist doctrines. Furthermore, I argue that the pluralism that is implicit in pragmatist doctrines warrants Rorty's membership in the tradition. Taken together, I conclude that Rorty can appropriately be called a pragmatist and he represents a valuable voice in a contemporary world that is facing unprecedented growth, environmental destruction, and the inevitability of continued interconnectedness. Although the face of his pragmatism is different, it still maintains enough family resemblances to qualify as such.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER	
1. WHAT IS PRAGMATISM, ANYWAY?.....	4
SOURCES OF AMBIGUITY	4
WHAT PRAGMATISM IS	9
2. EARLY PRAGMATISM	14
THE EMERGENCE OF AMERICAN PRAGMATISM.....	14
THE EARLY PRAGMATISTS: PEIRCE, JAMES, DEWEY	21
3. RICHARD RORTY AND AMERICAN PRAGMATISM.....	45
DECLINE	45
REVIVAL.....	50
RORTY AND THE REVIVAL OF PRAGMATISM	53
GOOD RORTY, BAD RORTY	72
RORTY'S PRAGMATISM: A DEFENSE.....	82
4. CONCLUSION: A QUESTION OF PLURALISM	92
THINKING BEYOND THE PRAGMATIST CONTROVERSY	94
CONCLUSION.....	99
BIBLIOGRAPHY	103

The lovers of sights and sounds like beautiful sounds, colors, shapes, and everything fashioned out of them, but their thought is unable to see and embrace the nature of the beautiful itself...As for those who in each case embrace the thing itself, we must call them philosophers, not lovers of opinion? Most definitely. —Plato, *The Republic*

The very idea of being presented with “all of Truth” is absurd, because the Platonic notion of Truth itself is absurd. —Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*

INTRODUCTION

Richard Rorty, philosopher and culture critic, lived a seditious existence. His pragmatic commitment to epistemological antifoundationalism, his willingness to take the 'linguistic turn,' and his denigration of programmatic philosophy, have all made him a frequent target of attack in the academic community over the last thirty years.¹ Whereas some scholars shirk away from criticism, Rorty courts controversy. In his autobiographical essay "Trotsky and the Wild Orchids," Rorty describes his precarious standing in academic circles: "If there is anything to the idea that the best intellectual position is one which is attacked with equal vigor from the political right and the political left, then I am in good shape."² Rorty's unflinching tenacity and restless challenging of the accepted notion of philosophy in academics and culture make him most effervescent and instructive.

This essay proposes several goals. Pragmatism as an intellectual doctrine has been fiercely debated from the nineteenth-century to the present. The first goal, then, will be to examine the historiographical debate over the meaning and function of the term "pragmatism." Second, I will examine the historical context of pragmatism's birth. This contextual analysis will serve to introduce the pragmatism of the "big three": Peirce,

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¹ Richard Rorty's critics number in the dozens, if not tens of dozens. For some of the more lively criticisms passed down on Rorty, see Susan Haack, "Vulgar Rortyism," in *The New Criterion* 16, no. 3 (1997); Barry Allen, "What is Epistemology?", and John McDowell, "Toward Rehabilitating Objectivity," in *Rorty and His Critics* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000); Richard Shusterman, "Dewey on Experience: Foundation or Reconstruction?" in *Dewey Reconfigured: Essays on Deweyan Pragmatism*, Casey Haskins and David Seiple, eds. (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1999); James Campbell, "Rorty's Use of Dewey," in *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 22 (1994); Thomas M. Alexander, "Richard Rorty and Dewey's Metaphysics of Experience," in *Southwest Philosophical Studies* 5 (1980). For an illustrative representation of Rorty's dissatisfaction with programmatic philosophy, namely Analytic philosophy, see Richard Rorty, "Thomas Kuhn, Rocks, and the Laws of Physics," in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 175-189.

² Richard Rorty, "Trotsky and the Wild Orchids," in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, 3.

James, and Dewey. Moreover, the analysis of the early pragmatists will illustrate the difficulty in pinning down a single, unifying theme to describe pragmatism. Consistencies among these men were matched equally by sharp inconsistencies, but some continuity can be located. Third, I will examine the nature of the revival of pragmatism in America during the late 1970s and early 1980s. In so doing, I will explore Rorty's role as the central figure in the revival and how he successfully brought pragmatism back into academic discourse. This analysis will serve as the jumping off point for the central discussion of this thesis.

To this end, I argue that Rorty's self-designation as a pragmatist was the result of biographical predispositions, philosophical commitments, and intellectual misgivings with analytic philosophy during the 1960s and 70s. Early in his career, Rorty attained professional notoriety by taking the "pragmatist turn" and leaving analytic philosophy behind. This involved developing a unique brand of pragmatism that abandoned experience in favor of linguistics as the primary medium in which knowledge is acquired. To some, the fast and loose approach he employs in his historical reinterpretation distorts the history of pragmatism, and, as a result, created a polemical debate over the legacy of pragmatism that continues today.

For many observers, Rorty's self-identification with the pragmatist tradition is little more than an attempt to corroborate his own philosophical positions that grew out of his dissatisfaction with analytic philosophy during the mid-1960s and early 1970s. They see Rorty's "conversion," as exemplified in the "pragmatist turn," as disingenuous and ultimately wrongheaded. For my purposes here, I will argue that this reductive account fails to recognize the multifarious and nuanced background of Rorty's intellectual

development. If certain aspects of Rorty's background are brought to light, then his "pragmatist turn" appears to be less a conversion and more of a manifestation of his intellectual development.

Rorty's turn to linguistics as the basis of his philosophy is understandingly problematic to some scholars of classical pragmatism. However, I argue that it should be seen as a valid epistemological move. Rorty is thinking and writing in a post-Kuhnian intellectual setting that requires a rethinking of the utility of epistemology on the whole. As a result, his pragmatism is going to look quite different than the pragmatism of the early group. Furthermore, I believe that Rorty's socio-linguistic epistemology avoids many of the pitfalls several postmodernists confront in their own formulations. Unlike many of the postmodernists who view deconstruction as an end in itself, Rorty is never so jaded as to not leave his audience with a sense of hope (however fleeting and laced with contingency) about the possibilities of the individual and society.

The hope in writing this thesis is to somehow provide a rationale for moving beyond the Rorty-Pragmatism controversy. By showing how Rorty's background is shot through with genuine pragmatist concerns and how his philosophy shares many of the "family resemblances" of his forefathers, I hope to offer justification for his inclusion in this rich tradition. As for the tradition itself, I will argue that pragmatism is large, yet specific enough, to allow Rorty membership. In so doing, I conclude that the time has come to move beyond the controversy surrounding Rorty and move toward reinforcing the central tenets of the pragmatism that allow Rorty to appropriately call himself a pragmatist. To do so, we must rediscover the early pragmatist's emphasis on pluralism, historicism, and possibility.

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS PRAGMATISM, ANYWAY?

Sources of Ambiguity

“Pragmatism” as a common, everyday term arouses a variety of meanings. To the common person, it evokes a sense of the American identity: historically, Americans have always made pragmatic choices that effect practical consequences. In this usage, pragmatism describes the American ethos as being one marked by practicality, where hard work and simple ingenuity are the mechanisms of progress and democracy.³

For academics, defining pragmatism is slightly trickier. Pragmatism can connote many things: a brand of philosophical inquiry specific to American universities; a methodological approach for solving problems in the sciences and humanities; a term used by intellectual historians to describe a particular idea at a particular moment in American history; and so on. The multitude of meanings prescribed to the term is indicative of the difficulty of tying down pragmatism. The major implication of ambiguity over meaning is that pragmatism can be viewed as a totally incoherent, and thus useless, philosophical doctrine. As an indirect result of this, it becomes unclear who counts as a pragmatist, and in contemporary discourse, who is actually preserving the mantle of classical pragmatism.

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³ One of the most outspoken critics of pragmatism during the first years of the twentieth-century was historian Lewis Mumford. In *The Golden Day* (1926), Mumford chastised the common perception of pragmatism as the primary feature of the American identity. For Mumford, pragmatism did not represent an attitude of simple ingenuity, progress, and democracy. He argued that this assessment lacked a sense of tragedy in a United States that was witnessing the manifestations of industrialization and still reeling from the Civil War. Mumford saw pragmatism not as a philosophy of action and progress, but as a philosophy of acquiescence. Mumford observes that “Transcendentalism, as Emerson caustically said, had resulted in a headache; but the pragmatism that followed it was a paralysis.” See Lewis Mumford, *The Golden Day: A Study in American Experience and Culture* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1926), 166.

Although the problem of ambiguity abounds, it follows that a highly generalized definition can be agreed upon by most observers. Most would agree that, as an academic discourse, pragmatism emphasizes the practical consequences of philosophical and scientific forms of inquiry. It is generally accepted that pragmatism deals mainly with the “practicalization of truth,” the “practicalization of intelligence,” and the utility of epistemology.⁴ However, as in most cases, problems are to be found in the details. Ambiguities and contradictions arise when the particulars of large, generally accepted definitions are scrutinized. Many scholars have attempted to locate the sources of ambiguity and clarify the pragmatists’ project over the past century. In so doing, many have been critical without constructiveness, while others attempt therapeutic treatment of the beleaguered term.

American philosopher and intellectual historian Arthur Lovejoy was one of the first critics to point out the ambiguities and inconsistencies of pragmatism. In 1908, Lovejoy published the two-part article “The Thirteen Pragmatisms” in which he outlines the varied meanings of pragmatism as a philosophical doctrine. In so doing, he emphasizes that deficiencies abound because of a lack of doctrinal coherence. Lovejoy attributes the lack of coherence to the large amalgamation of pragmatic practitioners: “There appears to be as yet no sufficient clear and general recognition, among contributors to that controversy, of the fact that the pragmatist is not merely three, but

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⁴ A dialogue occurred between John Dewey and William Pepperell Montague at a 1939 American Philosophical Association meeting, in which Montague complimented Dewey “for his lifelong effort to practicalize intelligence.” It is reported that Dewey replied “that Montague was taking a narrow, inbred view—a philosopher’s trade-union view, he implied—of what he, Dewey, had tried to accomplish. His effort had not been to practicalize intelligence but to intellectualize practice.” See Charles Frankel, “John Dewey’s Social Philosophy,” in *New Studies in the Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. Steven M. Cahn (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1977), 5.

many men at once.”⁵ He argues that the variety of pragmatisms and pragmatists leads to doctrinal confusion and incommensurability between the competing definitions. He attributes the problem of definition to two causes: “The multiplicity of meanings in pragmatism is partly explicit and partly implicit; that is to say, it is due to the conjunction by the representatives of pragmatism of contentions which they themselves express by separate formulas; and it is partly due to the unrecognized ambiguities of meaning or duplicates of implication latent in one or another of these formulas.”⁶ He concludes that “what the movement commonly so named most needs is a clarification of its formulas and a discrimination of certain sound and important ideas lying behind it from certain other ideas that are sound but not important, and certain that would be important if only they were not unsound.”⁷ This, though, is easier said than done.

Half a century later, H.S. Thayer attempted to resolve some of Lovejoy’s concerns.⁸ Just as Lovejoy saw different pragmatisms owing to different pragmatists, Thayer too sees the difficulty of definition related to multiple actors in the early pragmatist movement. Although many intellectual movements are coherent with many actors and adherents, the lack of a clear understanding over doctrine among pragmatists served to exacerbate ambiguity. He observes that “it is odd that the founders of pragmatism were neither clear nor consistent in the accounts they gave concerning the historical origins of their doctrines.” Thayer attributes this confusion to the fact that “they

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⁵ Arthur O. Lovejoy, “The Thirteen Pragmatisms. I,” in *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Method* 5, no. 1 (2 January 1908): 5.

⁶ Lovejoy, “The Thirteen Pragmatisms. I,” 5-6.

⁷ Lovejoy, “The Thirteen Pragmatisms. II,” in *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Method* 5, no. 2 (16 January 1908): 38-39.

⁸ H.S. Thayer, *Meaning and Action: A Critical History of Pragmatism* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1968). Garry Brodsky observes that this foundational text created the “orthodox interpretation of American pragmatism.” See Brodsky, “Rorty’s Interpretation of Pragmatism,” in *Transactions of the Charles Sanders Peirce Society* 17 (1982): 311-38, at 322.

were not entirely in agreement on what pragmatism stood for, as a philosophic position or as a nucleus of ideas.”⁹ It may be said, then, that ambiguity is a symptom of something inherent in the nature of pragmatism that makes it difficult to pin down, for good and ill.

Thayer sees the conflation of “pragmatism” and “usefulness” as another source of ambiguity. He argues the general line espouses that “pragmatism is a doctrine holding that the meaning and truth of thought is determined (somehow) by criteria of practical *usefulness*. Some of the colloquial and uncritical language of the leading pragmatists would seem to support this generalization.”¹⁰ Thayer believes that the coupling of “pragmatism” with “usefulness” creates confusion for several reasons. First, it makes it seem that the notion of utility was a novel feature of early pragmatism. Against this common view, Thayer believes that the doctrine of usefulness has been written time and time again in the history of Western philosophy. After all, the subtitle of James’s *Pragmatism* is “a new name for some old ways of thinking.” Second, the notion of usefulness is subjective to the individual. Indeed, what is useful for one person may be dangerous or harmful to another. On this charge, pragmatism is branded as subjectivism or relativism which serves to confuse its actual meaning. In sum, the characteristic of utility takes pragmatism in directions it is not necessarily meant to go.

In similar fashion, John E. Smith argues that ambiguity over the meaning of pragmatism results from internal inconsistencies and external hostilities by philosophers who viewed pragmatism as reckless and naïve. Of the former, Smith observes that James’s “vivid imagination and arresting language” lead ultimately to formulating

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⁹ Thayer, 5.

¹⁰ Ibid., 5-6. Author’s emphasis.

“expressions that were misleading or designed to confirm the prejudices of his critics.”¹¹

In Peirce, he identifies “cryptic forms of expression which multiply the problems of interpretation.” Also, in Dewey he observes the “tendency to spin an almost impenetrable web about an idea or distinction which calls instead for special clarification does not make him easy to read.”¹²

To the latter, Smith notes that critics of pragmatism carry a certain amount of responsibility for misunderstandings and misinterpretations. He argues that hostility over the methods and implications of pragmatism has led critics to false interpretations and prejudices against pragmatism. Smith writes that “the idea of connecting thought with practical consequences and with the transforming of situations through an instrumental intelligence was taken to be a sure sign that thought had been deprived of its autonomy and that the essential message of Pragmatism could be summed up in the formula ‘All thought is for the sake of action.’”¹³ Critics also routinely portray pragmatism as a borrowed tradition with “intellectual capital from the Old World.”¹⁴ According to interpretations of this sort, pragmatism is too behaviorist and unoriginal. Taken on the whole, then, Smith concludes that ambiguity results from both internal and external causes.

Others argue that confusion begins with the historians’ perception of American pragmatism. They argue that lumping Peirce, James, and Dewey into something that

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¹¹ John E. Smith, *Purpose and Thought: The Meaning of Pragmatism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 7.

¹² Smith, *Meaning and Purpose*, 8. Smith cites Peirce’s pragmatic maxim—with its reference to effects which ‘might conceivably have practical bearings’—as muddled, and Dewey’s use of the term ‘doubtful’ to describe a situation prone to problems as key examples of the pragmatists’ ambiguity and unclear vocabularies.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁴ John E. Smith, *The Spirit of American Philosophy*, Revised Edition (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1983), xi.

resembles a unified movement distorts the historical facts. In *Community Denied: The Wrong Turn of Pragmatic Liberalism*, historian James Hoopes argues that there was no single, unified “pragmatism”. Against the common perception of a cohesive body that constituted American pragmatism, Hoopes asserts that “there were *two* very different American pragmatisms, a Peircean strain and a James-Dewey strain, the latter being what most intellectual historians have in mind when they invoke ‘American Pragmatism.’”¹⁵ For Hoopes, Peirce is “lumped” in with James and Dewey because of his initial role in the creation of pragmatism. This coupling forgets that “there were real and specific differences in logic and metaphysics between Peirce on the one hand and James and Dewey on the other. Where Peirce’s pragmatism was strong and objective, theirs was weak, was at least partly subjective and unpragmatic.”¹⁶

Taken on the whole, the muddled view of pragmatism can be seen as the result of internal and external sources; inconsistencies and ambiguities are the consequence of vagueness on the part of the pragmatist philosophers, its critics, and historians. Ambiguity, though, does not render pragmatism completely incoherent.

What Pragmatism Is

As shown above, inconsistencies and ambiguities within pragmatist doctrines were recognized by both pragmatists and their critics. Indeed, after James “borrowed” Peirce’s maxim of pragmatism and expanded its scope to include questions of religion and morality, Peirce protested vigorously. As Thayer observes, “Peirce’s “maxim,” as he called his method of analysis, became James’s universal “mission”...Peirce’s laboratory,

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¹⁵ James Hoopes, *Community Denied: The Wrong Turn of Pragmatic Liberalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

then, was rebuilt into a hotel by James...”¹⁷ This, of course, led Peirce to rename his philosophical approach “pragmatism”, a term “which is ugly enough to be safe from kidnappers.”¹⁸ Dewey developed pragmatism further from Peirce’s unclear “maxim” and James’s theory of meaning towards an instrumentalist theory of inquiry.¹⁹ Thus, the critical observation that pragmatism is an inconsistent philosophical doctrine is not without substance. However, the variances in pragmatism among Peirce, James, and Dewey do not render pragmatism totally unintelligible and incoherent as a mode of inquiry or as a philosophical doctrine.

What follows is a brief sketch of the unifying themes of pragmatism. After this brief sketch, the question of whether or not pragmatism can be treated as a coherent doctrine will be examined. *Pragmatism is a philosophical genre concerned with forms of inquiry and the practical consequences of knowledge.* James argues that “the whole function of philosophy ought to be to find out what definite difference it will make to you and me, at definite instants of our life, if this world-formula or that world-formula be the true one.”²⁰ James gives voice to an important reoccurring characteristic of pragmatism: an obsession with outcomes, consequences, practicality, and utility of knowledge and the methods used to derive such knowledge.

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¹⁷ Thayer, *Meaning and Action*, 80.

¹⁸ Charles Sanders Peirce, *Values in a Universe of Chance: Charles Sanders Peirce, Selected Writings*, ed. Philip Wiener (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1958), 186.

¹⁹ Dewey’s *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* is a treatise that outlines his concern with methods of inquiry (mainly scientific) and their practical consequences in human affairs. Dewey’s “instrumentalism” is his own formulation of a distinct method of inquiry: knowledge gained from inquiry should have an instrumental value or character for it to be worthwhile. For a method of inquiry to be instrumental, it must have aims that are directed at knowledge with practical consequences. See Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1938).

²⁰ William James, “What Pragmatism Means,” in *The Writings of William James*, John J. McDermott, ed. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 379.

Often, though, the pragmatist's emphasis on the practical nature of knowledge is translated into denunciatory readings of pragmatism that charge it with relativism, nominalism, and subjectivism.²¹ Against these sorts of charges, pragmatists have argued that such hostilities are the carryover of an obsolete tradition that still pays homage to notions of "first philosophy" and epistemological foundationalism. For pragmatists, it is the job of the philosopher to make knowledge functional in the sense that it acts as the guide of our actions. In so doing, knowledge is the tool that allows us to get along better in the world, make better choices, and inform future choices and decisions. In a word, knowledge and thought are *purposive*, rather than foundational.²²

The instrumentalist character of pragmatism's epistemological perspective is the manifestation of the pragmatist belief in the transitional nature of reality and human existence. On such a view, notions of an objective reality based on assumptions of the eternal, the perfect, or simply of foundations of knowledge are simply untenable. If one carries such views, the function of knowledge would be to uncover or "discover" such foundations. Alternatively, the pragmatic conception of knowledge (with its emphasis on the transitional nature of reality and human existence) employs knowledge as a "ruling principle" of our actions—hence, pragmatism is inherently instrumentalist in form as it is concerned with the outcomes of experiential processes. It is in this experiential process that ideas are tested, reinforced, or shown fallible. Thus, knowledge is less a derivative of

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²¹ The usual target of attack is James's notion of the "expediency of truth." In "What Pragmatism Means," James states "The true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief, and good, too, for definite, assignable reasons." (388) Critics of James during his time, and present day challengers of pragmatism cite that this sort of logic leads to hyper-subjective valuing. However, many are quick to defend James's rhetorical usage here as not implying anything of the sort. See Hilary Putnam, "The Permanence of William James," in *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 46, no. 3 (December 1992): 17-31. For an insightful reading of James's rhetorical devices, see Ryan E. Cull, "The Betrayal of Pragmatism?: Rorty's Quarrel with James," in *Philosophy and Literature* 24 (2000): 83-95.

²² See Thayer, *Meaning and Action*, 431.

experience than it is the guide for experience. Scholars, though, have pressed pragmatists on this point. The experientialism that the pragmatists espouse appears to some as an updated form of the empiricist tradition of Locke and Berkeley.²³

Common among the early pragmatists is the fundamental importance bestowed upon experience. Although Peirce, James, and Dewey all hold widely differing views of experience, the epistemological function of experience is the unifying thread that binds them each together. On the surface, the emphasis on experience would appear to place pragmatism within the larger tradition that began with Locke and Berkeley. The critical difference between those commonly identified as the British empiricists and the pragmatists is found in the relationship between knowledge and experience. For Locke, the epistemological function of experience is to provide the medium for coming to know ideas. That is, ideas are derived from experience. For the pragmatists, experience is transformed into an epistemological tool for assessing ideas as they are encountered *in* reality. Hence, pragmatists are concerned mainly with the consequences of experience and how experience can be used to test a store of ideas.²⁴

A good general view of pragmatism is H.S. Thayer's *Meaning and Action*. His cogent outline is seen by many scholars as the "orthodox" take on the history of American pragmatism. Thayer identifies the "cardinal thesis" of pragmatism to be located in the idea of possibility. He bases this conclusion on four key premises: first, Peirce, James and

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²³ Rorty offers his take on the relationship between pragmatic experientialism and the Western philosophical tradition in "Truth Without Correspondence to Reality," in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, 23-46. He is critical of the weight Peirce and Dewey put behind scientific methods and experience as epistemic tools.

²⁴ See Thayer's chapter entitled "Pragmatism and American Life," in *Meaning and Action*, 432-47. Thayer outlines the imported stock of European ideas in early American philosophy, then goes on to show how Peirce, James, and Dewey revised and discarded many of them to produce a distinctly "American" form of philosophy.

Dewey all hold that the character of reality and reason is practical; second, as shown above, each of these men believe that existence is transitional and that knowledge is an instrument to guide our actions in such a predicament; third, since knowledge is aimed at affecting the transitions of reality, knowledge implies valuation; fourth, since thought is a process of valuation, knowledge must have an object to which it evaluates. Thus, the object of valuation, in a pragmatist model as such, is future possibilities that encompass a litany of desires, interests, and purposes.²⁵ Therefore, since Peirce, James and Dewey are concerned with the consequences, not foundations, of knowledge, knowledge and thinking should be concerned with the possibilities of the future.

This thesis represents a radical departure from traditional philosophy. Indeed, Dewey ably describes this departure when stating "Pragmatism...presents itself as an extension of historical empiricism but with this fundamental difference, that it does not insist upon antecedent phenomena but consequent phenomena; not upon the precedents but upon the possibilities of action. And this change in point of view is almost revolutionary in its consequences."²⁶ However, the question becomes: why did a paradigm shift occur? If, as Dewey states "this change in point of view is almost revolutionary in its consequences," then what historical mechanisms produced this change?

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²⁵ Thayer, *Meaning and Action*, 424-31.

²⁶ John Dewey, "The Development of American Pragmatism," in *Philosophy and Civilization* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1963), 24.

CHAPTER 2

EARLY PRAGMATISM

The Emergence of American Pragmatism: Social and Historical Contexts

As outlined above, the early pragmatists all share a common belief in the instrumental value of knowledge. Although each approaches epistemological problems with different purposes in mind, the unifying theme among them is what Dewey terms “consequent phenomena.” Experience is the testing ground for ideas: the practical consequences of thought are derived from the experimental process of putting ideas to work. In this section, the social and historical contexts in which pragmatism emerges will be examined with the hope of unearthing the sources of the revolutionary paradigm shift that distinguishes pragmatism from its predecessors in the history of Western philosophy.

American philosophy has been denounced as provincial and lacking in intellectual originality. However, pragmatism is shot through with paradigm breaking assertions that, during its initial years, had consequences and implications both inside the United States and abroad. The pragmatist attitude undermines a variety of traditional philosophical assumptions. A firm commitment existed among the classical pragmatists to the challenging of foundationalist epistemologies inherited from the philosophy of Descartes, Kant, Spinoza and Leibniz.²⁷ For these philosophers, the goal of philosophy is the uncovering of the “foundations” of knowledge, seeking that which lay behind the cursory experiences of the everyday sort. However, Peirce, James, and Dewey see the tenets of

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²⁷ Thayer argues that the pragmatists’ challenge to rationalism coincided with attacks against the traditions of British empiricism, the tradition most scholars closely associate with pragmatism. See Thayer, *Meaning and Action*, 449-52.

first philosophy as obsolete, carrying no bearing on practical matters such as action, belief, and social responsibility. Intellectual historian George Cotkin describes the concerns of Peirce with the tradition he inherited: "Peirce dismissed Cartesian rationalism based on a priori categories of clarity and distinctness, along with Leibniz's abstract definition of truth...Abstract rationalist definitions offered little by way of meaning, according to Peirce; they were too vague. Inquiry helped the individual to produce belief and habit, and most of all to engage in useful discussions of truth."²⁸ It can be seen that the early pragmatist's primary concern is with putting knowledge to work to verify belief, guide action, and enable the individual to get along better in the world. Several interrelated historical events and movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century serve to explain the emergence of pragmatism as undertaken by Peirce, James, and Dewey.

A proper account of the emergence of pragmatism must recognize the revolutionary impact of Darwin's *Origins of Species* (1859). This text served to undermine not only the authority of religious narratives, but the very concept of self as understood in the Western world.²⁹ Darwin's thesis is well known: the origins of species (man being one of them) are best explained by historical modification. Through a long and slow process of natural selection, species evolve into different forms in conformity with the dictates of their environment. On this model, the form that humans embody is

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²⁸ George Cotkin, *Reluctant Modernism: American Thought and Culture, 1880-1900* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1992), 42-3.

²⁹ For an insightful intellectual history that examines some of the impacts of Darwinism in New England consciousness, see James Hoopes, *Consciousness in New England: From Puritanism to Psychoanalysis and Semiotic* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989). For a seminal work on the history of American philosophy during the period of the Darwinian Revolution, see Bruce Kuklick, *The Rise of American Philosophy: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1860-1930* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977). For a sweeping, yet concise history of ideas in nineteenth century America, see Louis Menand's *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001).

the result of struggle and adaptation, not divine design at the moment of creation.³⁰ An implication of this thesis, then, is that humans evolve in similar processes as plants and animals. In effect, Darwin's notion of natural selection strips mankind of any sense of preordained dignity that makes humans superior to any other species involved in processes of natural selection.³¹

John Dewey observed in 1909 that "the combination of the very words origin and species embodied an intellectual revolt...In laying hands upon the sacred ark of absolute permanence...the *Origins of Species* introduced a mode of thinking that in the end was bound to transform the logic of knowledge, and hence the treatment of morals, politics and religion."³² Indeed, the intellectual revolt had profound implications. More specifically, Darwinism created a contradiction in nineteenth-century American consciousness. On the one hand, Darwinism represented a monumental achievement in the workings of man against nature. The notion of natural selection is powerful both in explanatory value and in implication. More importantly, it jibed well with the increasingly scientific methods of inquiry that were pervasive in the second half of the nineteenth-century. On the other hand, Darwinism flew in the face of traditional religious narratives. During this period, natural selection was seen as a blasphemous concept that

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³⁰ See Charles Darwin, *The Origins of Species*, 6TH ed. (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1902), 75-164.

³¹ If Rorty is considered a fugitive figure in the intellectual world, Darwin is seen by some as the antichrist. For a variety of contemporary readings on the impact of Darwin, see Niles Eldredge, *Reinventing Darwin: The Great Debate at the High Table of Evolutionary Theory* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1995); David N. Stamos, *Darwin and the Nature of Species* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 2007); John Maynard Smith, *Did Darwin Get It Right: Essays on Games, Sex, and Evolution* (New York: Chapman and Hall, 1998).

³² John Dewey, "The Influence of Darwinism on Philosophy," in *John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899-1924, Volume 4: 1907-1909*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976), 3.

challenged the authority of God and the bible.³³ As Dewey notes above, the coupling of “origin” and “species” is an outright challenge to the biblical origins that most Americans felt provided a sufficient, if not necessary, account of the beginnings of mankind.

After the publication of Darwin’s *Origins of Species*, an epistemological crisis of enormous proportion ensued. The gauntlet which Darwin threw down required a philosophical reassessment to reconcile the new scienticism with the religious traditions prevalent in nineteenth-century America. Kuklick believes that pragmatism was the answer to this crisis, because as a philosophical doctrine, it was “able to wed evolutionary science to a religious world view.”³⁴ Indeed, as will be discussed below, the early pragmatists had the challenge of Darwinism in full view. Their formulations reflect the tenuous coexistence of the insights Darwin offers and the American religious tradition. Thus, from the outset, pragmatism was required to straddle the fine line between abstraction and practicality, which resulted in the melding of theory with praxis.³⁵

Another element in the understanding of the emergence of American pragmatism is its founding body: The Metaphysical Club. This loosely bound group of Cambridge intellectuals met briefly in the early months of 1872 for informal meetings to discuss pressing intellectual issues of their day. Members included figures like Charles Sanders Peirce, Chauncey Wright, William James, and Nicholas Green. The central issues

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³³ See Louis Menand’s discussion on the contradictory character *Origins of Species* took on in American public discourse in the second half of the nineteenth-century in *The Metaphysical Club*, 140-48.

³⁴ Kuklick, *The Rise of American Philosophy*, 26. Cotkin argues that others who were more reluctant about conflating science and religion chose to “compartmentalize” the two forms of knowledge. In so doing, one could accept the scientific conclusions of Darwin, while leaving them out of one’s religious perspectives. See Cotkin’s chapter entitled “The Tangled Bank’ of Evolution and Religion” in *Reluctant Modernism*, 1-26.

³⁵ For a remarkable study on a group of *fin de siècle* philosophers and social activists who pushed for the realization of such a middle ground, see James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

deliberated by this group included the mediation of science and religion, and the state of the American intellectual community following the Civil War. Cornel West observes that this group of intellectuals “were preoccupied with method, yet their understanding of method was quite Emersonian. Much like Emerson, they were intent on viewing science as continuous with religion—both shot through with moral purpose.”³⁶ From the beginning, the social context in which pragmatism was born out of was marked by an instrumentalism laced with morality designed to confront the historical realities of the post-Darwin, post-Civil War, United States. This, in turn, would affect the ways in which American philosophers would formulate their theories and what purposes they would ultimately serve.

The emergence of pragmatism and the experience of the Civil War as a part of the American identity is a connection that cannot be understated. The scale on which death and destruction unfolded had never been encountered before in human history. Lewis Mumford reflects that “on both sides of the line many a fine lad had died in battle, and those who survived, in more subtle ways died, too.”³⁷ Louis Menand observes that “it is a remarkable fact about the United States that it fought a civil war without undergoing a change in its form of government. The constitution was not abandoned during the American Civil War; elections were not suspended; there was no coup d’état...But in almost every other respect, the United States became a different country.”³⁸ What had changed was the profound faith in the American way of life and its accompanying system of beliefs. The Civil War created the conditions in which the essential components of the

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³⁶ Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 42.

³⁷ Mumford, *The Golden Day*, 159.

³⁸ Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, ix.

American identity were challenged. As a result, the old methods of belief and intellectual inquiry could no longer be trusted. Menand concludes that as “the Civil War swept away the slave civilization of the South, it swept away almost the whole intellectual culture of the North along with it. It took nearly half a century for the United States to develop a culture to replace it, to find a new set of ideas, and a way of thinking, that would help people cope with conditions of modern life.”³⁹

The Civil War was only one of several interconnected elements that serve to explain the emergence of pragmatism. The impact of industrialization, coupled with the effects of the Civil War, created a unique intellectual context in which Peirce and James would study. Mumford notes the “when the curtain rose on the post-bellum scene...old America was for all practical purposes demolished: industrialism had entered overnight...All the crude practices of British paleotechnic industry appeared on the new scene without relief or mitigation.”⁴⁰ The introduction of industrialization radically changed the American identity from one defined by the Transcendentalist notion of pastoral innocence to a mechanistic conception of self where “bigness” was championed as the means to progress and comfort. Mumford observes that during the Gilded Age “business was the only activity it respected; comfort was the only result it sought.”⁴¹ Thus, with industrialization came its chief partner in the race for progress: science.

Although many Americans of the nineteenth-century saw science as threatening traditional religious values, it was also viewed as having terrific emancipatory powers. Science promised to guide industrialization on a path towards improvement and progress

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³⁹ Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, x.

⁴⁰ Mumford, *The Golden Day*, 159.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 160-1.

in American life.⁴² It was no longer a discipline of intrinsic worth to a small minority of scholars and academics who were privileged in scientific discourses. Rather, during the post-Civil War years, science took on an extrinsic character that would infiltrate the popular consciousness of American life. This shift would initiate the technological revolution and carry with it profound effects in both the public and intellectual spheres in the United States.⁴³

If the beliefs that once sustained American life before the Civil War were now suspect, then the very way philosophy was undertaken underwent revision as well. Pragmatism would come to embody the contingency and uncertainty wrought in the wake of Darwinism, the Civil War, and industrialization, which was translated into broader intellectual concerns. These combined experiences shaped the contours of late nineteenth-century American philosophy in one crucial way: philosophy could not be an abstract activity that took place within the confines of social clubs and universities. Philosophy required a humanistic touch, based on practical application and experience. In such bleak times, philosophy was asked to make sense of the cruelty in the malaise of modernity, while also acting as a source of hope.

It is not surprising, then, that the philosophical formulations of Peirce, James, and Dewey all emphasize meliorism as a valuable end of philosophical inquiry. For philosopher Colin Koopman, the relationship between pragmatism and meliorism is a

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⁴² Kloppenberg argues that American philosophers and social critics of the “*fin de siècle* via media” recognized science to be a potential danger to American culture. Against the notion that science operated as a monolith of truth and progress, those of the “via media” argued that “the technical knowledge prized by the urban-industrial world...challenged traditional cultural values, and this generation of philosophers worried about the future of a world whose religious meaning was dissolving under the corrosive influence of the secular society’s mania for consumption.” See Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory*, 5.

⁴³ For an in depth discussion on the close relationship between nineteenth-century industrialization and scientism, see Mumford, *The Golden Day*, 158-161.

natural one. He observes that “Meliorism, holding together pluralism with humanism, is the thesis that we are capable of creating better worlds and selves...It is tempting, then, to see pragmatism as developing the philosophical consequences of meliorism...”⁴⁴ Indeed, the face of America had changed after the Civil War, and the American brand of philosophy is one of the clearest responses to the shifting intellectual and cultural scenes of *fin de siècle* America.

The Early Pragmatists: Peirce, James, Dewey

Charles Sanders Peirce is considered by most to be the founder of the pragmatist movement. He was the first of the group to attack the philosophical traditions in Western philosophy, and as some believe, the greatest philosopher in American history.⁴⁵ While attending Lawrence Scientific School at Harvard in 1861, William James wrote home with this observation of Peirce: “In last year’s [class] there is a son of Prof. Peirce, whom I suspect to be a very “smart” fellow with a great deal of character, pretty independent and violent though.”⁴⁶ This summation by James aptly describes the somewhat paradoxical life of Peirce: a man of exceeding intelligence and ability, yet plagued by personal problems that affected his standing in New England academic circles. For the most part, Peirce went largely unnoticed during his lifetime, with his second wife selling

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⁴⁴ Colin Koopman, “Pragmatism as a Philosophy of Social Hope: Emerson, James, Dewey, Rorty,” *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 20, no. 2 (2006): 107.

⁴⁵ This point is made by Cornel West in *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, 43. Other scholars agree with West’s view of Peirce. See Philip P. Wiener, *Values in a Universe of Change*, ix; Christopher Hookway, *Peirce* (Boston, MA: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1985); Hoopes, *Community Denied*. In a collection of essays by Max Fisch entitled *Peirce, Semeiotic, and Pragmatism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), Karl Popper is quoted as stating “Among the few dissenters [of physical determinism] was Charles Sanders Peirce, the great American mathematician and physicist and, I believe, one of the greatest philosophers of all time.” (426)

⁴⁶ William James, “Letter to Family, 16 September 1861”, in Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James, Volume I* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1935), 211.

all his papers to Harvard after his death in 1914 for five-hundred dollars.⁴⁷ In recent years, the importance of the life and thought of Peirce has reemerged, with philosophers and historians giving close attention to his writings.⁴⁸

In 1877 and 1878, Peirce published several essays in *Popular Science Monthly* that in time would come to mark the beginning of the American pragmatist movement. In the essay "How To Make Our Ideas Clear," Peirce outlines the essence of his pragmatism. In his famous "pragmatic maxim," Peirce defines what he sees as the function of knowledge and belief: "Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object."⁴⁹ As puzzling as this definition is for making our ideas clear, Peirce illustrates the paradigm shift in the function of knowledge and belief. Rather than being preoccupied with the antecedents of thought, one should focus on the "practical bearings" of knowledge and belief. Peirce's pragmatism (and later pragmatism) was designed to be a doctrine aimed at the clarification of ideas and of meaning. With this end in mind, Peirce argues that beliefs are the guiding principles of our actions; therefore, our beliefs should be well-thought over, deliberated upon, and combed through with the tools of logic so as to ensure our actions represent contemplative habits of mind. As a result, Peirce's formulations represent the

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⁴⁷ See Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufmann, "Introduction to Peirce" in *Philosophical Classics, Volume IV: Nineteenth-Century Philosophy* 3rd ed., Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufmann, eds. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003), 377.

⁴⁸ For an outstanding contemporary biography of Peirce, see Joseph Brent, *Charles Sanders Peirce: A Life* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998). Other essentials include: Karl-Otto Apel, *Charles Sanders Peirce: From Pragmatism to Pragmaticism* (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1981); Gerard Deledalle, *Charles S. Peirce: An Intellectual Biography* (Amsterdam: John Benjamin's Publishing Co., 1990); Murray G. Murphey, *The Development of Peirce's Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961).

⁴⁹ Charles Sanders Peirce, "How To Make Ideas Clear," in Baird and Kaufmann, *Philosophical Classics*, 396.

initial and marked shift away from the forms of philosophical inquiry inherited from the Western tradition.

This shift is significant for several reasons. Peirce is taking on both rationalist and empiricist schools in the Western tradition (as well as Kantianism). Descartes takes as his starting point a position of total skepticism, where all belief is doubted. Against this line, Peirce argues that belief and doubt act in tandem to confirm or deny ideas we confront throughout our lives. He posits that belief is the starting and stopping point of all thought, in that doubt irritates beliefs, while belief is also that which appeases doubt. Peirce states “As it appeases the irritation of doubt, which is the motive for thinking, thought relaxes, and comes to rest for a moment when belief is reached. But, since belief is a rule for action, the application of which involves further doubt and further thought, at the same time that it is a stopping-place, it is also a new starting-place for thought.”⁵⁰ H.O. Mounce locates the crucial step taken by Peirce as bringing the subject back into the process of knowing and affecting knowledge. Mounce observes that “Descartes’ aim...was to step outside his beliefs and to examine them without presupposition...his conception of knowledge was in a sense absolute...For Peirce on the other hand, the observer is in the midst of the world and knowledge is acquired always from some starting point of view or perspective.”⁵¹ Rather than viewing knowledge as a fixed set of beliefs, Peirce takes a radical turn by declaring knowledge to be contingent on an observer’s interests and beliefs at a particular moment (nor is that all truth equal). To be sure, Peirce is not denying that a person can revise their beliefs from time to time when relevant information becomes available to do so. However, he is denying that such

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⁵⁰ Peirce, “How To Make Our Ideas Clear,” 394.

⁵¹ H.O. Mounce, *The Two Pragmatisms: From Peirce to Rorty* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 14.

revision has to be total, wherein which all belief has to be called into question and deliberated in a single sweep of skepticism.

Peirce's assessment of Cartesian rationalism is equally damaging to the empiricists. For the empiricists, "knowing" is reduced to sense perception. According to Locke, humans are born with a blank mind ("la tabula rosa") on which knowledge is imprinted through sense experience. This view breaks with the rationalist epistemology in that it reconfigures the faculty through which knowledge comes to be known. However, for Peirce, both rationalism and empiricism share an insistence on the uncovering of absolutes: the fundamental foundations of knowledge. While rationalism and empiricism differ on the means of attaining knowledge, both are involved in the same pursuit. Hence, Peirce circumvents both camps when he denounces such metaphysical concerns and brings the subject back into epistemological inquiry.

This turn can best be explained by Peirce's background in the "hard" sciences and his firm belief in fallibilism. He was a man deeply entrenched in the scientific traditions of his time, trained as a mathematician, chemist, optician, and geologist, to name but a few. In a vignette to "A Guess at a Riddle," Peirce gives his readers some historical insight into his intellectual background and the general aims of his works:

From the moment when I could think at all until now, about forty years, I have been diligently and incessantly occupied with the study of methods [of] inquiry, both those which have been pursued and are pursued and those which ought to be pursued. For ten years before this study began, I had been in training in the chemical laboratory. I was thoroughly grounded not only in all that was then known of physics and chemistry, but also in the way in which those who were successfully advancing knowledge proceeded...I am saturated, through and through, with the spirit of the physical sciences....

Thus, in brief, my philosophy may be described as the attempt of a physicist to make such conjecture as to the constitution of the universe as the philosophers...Demonstrative proof is not to be thought of. The demonstrations of the metaphysicians are all moonshine....

For years in the course of this ripening process, I used for myself to collect my ideas under the designation *fallibilism*; and indeed the first step toward *finding out* is to acknowledge you do not satisfactorily know already; so that no blight can so surely arrest all intellectual growth as the blight of cocksureness; and ninety-nine out of every hundred good heads are reduced to impotence by that malady...

Indeed, out of a contrite fallibilism, combined with a high faith in the reality of knowledge, and an intense desire to find things out, all my philosophy has always seemed to me to grow....⁵²

Peirce viewed himself, first and foremost, as a scientist who espoused philosophical theory. However, his notion of science is calculated in the sense that he skirts the commitments of empiricism and the precepts of discovering “foundations” through philosophical inquiry. Peirce’s thorough reliance on methods of induction and the premium he places on fallibilism allows him to discard notions of antecedent phenomena and, thus, the goals and functions of first philosophy. It is out of this reworking that Peirce embodies the vanguard spirit of pragmatism. Moreover, he represents a departure from the European roots from which prior American philosophy had been firmly entrenched.⁵³

An important concept that is derived from Peirce’s fallibilism is his “communitarian idealism,” which avoids many of the major pitfalls of metaphysical realism.⁵⁴ This community-based epistemology centers on what Peirce terms “the final opinion”: knowledge is not the product of a metaphysically independent entity to which

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⁵² Charles Sanders Peirce, “Notes for a Book, to be entitled ‘A Guess at a Riddle,’ with a Vignette of the Sphinx below the Title,” quoted in Brent, *Charles Sanders Peirce: A Life*, 16-18.

⁵³ Prior to the pragmatist movement, American philosophy had been dominated by themes largely imported from European thought. For example, the Transcendentalists can be seen as borrowing themes and concepts from the German Idealism of Hegel and from 18th century Romanticism. Pragmatism represents a strict departure from these roots because it had finally created a discourse novel to the United States which reflected something distinct in the “American experience.” See Thayer’s *Meaning and Action* 432-447.

⁵⁴ For an extended discussion of this concept, see Kuklick, *The Rise of American Philosophy* 114-17. For an important work on the pragmatist emphasis on the need for a recovery of community, see Jacquelyn Kegley, *Genuine Individuals and Genuine Communities: A Roycean Public Philosophy* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1997).

the independent observer references. Rather, knowledge is that which endures the test of experience over the long run, thus being the result of a “final opinion.” Peirce argues that errors in thought and other epistemological accidents will be filtered out by the common opinion in a community. Truth, then, is what every woman and man would naturally believe, given an appropriate amount of time and information. Peirce observes “Let any human being have enough information and exert enough thought on any question, and the result will be that he will arrive at a certain conclusion, which is the same that any other mind will reach under sufficiently favorable circumstances.”⁵⁵

Peircean epistemology privileges a community discourse, espousing that truth will “come out in the wash.” This formulation allows Peirce to avoid the mind-body distinction inherited from Cartesian metaphysical realism, while simultaneously affirming scientific modes of inquiry as the correct epistemological approach to questions of knowledge. It is in Peirce’s community-based epistemology, combined with the relevance of the subject’s perspective in inquiry, that one can locate his sense of meliorism. By formulating a doctrine of meaning that accounts for the interests and beliefs of the individual, and that factors in the inevitability of fallibility, Peirce’s pragmatism is implicitly melioristic.⁵⁶

As noted above, Peirce’s communitarianism places a premium on collaboration and group deliberation in the consensus-developing process. It is obvious that these are all values that are necessary to sustain liberal ideals and democracy in the United States.

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⁵⁵ Peirce, 81.

⁵⁶ Mounce makes a similar point on page 18 in *The Two Pragmatisms*. In a discussion of Peirce’s emphasis on fallibilism, Mounce notes: “Now the view of science we are illustrating here has an important consequence. As we have said, scientific activity is, as it were, groping into the unknown. Since this is so, any general view of things which we develop today is liable to be replaced tomorrow by our moving into a wider perspective still. This view of science is known as *fallibilism*... This view is not pessimistic. Quite the contrary, it presupposes that science is, or can be, progressive. Tomorrow we are liable to change our view because we are liable to be in a better position to appreciate where we stand today.”

For Peirce, the self-community dichotomy needs to be overcome: the dichotomization of the two creates detached spheres that inhibit group progress by privileging the individual. Hoopes notes that “Peirce’s philosophy, far more than James’s or Dewey’s, makes it possible to see that our relation to society has some of the same kind of integration, some of the same kind of reality, as do the relations within us that constitute our individual minds and selves.”⁵⁷ For all the prestige and perceived debt owed to James and Dewey for the contribution to liberal politics, “their philosophy contained elements of old-fashioned, subjective logic that prevented James and Dewey from entirely escaping an illogical individualism.”⁵⁸ Thus, Peirce’s communitarianism is a doctrine “which was mainly a hopeful insistence on the obvious correctness of the proposition that no man is an island.”⁵⁹

William James is often identified as the key figure in the popularization of pragmatism in both academic and social discourses in the United States around the turn of the twentieth-century.⁶⁰ James, though, viewed himself as working within a tradition that did not start with him, but with his older colleague Peirce. To be sure, in an 1898 lecture in Berkeley titled “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results,” James gave full credit for

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⁵⁷ Hoopes, *Community Denied*, 11.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁶⁰ The suggested readings for William James are voluminous. However, a few essentials can be listed here. See Gay Wilson Allen, *William James: A Biography* (New York: The Viking Press, 1967); Jacques Barzun, *A Stroll with William James* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983); George Cotkin, *William James: Public Philosopher* (Baltimore, MD.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Gerald Myers, *William James: His Thought and Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, Two Volumes (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1935); George Santayana, *Character and Opinion in the United States, with Reminiscences of William James and Josiah Royce and Academic Life in America* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1920); Charlene Haddock Seigfried, *Chaos and Context: A Study of William James* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1978); Ellen K. Suckiel, *The Pragmatic Philosophy of William James* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1982); John Wild, *The Radical Empiricism of William James* (New York: Doubleday, 1969).

pragmatism's founding to Peirce.⁶¹ What each maintains pragmatism to be, though, is a different matter.

Whereas Peirce identifies his form of pragmatism as a logical tool to test the consequences of propositions, James's pragmatism is more humanistic, moral, and looser in its aims and scope.⁶² John Dewey, in "The Development of American Pragmatism," describes this difference:

Peirce was above all a logician; whereas James was an educator and humanist and wished to force the general public to realize that certain problems, certain philosophical debates, have a real importance for mankind, because the beliefs which they bring into play lead to very different modes of conduct. If this important distinction is not grasped, it is impossible to understand the majority of the ambiguities and errors which belong to the later period of the pragmatic movement.⁶³

Moreover, Peirce's pragmatism is mainly a theory of meaning (the clarification of ideas); after James, pragmatism becomes popularized as a theory of truth.⁶⁴ For Peirce, pragmatism enables an engaged inquirer to discern between the meaning of propositions with the use of logical tools. James, on the other hand, is concerned with the truth value of propositions and their practical consequences. Hence, James is less concerned with the nuts and bolts of a proposition than he is with their ability to pay off. Thus, the crucial

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⁶¹ After Peirce was black listed from professional academics in the 1880s, he fell into a state of abject poverty for the remainder of his life. While many of Peirce's old colleagues had abandoned him, William James remained charitable towards him for the rest of his life. On numerous occasions, James campaigned for Peirce to obtain lectureships and other academic postings (with minimal success). In *The Two Pragmatisms*, H.O. Mounce argues that James's use of the term "pragmatism" in the 1898 Berkeley lecture "was an act of characteristic generosity." (43) Menand's *The Metaphysical Club* and Brent's *Peirce* chronicle many of the more specific occasions and types of charity James bestowed Peirce.

⁶² Thayer identifies this major difference as grounded in "the dominant historical spirit" of James's era. He argues that James's moralistic reconfiguration of pragmatism was a response to "the present dilemma in philosophy." For James, the growing gap between morality and knowledge required a theory of truth that could mediate the two. Thus, James's commitment to pluralism and social individualism opened pragmatism up to a wide and diverse variety of topics. See Thayer's *Meaning and Action*, 420-2.

⁶³ Dewey, "The Development of American Pragmatism," 19.

⁶⁴ For an interesting analysis of this move by James, see Mounce, *The Two Pragmatisms*, 36-52.

divisions between Peircean and Jamesean pragmatism may be seen as centering on the place of logic in philosophical inquiry.

James's objections to logic has less to do with Peirce and his mode of inquiry, and more with the legacy of Hegel that was pervasive in nineteenth-century New England intellectual circles. Cotkin observes that "not all philosophers practicing in the final decades of the nineteenth century were content with a pragmatic philosophical perspective that failed to serve a fully satisfying main course of cosmic order, rationality, and progress."⁶⁵ For philosophers like George S. Morris, William T. Harris, and George Holmes Howison, Hegel provides the necessary foundations for their variety of philosophical proclivities. For James, the infatuation with Hegel poses a threat to issues of moral concern. Philosopher A.J. Ayer observes that the "roots of [James's] objection to Hegelianism were emotional and moral. Emotionally he found it stifling...What he finds morally shocking in Hegelianism is its pretence that pain and evil are not real, or anyhow not real enough to worry about."⁶⁶ The logic of Hegel—the dialectic—is dangerous because it threatens to strip human suffering and evil of its historicity and humanity. For James and the other pragmatists, philosophy should resist systems and abstractions that neglect the practical consequences. While some would argue that Hegelian logic has profound implications for evil and suffering, James sees it as failing to translate into the "ways things actually are".

Although the station of logic in philosophy represents a key difference between Peirce and James, both agree that the search for epistemological foundations must be abandoned in favor of practical forms of knowledge that allow for contingency,

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⁶⁵ Cotkin, *Reluctant Modernism*, 44.

⁶⁶ A.J. Ayer, *The Origins of Pragmatism: Studies in the Philosophy of Charles Sanders Peirce and William James* (San Francisco, CA: Freeman, Cooper, and Company, 1968), 176-7.

fallibility, and future revision. It is for this reason that both men agree on the need to include scientific approaches in philosophical inquiry. Cotkin notes that “James made quite clear that pragmatism began by associating itself with the proven experimental method of modern science. The essence of this method, under whose banner pragmatism proudly marched, demanded close attention to facts, as well as an openness to the revision of hypotheses in the light of experimental negation.”⁶⁷ It is this sense that James saw himself as inheriting the mantle of pragmatism, as sharing the common vision of testing ideas in experience. Thus, James views epistemology as an experimental process aimed at producing knowledge that can ameliorate the negative aspects of the human condition (rather than a project to reconstruct the foundations of first philosophy).

In its most basic form, James’s pragmatism as a theory of truth emphasizes both the functionality and limits of knowledge. As noted above, his form of pragmatism was designed to combat the effects of Hegelianism, but other contingencies existed that lead James to espouse his doctrine of pragmatism. For James, pragmatism was meant to be a mediatory methodology for the “present dilemma in philosophy” of his time. This dilemma centers on the intellectual divisions between what James categorizes as the “tender-minded” and the “tough-minded.” The former group is described by James as being “rationalistic,” “religious,” and “Idealistic”; the latter is “Empiricist,” “Materialistic,” and “Irreligious.”⁶⁸ James views the split as threatening moral virtue and religious belief. He believes that such divisions would ultimately result in

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⁶⁷ Cotkin, *William James: Public Philosopher*, 163.

⁶⁸ James’s famous two-column description of the differences between the “tender-minded” and the “tough-minded” can be found in *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1943), 20.

epistemological skepticism where each camp would accuse the other of philosophical malpractice.

In his lecture entitled "The Present Dilemma in Philosophy," James observes the quandary created by such divisions:

You want a system that will combine both things, the scientific loyalty to facts and willingness to take account of them, the spirit of adaptation and accommodation, in short, but also the confidence in human values and the resultant spontaneity, whether of the religious or of the romantic type. And this then is your dilemma: you find empiricism with inhumanism and irreligion; or else you find a rationalistic philosophy that indeed may call itself religious, but that keeps out of all definite touch with concrete facts and joys and sorrows.⁶⁹

James sees each camp as carrying serious shortcomings. Accordingly, James views pragmatism as a device that will at once show the limits of knowledge (as to illustrate the deficiencies of the projects of the rationalists and empiricists—the uncovering of "foundations") and develop truth *qua* utility (rather than as an absolute).

James's pragmatism is best exemplified by his notion of the "cash-value" of truth: the truth of a proposition lies in its ability to pay off; that is, allowing one to get along better in the experiential world.⁷⁰ Describing his pragmatic notion of truth, James writes "Pragmatism...asks its usual questions. 'Grant an idea or belief to be true,' it says 'what

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⁶⁹ James, *Pragmatism*, 20.

⁷⁰ Not every observer agrees with James's notion of the cash-value of truth. In his 1908 essay entitled "William James's Conception of Truth," Bertrand Russell takes James to task on his assertion that "the true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way belief, and good, too, for definite, assignable reasons." (See James, "What Pragmatism Means," in McDermott, 388). Russell argues that "the notion that it is quite easy to know when the consequences of a belief are good, so easy, in fact, that a theory of knowledge need take no account of anything so simple—this notion, I must say, seems to me one of the strangest assumptions for a theory of knowledge to make." See Russell, "William James's Conception of Truth," in *Bertrand Russell: Philosophical Essays* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966), 119. For Russell, the confusion over truth in a pragmatist framework centers around the distinction between *meaning* and *criterion*. Russell notes that "...if pragmatists only affirmed that utility is a *criterion* of truth, there would be much less to be said against their view. For there certainly seems to be few cases, if any, in which it is clearly useful to believe what is false. The chief criticism one would then have to make on pragmatism would be to deny that utility is a *useful* criterion, because it is so often harder to determine whether a belief is useful than whether it is true. The arguments of pragmatists are almost wholly directed to proving that utility is a *criterion*; that utility is the *meaning* of truth is then supposed to follow." (120-1)

concrete difference will its being true make in any one's actual life? How will the truth be realized? What experiences will be different from those which would obtain if the belief were false? What, in short, is the truth's cash-value in experiential terms?"⁷¹ This formulation is consistent with Peirce's insistence on grounding meaning in empirical, rather than metaphysical, terms. Also, James's utilitarian-esque epistemology is laden with scientific rhetoric that emphasizes the testing of ideas through experience, the outcome of experiential processes, and the moral value of such processes. This emphasis on scientific methods is reminiscent of Peirce as well. Thus, like Peirce, James's pragmatism can be seen as yet another challenge to the traditions in Western philosophy which seek to uncover antecedent phenomena that have little bearing on the practical consequences of human inquiry and action. It is telling then that James dedicates *Pragmatism* to John Stuart Mill "for whom I first learned the pragmatic openness of mind and whom my fancy likes to picture as our leader were he alive to-day."⁷²

As observed above, a key shift that occurs with James in the history of pragmatism is the overt moral character it assumes. For James, the mediation of the "present dilemma in philosophy" derives its purposes from the moral implications of the binary relationship between tender-minded and tough-minded.⁷³ On the one hand, if a person is aligned with the empiricist camp (the tough-minded), they could be charged with irreligiousness and propagating moral degradation. James witnessed first hand how the Darwinian Revolution exacerbated the negative perception of the "tough-minded":

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⁷¹ James, *Pragmatism*, 200.

⁷² *Ibid.*, xi.

⁷³ See Thayer, *Meaning and Action*, 422. Thayer argues that "the role that James helped to create for pragmatism, the moral function, was retained in the later history...James thought of pragmatism as a way in which man's otherwise disparate and dilemmatic interests in religious beliefs and hard scientific facts could be linked together."⁷³

the empiricist community was viewed as denigrating the role of church and God, a move that threatened the moral fiber of American life. On the other hand, if one maintained a rationalist worldview (the tender-minded), they ran the risk of neglecting the hard facts that science provided. It must be remembered that for all its shortcomings and charges of irreligiousness, science was having an undeniable social and cultural impact in America in the late nineteenth-century. For James, intellectual life requires a mode of inquiry that allowed both for brute facts and purposive habits of mind. The aim of philosophy, then, is not to divide and conquer, but to ask meaningful questions that could potentially “pay off” in the form of human flourishing and the establishment of dual beliefs in both religion and science.

As a result of the moralization of pragmatism by James, it would now take on a social role as a turn-of-the century public philosophy.⁷⁴ As many commentators observe, James’s emphasis on the pragmatic themes of contingency, pluralism, and individualism illustrate his moral commitment to the betterment of the public sphere, so as to promote creativity and human freedom. To be sure, James’s philosophical interests were heavily intertwined with the social and cultural issues of his times. Not only is James’s pragmatism a response to the contradictions between the tender-minded and tough-minded camps, but it is also a manifestation of the increasingly fragmented identity of the upper-middle class in American society.⁷⁵

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⁷⁴ For a critical analysis on the context in which pragmatism grew into a public philosophy, see Jeffrey C. Isaac, “Is the Revival of Pragmatism Practical, or What are the Consequences of Pragmatism?” in *Constellations* 6, no. 4 (1999): 561-87.

⁷⁵ Cotkin observes that during the second half of the nineteenth-century, the attitude of “desiccation” was pervasive among the upper and middle classes. He writes that “the etiology of desiccation, otherwise commonly referred to as neurasthenia, was mixed, but its effects could be numbing, provoking the sufferer to adopt a “nightmare” or “bass note” view of life.” See George Cotkin, “William James and Richard Rorty: Context and Conversation,” in *Pragmatism: From Progressivism to Postmodernism*, eds. Robert Hollinger and David Depew (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995): 38-55.

In James's later works, he came to champion the necessity of the individual's liberty as a crucial component of moral and practical life. His essay "The Will to Believe" illustrates the utility of beliefs in allowing the individual to get along better in the world. Mounce connects James's concern for the individual with his struggles with depression throughout his life: "It may be remembered that James had become convinced in early manhood, through his struggle with nervous depression, that one is entitled to believe independently of reason. Some truths, or so he came to believe, can be discovered only by those who have the faith to take them as such."⁷⁶ James's individualism can also be said to be a response to industrialization and American expansion abroad during the last years of the nineteenth-century. For James, this created a moral and philosophical problem: the "bigness" of industrialization and imperialism threatened to stifle the freedom of individual creativity and her or his capacity to actively affect change in their lives. Koopman observes that for James, "the larger the institution, the more easily our freedom is rendered ineffective. Greater masses channel our energies through mechanisms that hollow them of all creative force. James's concern is that we too readily institutionalize our social relationships in forms that supersede, and later extinguish, the actual energies they were supposed to cultivate."⁷⁷ Thus, James's focus on individualism is symptomatic of the social context in which he was writing. The threat to individual

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⁷⁶ Mounce, *The Two Pragmatisms*, 88. Here, Mounce provides some enlightening background on James's "The Will to Believe." He reports that James had regretted the title employing the word "will." James felt that the use of will implies that a believer is justified in holding any belief that can be "willed." He would have preferred the phrase "The Right to Believe" as it implies a larger criterion of belief than "rationality" can hold for. Hence, one has the right to believe x, according to an expanded notion of what counts as knowledge.

⁷⁷ Colin Koopman, "William James's Politics of Personal Freedom," in *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 19, no. 2 (2005): 180. For an insightful piece that depicts the more radical implications of James's emphasis on individualism, see Deborah Coon, "One Moment in the World's Salvation": Anarchism and the Radicalization of William James," in *The Journal of American History* 83, no. 1 (June 1996): 70-99. See also James's *A Pluralistic Universe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977).

liberty by the mechanisms of large institutions required a philosophical reassessment of the place of the individual within such a society. Taken on the whole, this represents James's fundamental concern with the practical effects of philosophy and the amelioration of social problems that individuals faced.

Thus, James's pragmatism is shot through with mediations on a number of levels: intellectual, social, and individual. Initially a response to the conflicts between the scientific and religious communities in New England, James's pragmatism began to mediate the relationship between the individual and the modern world. While James's concerns are less with the community on the whole, he worried about the social situations that individuals mediated at the personal level: James's meliorism deals directly with the ability to act and create, and, thereby, to improve. However, actions aimed at human development require a reconfiguration of the traditional notions of truth. Hence, James believed that for meliorism to operate as a social process, epistemological notions of truth must be loosened up to allow for pluralistic and humanistic interpretations of social reality. West observes "For James, the universe is incomplete, the world is still "in the making" owing to the impact of human powers on the universe and the world. Therefore, inquiry into truth about this universe and world produces contingent and revisable claims that are convincing."⁷⁸ Truth, then, is "an instrument—prompted by provocation, promoted by melioristic faith, and deployed by strenuous heroic persons against obstacles in order to further the moral development of individuals."⁷⁹ We can see that, like Peirce, the ways in which humans affect change corresponds to how they perceive their

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⁷⁸ West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, 65.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

relationship to a community, their role in change, and the function of knowledge in such a process.

John Dewey was born in 1859 and lived for ninety-two years. This is not an arbitrary passing observation. Over Dewey's lifetime, he witnessed some of the most important and transformative technological and social advances that proved to have profound effects in the United States. Not only does Dewey share his birth year with the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, he also lived to see the introduction of Einstein's Theory of Relativity, the birth of quantum mechanics, and the development of the Atomic age. As a result, Dewey's pragmatism took on a more mature character than that of his predecessors, Peirce and James. His pragmatism combines the scientific prerogatives of Peirce with the moralism of James to produce a philosophy that reflects the social context of his time.⁸⁰ Thus, in a sense Dewey represents a synthesis of the early pragmatist tradition in which he takes what he sees as the most useful aspects of Peirce and James and couples them with his own intellectual methods and concerns.

The scope of Dewey's academic writings and thought is staggering. The topics he covers vary from educational theory, philosophy of language, philosophy of science, as well as the more traditional philosophical terrain encompassing metaphysics and epistemology. Although his professional interests are multiple, his commitment to pragmatism and its methods of inquiry unifies his thought and writing.

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⁸⁰ For an in-depth analysis on Dewey's melding of the methods and aims of Peirce and James, see Thayer, *Meaning and Action*, 165. For overlap and divergence between Dewey, and Pierce and James, see also Susan Haack, "The Pragmatist Theory of Truth," in *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 27, no. 3 (September 1976): 231-49.

Much the same as Peirce and James, Dewey views science as possessing enormous potential for the betterment of mankind. The emphasis science places on revision, fallibility, and the potentiality of future theories that are more predictive and illuminating is a source of hope among the pragmatists. Yet Dewey and his predecessors see a danger in the growth of scientism: as science begins to provide a clearer picture of the natural world, it runs the risk of becoming amoral, static, and devoid of practical concerns and human interests. This would grow into a fundamental concern for Dewey over his lifetime.

As shown above, Dewey's pragmatism is the product of a historically specific moment. Having witnessed the extreme transformative effects of science in the modern world, Dewey was confronted with the reality of an increasing gap between science and morality. Science had given the world a clearer picture of its molecular makeup, a stronger sense of the origins of the universe, as well as a device that could put an end to humanity. For Dewey, the technological revolution that science fostered only served to sharpen the cleavage between science and morality.

Dewey's pragmatism attempts what James had tried to do, but in a much different world: to dissolve the notion that science and morality were mutually exclusive categories. Whereas James was confronting an intellectual dilemma that existed between the scientific community and religious believers, Dewey faced an extreme challenge between the growing divergence of science and humanity itself. That is, while James's concerns were certainly practical in aim, they still remained somewhat abstract in form. On the other hand, Dewey occupied a moment in history when the forces of science were being made manifest and their implications were being realized in their full brunt. James

lived in a world where the abyss was ever present, but able to be withstood at arms length. For Dewey, though, the world was threatened to be enveloped in the abyss of totalitarianism and nuclear warfare. This, then, is the context out of which Dewey's pragmatism arose.⁸¹

Throughout his writings, Dewey maintains a profound dissatisfaction with the detached and increasingly specialized character of philosophy. He views the divisions maintained between, say, the sciences and ethics, or philosophy and practical human concerns, as "the greatest misfortune and most serious intellectual error of the present century."⁸² In 1917, Dewey observed this tendency in present philosophy: "More emphasis has been put on what philosophy is not than upon what it may become...There are human difficulties of an urgent, deep-seated kind which may be clarified by trained reflection...Philosophy will not solve these problems; philosophy is vision, imagination, reflection—and these functions, apart from action, modify nothing and hence resolve nothing."⁸³ Dewey believes that a recovery is necessary if philosophy is to have a practical bearing on issues of human concern. He observes that "philosophy recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men."⁸⁴

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⁸¹ For a decisive analysis of Dewey's life and thought, see Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991). Other essentials include: Thomas Alexander, *John Dewey's Theory of Art, Experience, and Nature* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1987); Raymond Boisvert, *Dewey's Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1988); James Campbell, *Understanding John Dewey* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1995); Neil Coughlan, *Young Dewey: An Essay in American Intellectual History* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1973); George Dykhuizen, *The Life and Mind of John Dewey* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973); Stephen Rockefeller, *John Dewey: Religious Faith and Democratic Humanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); Ralph Sleeper, *The Necessity of Pragmatism: John Dewey's Conception of Philosophy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986).

⁸² Thayer, *Meaning and Action*, 166.

⁸³ Dewey, "The Need for a Recovery in Philosophy," in John J. Stuhr, ed., *Classical American Philosophy: Essential Readings and Interpretive Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 345.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 345.

Thus, for Dewey, recovery requires reconstruction: if philosophy is to become a “method” for “dealing with the problems of men” philosophers will need to reconstruct the very notion of the aims and purposes of philosophy. Therefore, Dewey envisions philosophy as an instrument for confronting human concerns and for discerning the possible consequences of intellectual inquiry of such concerns.

Dewey’s pragmatism is best identified by his instrumentalism. To bridge the gap between science and morality, Dewey suggests that philosophy must be reconstructed: theories of knowledge, science, and morality must be viewed as interconnected and shot through with human interests and values.⁸⁵ Hence, scientific inquiry should operate under a paradigm that has the interests and values of mankind in full view. That is, the consequences of scientific investigation should always be tested for their practical bearing in human affairs. Therefore, scientific knowledge (among other forms of knowledge) should have instrumental, rather than intrinsic, value.

Dewey defines his instrumentalism as follows:

Instrumentalism is an attempt to establish a precise logical theory of concepts, of judgments and inferences in their various forms, *by considering primarily how thought functions in the experimental determinations of future consequences*. That is to say, it attempts to establish universally recognized distinctions and rules of logic by deriving them from the reconstructive or meditative function ascribed to reason. It aims to constitute a theory of the general forms of conception and reasoning, and not of this or that particular judgment or concept related to its own content, or to its particular implications.⁸⁶

True to form, Dewey’s definition is all but clear. However, the point is well taken: thought or thinking is an instrument from which we derive knowledge; as it were, thought

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⁸⁵ See Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). This is an important collection of philosophical lectures that examine the nature of the relationship between facts and values, and how the dichotomy is no longer useful (and in pragmatist terms, then, it no longer holds). In Deweyan spirit, Putnam argues that science can still be a sound source of knowledge, while acknowledging the fact that it is laden with value judgments.

⁸⁶ Dewey, “Development of American Philosophy,” 26. My emphasis.

is purposive and aimed at the consequences to which reason makes us beholden. Thus, Dewey's instrumentalism seeks to underwrite the conditions in which (1) thought occurs and (2) the consequences of such processes.

On such a model, it becomes possible for Dewey to ameliorate, theoretically, the science-morality gap. Since thought is purposive and aimed at future consequences, scientific inquiry is no longer thought of as taking place within a vacuum. Rather, on Dewey's instrumentalist model, because thought is purposive, it is laden with values and interests. Accordingly, reason mediates the thought-act of determining the future consequences of inquiry and the act of thought itself. Hence, knowledge is instrumental in that it is a tool for determining such consequences. Seen in these terms, science and morality become wedded and the dichotomy collapses. In *Reconstruction in Philosophy* Dewey describes the implications of this reconstruction: "When the consciousness of science is fully impregnated with the consciousness of human value, the greatest dualism which now weighs humanity down, the split between the material, the mechanical, the scientific and the moral and ideal will be destroyed."⁸⁷

Implicit to Dewey's instrumentalism is an epistemological critique of the Western tradition dating back to Plato. For Dewey, the co-optation of philosophy by epistemology and its projects was the cause of the increasing gap between science and philosophy. Historian Robert Westbrook observes that "the consequences of this swallowing up of modern philosophy by epistemology, Dewey advised, had been disastrous. Not only had epistemologists not delivered the Reality they promised, but in trying to grasp it and in contemptuously dismissing ordinary belief, they had cut philosophy off from science."⁸⁸

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⁸⁷ Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920), 173.

⁸⁸ Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, 124.

For Dewey, the epistemological promise of foundations is foregone, and he posits instrumentalism to be a more fruitful path of inquiry—this attitude leads Dewey to formulate his notion of “immediate empiricism.”

Dewey built on the antifoundationalist mantles of Peirce and James and created an epistemology that locates truth and knowledge in experience—the essence of early pragmatism. In his essay titled “The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism,” Dewey outlines his epistemological stance which he calls “immediate empiricism.” Defining this term, he states: “Immediate empiricism postulates that things—anything, everything, in the ordinary or non-technical use of the term ‘thing’—are what they are experienced as. Hence, if one wishes to describe anything truly, his task is to tell what it is experienced as being.”⁸⁹ With this definition, Dewey is doing three things simultaneously: first, he is attacking the correspondence theory of truth; second, he is asserting that objects come to be known by their “consequent phenomena”—what the results of experiences *are*, and what can be said about an object; and third, he is challenging the concept of truth as an epistemological category, preferring the more probabilistic adjective “truly.”

For Dewey, immediate empiricism represents a strong move away from the traditions of modern epistemology. On a traditional empiricist model, knowledge is something perceived through our senses. We come to know things through their relations with our senses. On such an account, experience is implicitly passive, with the observer somewhat detached from her environment. Dewey, in effect, does away with the notion that knowledge is relational between objects and our senses. Rather, Dewey holds that knowledge is something interacted with, something we take part in and affect. Westbrook

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⁸⁹ Dewey, “The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism,” in *James and Dewey on Belief and Experience*, eds. John M. Capps and Donald Capps (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 189.

observes that “Dewey believed that persuasive evidence for his “postulate of immediate empiricism” was provided by evolutionary biology, which had established that experience was a process of interaction between a living being and its environment.”⁹⁰ No doubt, this represents a clear sign of the influence of the Darwinian Revolution and the impact it had on the ways in which Dewey formulated his discourse.⁹¹ Thus, for Dewey, immediate empiricism is a corollary of instrumentalism in that knowledge is gained through the examination of thought itself.

On the surface, Dewey’s formulation appears quite flimsy. An epistemological conception of immediate experience as the mediator of true knowledge appears problematic on a number of levels. What is the relationship between immediate sense datum and the idea with which it corresponds? And what is the role of ideas in an epistemology that is based entirely in experience? Dewey responds to such charges by examining the tradition from which we base our very notions of knowledge and truth. He writes “Except for the occasional protest, historic philosophies have been ‘transcendental.’ And this trait of philosophies is a reflex of the fact that dominant moral codes and religious beliefs have appealed for support to something above and beyond experience. Experience has been systematically disparaged in contrast with something taken to be more fundamental and superior in worth.”⁹² Dewey emphasizes the dominance of the traditional dichotomization of the phenomenal and noumenal, the subject and the object, and the temporal and the eternal. The inherited traditions of Plato, Descartes and Kant, which put a premium on such dichotomies, have served as the

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⁹⁰ Westbrook, 127.

⁹¹ See Dewey, “The Influence of Darwinism on Philosophy,” 8-14.

⁹² Dewey, “What I Believe,” in *James and Dewey on Belief and Experience*, 216.

epistemological paradigm for over two thousand years.⁹³ Dewey observes that throughout the history of philosophy “impermanence meant insecurity; the permanent was a sole ground of assurance and support amid the vicissitudes of existence.”⁹⁴

However, for Dewey, the security provided by the traditional epistemological model ignores the historical facticity of knowledge. Dewey’s epistemological perspective (which places experience as the primary epistemic category) requires the acknowledgment that knowledge is the result of the relationship between humans and the world in highly specific social, political, and cultural circumstances and with particular social interests in mind. It is here where Dewey’s melioristic function of philosophy comes to the surface. Knowledge and the “knowing subject” interact in a social relationship. Once this relationship is brought into view, knowledge is no longer something permanent or detached from concrete human reality. Rather, knowledge is created and affected through human action, and truth is more of “a way” than an eternal principle. It is here where the potential for positive change in the future is located. Hopefulness, or meliorism, is “at the heart of pragmatism,” and is realized “in the abilities of human effort to create better future realities.”⁹⁵

It becomes apparent why Peirce, James, and Dewey can be viewed as making a radical departure from the traditions of Western philosophy: their consistent calls for the

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⁹³ In *Reconstruction in Philosophy* Dewey uses the metaphor of feudal society to describe the hierarchies in the classical tradition. He writes “In a feudally organized society...each kinship group or species occupies a definite place. It is marked by the possession of a specific rank higher or lower with respect to other grades. This position confers upon it certain privileges, enabling it to enforce certain claims upon those lower in the scale and entailing upon it certain services and homage to be rendered to superiors...The classic theory of the constitution of the world corresponds point by point to this ordering of classes in a scale of dignity and power.” (63)

⁹⁴ Dewey, “What I Believe,” 218.

⁹⁵ Koopman, “Pragmatism as a Philosophy of Hope,” 109.

abandonment of foundational epistemologies entails the loss of the guarantee of universals. This results in the utility, not eternity, of truth and knowledge. Moreover, their commitment to challenging the foundations of first philosophy illustrates a deep awareness of the historicity and social function of philosophical inquiry. Questions asked by Descartes and Kant seemed no longer relevant in the context of nineteenth and early twentieth-century American society. The pragmatist philosophers faced new problems that required a fundamental reworking of their philosophical perspectives to address important public issues. What they did was to remove philosophy from the ivory tower and ask it to go to work.

CHAPTER 3

RICHARD RORTY AND THE LEGACY OF AMERICAN PRAGMATISM

Richard Rorty's revival of pragmatism in the late 1970s and early 1980s marked an important moment in the intellectual history of the United States. It was the rebirth of the American philosophical legacy that most considered extinct. The America that Dewey left in 1952 was quite different than the one neopragmatists live in today. After victory in World War II, America found itself entrenched in the fight against communism. This fight would take the United States into Korea and Vietnam only to result in stalemate and eventual defeat. The 1960s witnessed a cultural revolution that shattered the American consensus.⁹⁶ Fragmentation of consensus can also be found in the Civil Rights movement—questions and issues pertaining to race relations that began with conversations in the 1960s persist today. Taken together, all of these events profoundly transformed the character and identity of the United States. Thus, the contexts of classical pragmatism and contemporary pragmatism play an important role in discerning the similarities and differences between the two.

Decline

To some, pragmatism is viewed as having fallen by the wayside after the Second World War: the threat of nuclear attack and the prevailing atmosphere of fear during the initial years of the Cold War rendered pragmatism impractical in the social and political

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⁹⁶ The question of consensus in the American identity is a highly contentious topic. For a thorough exposition of the "liberal consensus" of the 1950s, see Charles Maland, "Dr. Strangelove (1964): Nightmare Comedy and the Ideology of Liberal Consensus," in *American Quarterly* 31, no. 5, Special Issue: Film and American Studies (Winter 1979): 697-717.

conditions of the 1950s. It would be a mistake, though, to reduce dissatisfaction with pragmatism as a result of World War II and the onslaught of the Cold War. Historian John Patrick Diggins argues that dissatisfaction with the pragmatic tradition can be traced back to the 1910s and 1920s.⁹⁷

Dewey and his followers were criticized during the First World War by culture critics who saw the doctrines of pragmatism as either impotent or dangerous to the public consciousness of the United States. In 1917, progressive writer Randolph Bourne voiced his doubts about Dewey: "What concerns us here is the relative ease with which the pragmatist intellectuals, with Professor Dewey at the head, have moved out their philosophy, bag and baggage, from education to war...How could the pragmatist accept war without more violent protest, without a greater wrench?"⁹⁸ Morris Dickstein argues that World War I "discredited the kind of enlightened planning with which pragmatism had become identified. The reaction against progressivism after 1920 also became a reaction against pragmatism, among conservatives who celebrated America's exceptionalism and achievements and as well among radicals who castigated its abuses and inequalities."⁹⁹ On such a view, the first cracks in the pragmatist movement appear much earlier than the rise of fascism and the nuclear age.

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⁹⁷ Diggins argues that "To suggest that liberal pragmatism became a casualty of the cold war is far from the whole story of the philosophy's decline in the post-World War II era. Since the twenties and thirties disillusioned writers of the "lost generation" and militant Marxists had attacked pragmatism for its unflinching optimism, its superficial faith in science and technology, its innocence of corporate power, and its alleged unconcern about the cultural deprivations of the American environment." See *The Promise of Pragmatism: Modernism, and the Crisis of Knowledge and Authority* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 404.

⁹⁸ Randolph Bourne, "Twilight of Idols," in *The Radical Will: Selected Writings, 1911-1918*, ed. Olaf Hansen (New York: Urizen Books, 1977), 339.

⁹⁹ Morris Dickstein, "Introduction," in *The Revival of Pragmatism: New Essays on Social Thought, Law, and Culture*, ed. Morris Dickstein (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 9.

Others argue that pragmatism's decline was the result of the increasing popularity of analytic philosophy during the 1930s and 1940s. With an influx of European intellectual refugees—most notably Reichenbach, Tarski, Carnap, Feigl, and Hempel—during World War II, philosophy departments all across America embraced the scientific methodologies and emphasis on specialization brought by the Logical Positivists. Carl Schorske argues that the dominance of analytic philosophy was characteristic of the “New Rigorism” that took hold following the Second World War.¹⁰⁰ H.O. Mounce argues that the dominance of the Logical Positivists “seems to be social rather than philosophical. The newcomers were European intellectuals, who were on familiar terms with some of the leading scientists, who were familiar with the latest scientific discoveries and who were proficient in the techniques of logic and mathematics. This gave them prestige and it was this prestige...which accounts for their success.”¹⁰¹ Philosophically, such perspectives as those espoused by the Logical Positivists promised a kind of progress and rigorism that was consistent with the consciousness of the middle twentieth-century. The dual specters of communism and nuclear holocaust required more than a philosophy of mediation, fallibilism, and possibility. A philosophy that was both hardy and precise was needed if the United States was to overcome the threat of totalitarianism domestically and abroad. The tender-minded pragmatists no longer had any relevant position in the maintenance of American Philosophy.¹⁰²

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¹⁰⁰ Schorske observed that the “New Rigorism,” particularly in the natural sciences, moved from methodologies of “loose engagement with a multifaceted reality historically perceived to the creation of sharp analytic tools that could promise certainty where description and speculative explanation had prevailed before.” See Carl Schorske, “The New Rigorism in the Human Sciences, 1940-1960,” in *Daedalus* 126, no. 1 (1997): 295.

¹⁰¹ Mounce, *The Two Pragmatisms*, 175.

¹⁰² For an exposition of the transformation of the American philosophical scene during the pre-World War II years, and an argument denying the sharp break between pragmatism and analytic

Similarly, John McCumber argues that pragmatism was simply another victim of McCarthyism during the 1950s. He believes that philosophy as an academic discipline was a prime target for right-wing Communist hunters because of its reputation for “free thinking” and intellectualism. Much more than any other academic discipline, McCumber argues, philosophy was at the forefront of attacks: “Philosophy, in fact, may be in first place in terms of the percentage of its practitioners who fell afoul of right-wing vigilantes...”¹⁰³ The central belief system of the McCarthy era stressed tradition and conformity. By its very nature, philosophy was implicitly set against such forms of parochialism. Logical Positivism appears to have been the only form of philosophy that could conform to the political climate of the 1950s. It was scientific, and, therefore, could be used as a weapon against communism. Pragmatism, as a philosophy of uncertainty and possibility, did not lend itself as well to 1950s radicalism.¹⁰⁴

Still to others, pragmatism may have been challenged, but never toppled. Cotkin argues that pragmatism withstood the negative forces threatening to sweep away the last remnants of the pragmatic tradition in America. He observes that the popular “middle-ground” pragmatists like Will Durant and Harry Overstreet were able to effectively mediate the social and political imperatives of their time because they “communicated philosophical knowledge and presented philosophical positions in an ecumenical and non-threatening manner.”¹⁰⁵ In so doing, they were able to avoid the charges railed

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philosophy, see Richard Bernstein, “The Resurgence of Pragmatism,” *Social Research* 59, no. 4 (Winter 1992): 815-817.

¹⁰³ John McCumber, *Time in the Ditch: American Philosophy and the McCarthy Era* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 25.

¹⁰⁴ For an insightful piece that illustrates the genesis of the post-World War II radical movements, see Victor C. Ferkiss, “Political and Intellectual Origins of American Radicalism, Right and Left,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 344 (November 1962): 1-12.

¹⁰⁵ George Cotkin, “Middle-Ground Pragmatists: The Popularization of Philosophy in American Culture,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 55, no. 2 (April 1994): 284.

against pragmatism: its loose epistemological standpoint, the lack of a sense of tragedy, and the inability to say anything meaningful about the cultural and political happenings of the period. Cotkin writes “middle-ground pragmatists believed they could have the best of both possible worlds...to be scientific and literary, committed yet distanced, and optimistic yet cautious.”¹⁰⁶

Dickstein observes also that philosophers like Richard J. Bernstein, John E. Smith, and John J. McDermott kept pragmatism alive in college classrooms during the so-called moribund years of the pragmatic movement.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, many other scholars writing during the post-World War II years saw pragmatism not only as living, but flourishing. In his 1950 book *The American Mind*, historian Henry Steele Commager declared that pragmatism was “almost the official philosophy of America.”¹⁰⁸ Indeed, Commager saw Dewey as maintaining a central role in American life during this period: “So faithfully did Dewey live up to his own philosophical creed that he became the guide, the mentor, and the conscience of the American people: it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that for a generation no major issue was clarified until Dewey had spoken on it.”¹⁰⁹ Accordingly, some view pragmatism as actively resisting the hegemony of Analytic philosophy and attacks waged by Marxists and conservatives alike. As a result of such thinking, it continued to persist in social discourses throughout the period of its supposed

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¹⁰⁶ Cotkin, “Middle-Ground Pragmatists,” 295.

¹⁰⁷ Dickstein, *The Revival of Pragmatism*, 10.

¹⁰⁸ Henry Steele Commager, *The American Mind: An Interpretation of American Thought and Character Since the 1880s* (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 1950), 97. See also Morton White, *Social Thought in America: The Revolt against Formalism* (New York: Viking Press, 1949). White argues that pragmatism may have lost some its intellectual influence after World War II, but it did not disappear completely. Rather, White observes that pragmatism became one among many brands of intellectual perspectives abound in the post-World War II American intellectual scene.

¹⁰⁹ Commager, *The American Mind*, 100.

decline. Yet it had been, to a degree, pushed aside in departments of Philosophy as analytic philosophy dominated.

Revival

The revival of pragmatism in American academic discourses is paradoxical on a number of levels. Long considered a tenuous and problematic philosophy, pragmatism appeared to be outdated and obsolete. Historian David Hollinger observed that, "In 1980, "pragmatism" is a concept most American historians have proved they can get along without. Some nonhistorians may continue to believe that pragmatism is a distinctive contribution of American civilization and somehow emblematic of America, but few scholarly energies are devoted to the exploration or even the assertion of this belief."¹¹⁰

This assessment was premature. A decade and a half later, historian James Kloppenberg observed that "pragmatism today is not only alive and well, it is ubiquitous. References to pragmatism occur in dizzying frequency from philosophy to social science, from the study of literature to that of ethnicity, from feminism to legal theory."¹¹¹ Indeed, pragmatism had made its way back, but had arrived in a much different context. The American academic and intellectual landscape had been transformed considerably since Dewey's death in 1952. Together, Analytic philosophy and postmodernism presented a rather unwelcoming intellectual setting for pragmatism to reemerge.¹¹²

A number of scholars have posited that Analytic philosophy and postmodernism provided the necessary conditions for the reemergence of pragmatism. To some, the

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¹¹⁰ David Hollinger, "The Problem of Pragmatism in American History," in *The Journal of American History* 67, no. 1 (June 1980): 88.

¹¹¹ James T. Kloppenberg, "Pragmatism: An Old Name for Some New Ways of Thinking?" in *The Journal of American History* 83, no. 1 (June 1996): 100-38, at 101.

¹¹² For critical analyses on the dangers and pitfalls of analytic philosophy in American society, see William Barrett, *The Illusion of Technique: A Search for Meaning in a Technological Civilization* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1978).

unfulfilled promises of Analytic philosophy, combined with the challenges set forward by French literary critics (and others affiliated with the postmodernist movement), provided the optimal conditions for the revival of pragmatism.¹¹³ Analytic philosophy had transformed philosophy into something of an enterprise tucked deep within the recesses of university buildings. Diggins observes that “analytic philosophy turned the discipline into a boring, bloodless affair of academic disputations that inhibited fresh philosophical thought.”¹¹⁴ As it were, Analytic philosophy had ignored the “human factor” for too long: the knower-subject was now asking to come back onto the scene. Pragmatism could provide for the expansion of philosophy back into more humanistic and pluralistic questions.

Postmodernism threatened to relegate philosophy (and the humanities on the whole) to the deconstructionist dustbin. Its preferred targets are things like “authorial sovereignty,” “grand narratives,” “canons,” and the agency of the “knowing-subject.” The revival of pragmatism can be seen as a remedy to the sweeping and far-reaching character of postmodernist critiques. To some, pragmatism represents a pre-tested American version of postmodernist literary criticism without the destructive potential.¹¹⁵ Whereas postmodernism runs the risk of resulting in relativism, or worse nihilism, pragmatism always carries an object of affirmation in sight. In a word, pragmatism does not carry its anti-essentialism as far as the postmodernist would like to. In this sense,

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¹¹³ West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, 4.

¹¹⁴ Diggins, *The Promise of Pragmatism*, 406.

¹¹⁵ In his essay “The Resurgence of Pragmatism,” Bernstein argues that postmodernism has a “gesture of totalizing critique that seeks to expose and mock *all* norms and standards is self-defeating and ends in what Habermas calls ‘performative contradiction.’” (839) He believes that the reemergence of pragmatism is not a shock because it “fixes” a major deficiency in postmodernist criticisms. For Bernstein, postmodernism lacks any “affirmation” out of its criticism—it simply “mocks all norms.” For pragmatists, on the other hand, affirmation “has been central to the pragmatic tradition.” He concludes that “the reason why I think there is now a resurgence of pragmatism and why we are learning anew to appreciate the classical pragmatists is because they were way ahead of their times.” (839)

pragmatism was both a response and mediation in its attempt to ameliorate the problems in philosophy during the early 1980s.

Historian John Pettegrew sees a correlation between the parallel reemergence of pragmatism and intellectual history in the 1980s. He observes “One overarching explanation for the revivification of American intellectual history and pragmatism as an integral part of it is that together they have been adept in explaining historical practice in relation to the decentering impulses of postmodernism and the poststructuralist destabilization of narrativity and, more fundamentally, the representational capacity of language.” Pettegrew concludes that “Pragmatism’s antifoundationalist and fallibilistic premises matched scrupulously with the willingness to apply thought to social situations and thereby transitory judgments have served professional historians well over the past two decades.”¹¹⁶ What Pettegrew and others all see is a radical retrieval of the subject into the process of inquiry and knowing. Postmodernism has little use for the knowing subject. Analytic philosophy aims at objectivity, while postmodernism says that neither the knower nor the objects of knowledge can ever be attained in any “real” form.

In a sense, then, pragmatism allowed scholars in the early 1980s to mitigate the oncoming of postmodernism while alleviating the shortcomings of analytic philosophy. To attribute the revival of pragmatism to any one of these hypotheses would be reductive and lacking any practical explanatory value. A more reasonable explanation would highlight the confluence of social and intellectual forces that provided the conditions for pragmatism to reemerge and once again take hold in intellectual discourses. Although

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¹¹⁶ John Pettegrew, *A Pragmatist's Progress?: Richard Rorty and American Intellectual History*, ed. John Pettegrew (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 8.

scholars disagree over the larger forces that came together to revive pragmatism, most agree on the main figure involved in its reemergence: Richard Rorty.

Rorty and the Revival of Pragmatism

Few people imagined that a veritable dark horse was waiting in the wings to challenge the dominance of analytic philosophy in American philosophy.¹¹⁷ Moreover, the reemergence of pragmatism was not an obvious choice for intellectual healing during the late 1970s and early 1980s. However, Richard Rorty, a Princeton professor of Philosophy at the time, reinvigorated academic interest in the early pragmatists and the American philosophical tradition. In so doing, Rorty would spark an internecine debate over what pragmatism formerly was, and what it had become.

When Richard Rorty was in his late teens and early twenties, he grew disillusioned with the fundamental basis of the Western philosophical tradition: Platonism. He felt that the Platonic search for the transcendental served only to distance one further from truth—truth on this model had no functionality because it was set up to be perpetually elusive. Rorty, in his autobiographical essay “Trotsky and the Wild Orchids,” writes:

I wanted very much to be some kind of Platonist, and from 15 to 20 I did my best. But it didn't pan out. I could never figure out whether the Platonic

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¹¹⁷ Indeed, many philosophers and spectators saw analytic philosophy as a thoroughly entrenched institution in the late 1970s. Not all were pleased with this institution, though. A telling example of the growing dissatisfaction with the dominance of Analytic philosophy was the “Pluralist Revolt” at the 1979 American Philosophical Association Eastern Division meeting in New York City. Neil Gross reports that “the pluralists staged a rally that, on at least one account, was attended by more than 800 people... The next day, the highly charged pluralist contingent packed the meeting of the Nominating Committee, and nominated from the floor different candidates from those the Committee itself had chosen. An election was held among those present at the meeting and the result of the vote was that three of the pluralists’ non-analytic candidates were elected to top posts in the APA.” Gross, “Richard Rorty’s Pragmatism: A Case Study in the Sociology of Ideas,” in *Theory and Society* 32 (2003): 93-148, at 117. The Analytics protested the vote, lobbying then President of the Eastern Division Richard Rorty to overturn the outcome. Rorty refused.

philosopher was aiming at the ability to offer irrefutable argument—argument which rendered him able to convince anyone he encountered of what he believed...or instead was aiming at a sort of incommunicable, private bliss.¹¹⁸

This paradox would follow Rorty throughout his college years and into his first years of teaching. However, after chasing down answers, Rorty halted the search. “About 20 years or so after I decided that the young Hegel’s willingness to stop trying for eternity, and just be the child of his time, was the appropriate response to disillusionment with Plato, I found myself being led back to Dewey.”¹¹⁹ This shift, though, was made in a philosophical climate where Analytic philosophy was king.

During the 1960s, Richard Rorty became increasingly dissatisfied with the path philosophy in America was going down. The paradigm under which philosophy in America operated had become a thoroughly entrenched norm—there was little refutation made by contrarians who questioned it. Analytic philosophy demanded serious outlining and explication of the core philosophical problems that were to be addressed. Accordingly, such a project involved demarcating the types of philosophical problems that counted as worthy of investigation, and those that did not. The methodology was imported from Logical Positivists: an emphasis on mathematics and logic aimed at attaining the relationship between propositions. This methodology was thought to avoid the major pitfalls of traditional forms of rationalism and empiricism through the use of formal proofs verified by the accepted tools of logical inquiry. Thus, the paradigm of the Logical Positivists was both radically scientific and cogently systematic.¹²⁰

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¹¹⁸ Rorty, “Trotsky and the Wild Orchids,” in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, 9-10.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

¹²⁰ Several important outlines on the major tenets of the Logical Positivist movement include: A.J. Ayer, *Logical Positivism* (New York: Free Press, 1966); Bertrand Russell, “Logical Positivism,” in *Polemic*, no. 1 (1945): 6-13; Rudolf Carnap, *The Logical Syntax of Language* (New York: Humanities Press, 1951) and *The Logical Structure of the World: Pseudoproblems on Philosophy* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967).

However, it was these features that drove away Rorty. He observes that “by the time I had reached the age of 30 (just about the time of the publication of Kuhn’s *Structure*), I had begun to doubt whether the creative analytic philosophers, as opposed to the hacks, were using anything like an ‘analytic method.’”¹²¹ The programmatic nature of analytic philosophy served to exacerbate Rorty’s personal philosophical dilemmas: philosophical inquiry had the appearance of hopeless futility, elusiveness, and dogmatism. Analytic philosophers proclaimed to be tracking down truth using all the latest and greatest tools of logic and mathematics unavailable to Plato, Descartes, Locke and Kant. On Rorty’s assessment, though, the Analytics perpetually held truth at arm’s length and never obtained any practical consequences from their inquiries. Although analytic philosophy claimed to be doing away with the negative and less fruitful aspects of the Western tradition, it was still a task undertaken within the tradition itself—it was still in the business of finding foundations of truth. In short, the Analytics still believed in epistemology. For Rorty, this had become a search heading down a dead end road.¹²²

As Rorty mentioned above, his doubts about Analytic philosophy coincided with Thomas Kuhn’s publication of *The Structures of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). The connection between Kuhn and Rorty’s abandonment of analytic philosophy is not merely an arbitrary one. The fallout from the Kuhnian Revolution was felt in most of the major disciplines in academia. What Kuhn proposed was that scientists do not have a privileged insight to the nature of reality or truth. He maintained that science operates in cycles of normally stability, but undergoes periodic paradigm shifts that revise methodologies and

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¹²¹ Rorty, “Thomas Kuhn, Rocks, and the Laws of Physics,” in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, 178.

¹²² For more background on Rorty’s abandonment of Analytic philosophy, see Diggins’ section entitled “Epistemology is Dead, Long Live Pragmatism: Richard Rorty’s Quarrel with Philosophy as Theory,” in *The Promise of Pragmatism*, 406-17.

past theories. On the surface, this assertion appears somewhat harmless; in reality, though, it undermines the notion that science operates in the light of truth and reality. An implication of Kuhn's thesis is that science is episodic and plural, operating under revisable paradigms at a particular historical moment.¹²³ Science can no longer be seen as a great monolith of truth, but only as a series of episodes throughout history operating under various paradigms.

For Rorty, this conclusion had profound implications for philosophy. Rorty reflects that "after reading *Structure* I began to think of analytic philosophy as one way of doing philosophy among others, rather than as the discovery of how to set philosophy on the secure path of a science."¹²⁴ Kuhn spoke to Rorty in a way that informed his philosophical misgivings about analytic philosophy and the perception of philosophy on the whole during the early 1960s. Kuhn's suggestion that science and other academic professions are contingent upon accepted paradigms, and, thus, are not plugged into a privileged "picture of reality" jibed with Rorty's growing historicism and antifoundationalism. For Rorty, Kuhn's pluralist-episodic notion of science could be translated into a similar notion of philosophic discourses throughout the Western tradition. Rorty concludes that

Kuhn led me, and many others, to think that instead of mapping culture on to a epistemic-ontological hierarchy topped by the logical, objective and scientific, and bottoming out in the rhetorical, subjective and unscientific, we should instead map culture on to a sociological spectrum ranging from the chaotic left, where criteria are constantly changing, to the smug right, where they are, at least for the moment, fixed.¹²⁵

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¹²³ For a full exposition of Kuhn's notion of paradigm shifts and how they come about, see his chapter entitled "Anomaly and the Emergence of Scientific Discoveries," in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 52-65. An important work that examines the impact of the Kuhnian Revolution, see Steve Fuller, *Thomas Kuhn: A Philosophical History for Our Times* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

¹²⁴ Rorty, "Thomas Kuhn, Rocks, and the Laws of Physics," in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, 178.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 180.

Thus, Kuhn's toppling of the hierarchical and authoritative notions of science lent itself to Rorty's own concerns with the ways in which philosophy had been presented throughout history.¹²⁶

The searching by philosophers and the privileged picture they supposedly offer was fundamentally undermined by Kuhn. So, Rorty gave up the search and moved towards edification in philosophy.¹²⁷ This move entailed abandoning the traditions of Carnap and Russell, and adopting Dewey as his new prophet. With the publication of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty "set down the path of pragmatism, one that he has been following for the past twenty years through a body of writing unmatched in recent American intellectual history in terms of its mass, critical accessibility, and provocation."¹²⁸

Published in 1979, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* was a virtual watershed not only in American philosophy, but in intellectual circles abroad as well. It grasped the attention of many critics in the initial years after its publication. As noted above, Rorty had been a well-known philosopher of analytic training, so his thesis was seen by many as coming out of left field. Any time scholars of prominence "switch teams," it is bound to create a

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¹²⁶ For a thorough and informative "sociology of ideas" that examines the influence of Kuhn on Rorty during his Princeton years, see Neil Gross, *Richard Rorty: The Making of an American Philosopher* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 202-216.

¹²⁷ The move away from analytic philosophy was not just abstract. At the time, Rorty was teaching at Princeton, which was dominated by a climate friendly to Analytic philosophy. Having just published *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty found few intellectual comrades willing to affirm his positions taken in the book at Princeton. Unsatisfied with Analytic philosophy and the unfriendly environment at Princeton, Rorty took his MacArthur Prize and accepted a professorship at the University of Virginia. Perhaps, the ultimate irony may be that *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, the book that made Rorty, was published by Princeton University Press. For an insightful account of this move, see Gross, "Richard Rorty's Pragmatism," 120-1.

¹²⁸ Pettegrew, 9.

stir. To some, what Rorty proposes in this text is good news for those that felt smothered in the stifling environment of analytic philosophy. To others, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* represents a threat to the practice of philosophy itself. After all, most professional philosophers would agree that no epistemology means no philosophy. To scholars of classical pragmatism, Rorty's coupling of Dewey with Wittgenstein and Heidegger was seen as vulgar and irresponsible. Whether critics affirmed or abhorred *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, one thing can be said for certain: it got people talking.

Writing in response to Rorty's text, philosopher Charles Taylor remarks that "what is exciting and controversial about Rorty's narrative is the sense of a radical new departure. What is radical is the promise that we can free ourselves of a whole host of questions which have been central to philosophy hitherto."¹²⁹ Taylor carefully articulates the central aim of Rorty's argument: philosophy is constrained by the questions it thinks it has to ask. For Rorty, the metanarrative of philosophical discourses, inherited from Plato and the tradition he helped create, has become obsolete. Rorty's aim "is to undermine the reader's confidence in 'the mind' as something about which one should have a 'philosophical' view, in 'knowledge' as something about which there ought to be a 'theory' and which has 'foundations,' and in 'philosophy' as it has been conceived since Kant."¹³⁰

From this brief synopsis, we can trace out two major trajectories of Rorty's philosophical agenda in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. First, traditional problems

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¹²⁹ Charles Taylor, "Rorty in the Epistemological Tradition," in *Reading Rorty: Critical Responses to Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (and Beyond)*, ed. Alan R. Malachowski (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990), 258.

¹³⁰ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 7.

of epistemology and metaphysics—the mind-body problem and the issue of foundations of truth, as examples—must be discarded because they are issues no longer useful to examine. Second, the traditional philosophical categories of metaphysics, ethics, and especially epistemology, reflect the entrenchment of the traditional metanarrative, and should be gotten past as well. Rorty believes that philosophy should move away from self-identification with truth-seeking and the discovery of absolutes. On his assessment, philosophers must become self aware of the socio-historical context in which they are theorizing, while simultaneously recognizing the historicity of philosophical theories which are thought of as existing outside of time and place. It becomes apparent, then, why Rorty chose Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Dewey as the “three most important philosophers of our century”: each of the three became deeply committed to historicist and antifoundationalist positions in the latter portion of their careers, which, for Rorty, “represented a paradigm shift from the Cartesian-Kantian era.”¹³¹

Rorty’s attack on traditional philosophical categories zeroes in on epistemology. In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Kuhn argued that scientific discourses operate in two distinct ways: normally and abnormally. The former seeks answers to questions in an environment where an accepted paradigm is present and agreed upon. That is, an agreed upon foundation is available against which problems can be tested, proven, or disproven. The latter discourse is revolutionary, ushering in a new paradigm with an accompanying domain of new questions and problems. For Rorty, Kuhn’s distinction between normal and abnormal scientific discourses translates into the philosophical distinction between epistemology and hermeneutics. Rorty argues that, similar to normal

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¹³¹ Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 5; See also Gross, *Richard Rorty: The Making of an American Philosopher*, 205.

scientific discourses' notions of consensus, epistemology operates under a paradigm of "commensurability." He writes that "epistemology proceeds on the assumption that all contributions to a given discourse are commensurable...By "commensurable" I mean able to be brought under a set of rules which will tell us how rational agreement can be reached on what would settle the issue on every point where statements seem to conflict."¹³² For Rorty, epistemology presupposes the existence of a foundation that grounds the criterion of commensuration for a variety of discourses. For an epistemologist, this foundation is truth.

For Rorty, hermeneutics is much more fugitive in its treatment of knowledge.¹³³ He argues that it embodies a similar function as Kuhn's abnormal scientific discourse does. He observes that "normal discourse is that which is conducted within an agreed-upon set of conventions about what counts as answering a question...Abnormal discourse is what happens when someone joins in the discourse who is ignorant of these conventions or sets them aside."¹³⁴ By its very nature, hermeneutics operates without a clear vision of rules that guide inquiry. It has no touchstone to test its objects of inquiry against. It views philosophy and epistemology as less a unified formal discourse, or a group of discourses, than an ongoing "conversation." Rorty observes that "hermeneutics sees the relations between various discourses as those of strands in a possible conversation, a conversation which presupposes no disciplinary matrix which unites the speakers, but where the hope of agreement is never lost so long as the conversation

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¹³² Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 316.

¹³³ Although hermeneutics is a problematic term, I am using it in a strict Rortyan sense. In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty asserts that his use of "hermeneutics" is "not the name for a discipline, nor for a method of achieving the sort of results which epistemology failed to achieve, nor for a program of research. On the contrary, hermeneutics is an expression of hope that the cultural space left by the demise of epistemology will not be filled—that our culture should become one in which the demand for constraint and confrontation is no longer felt." (315)

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 320.

lasts.”¹³⁵ Hermeneutics, then, is implicitly historicist, pluralistic, and antifoundationalist. It is not reduced to a notion that philosophy and epistemology are wedded in a project aimed at showing how the mind mirrors nature. Hence, it makes no allusions to representation or correspondence that epistemology carries with it. Rorty concludes that “if we see knowledge as a matter of conversation and of social practice, rather than as an attempt to mirror nature, we will not be likely to envisage a metapractice which will be the critique of all possible forms of social practices.”¹³⁶ The emphasis on conversation allows Rorty to move beyond the essentialism and foundationalism of traditional epistemological methods, while illustrating the historical contingency of language and the discourses one chooses to express their knowledge and beliefs.¹³⁷ This leads Rorty to a position of “epistemological behaviorism.”

Rorty describes his “epistemological behaviorism” as “explaining rationality and epistemic authority by reference to what society lets us say, rather than the latter by the former.”¹³⁸ This formulation is radical because it challenges the traditional Kantian notion of epistemological representationalism that is the foundation of Analytic philosophy. Rorty employs Sellars’s attack on the “myth of the given,” and Quine’s challenge to the necessary-contingent distinction to illustrate the social nature of

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¹³⁵ Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 318.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 171.

¹³⁷ In a reflection essay entitled “Richard Rorty at Princeton,” philosopher Raymond Geuss elaborates on the somewhat puzzling affinity Rorty had for Gadamer and his notion of “conversation.” Geuss held Gadamer to be a “reactionary, distended windbag,” who during World War II advocated the “New Europe under National Socialism.” Raymond Geuss, “Richard Rorty at Princeton: Personal Recollections,” in *Arion* 15, no. 3 (Winter 2008): 86. However, for Rorty, Gadamer’s notion of cultural “conversation” transcended any of his personal and moral shortcomings. Gadamer’s “conversation” appealed to Rorty’s growing frustration with the rife foundationalist climate at Princeton during the 1960s. Geuss notes that “conversation” is both antiessentialist and based on a historicist conception of knowledge: “‘conversation’ is to be very explicit about the inherently social nature of what makes us human, and...the informality of the use of the word ‘conversation’ directs attention away from trying to understand this activity as the activation of pre-given formal rules, or as aspiring to satisfy some antecedently given canons of cogency, relevance, or accuracy.” (87)

¹³⁸ Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 174.

knowledge and belief. In Sellars and Quine, Rorty observes a “commitment to the thesis that justification is not a matter of a special relation between ideas (or words) and objects, but of conversation, of social practice.”¹³⁹ The emphasis on justification in social practice provides Rorty with a more holistic view of knowledge, and, hence, allows him to abandon any criterion of accuracy associated with epistemological representationalism. He argues that “if assertions are justified by society rather than by the characterization of the inner representation they express, then there is no point in attempting to isolate *privileged* representations.”¹⁴⁰ Thus, the only criterion of knowledge for Rorty’s epistemological behaviorism is access to the “rules of the language-game.” If we view knowledge as justified in a social conversation, then “it will not occur to us to invoke either of the traditional Kantian distinctions.”¹⁴¹ Therefore, without the invocation of representationalist epistemological techniques, Rorty concludes that the “notion of the mind as Mirror of Nature can be discarded.”¹⁴²

With the mind as Mirror of Nature metaphor abandoned, Rorty argues that philosophy should move towards purposes of edification. Using Gadamer’s notion of “redescription,” Rorty articulates edification as “finding new, better, more interesting, more fruitful ways of speaking,” to “reinterpret our familiar surroundings in the unfamiliar terms of our new inventions.”¹⁴³ For Rorty, by its very nature, edification is

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¹³⁹ Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 170. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer argues that language, not science, is the only means of acquiring truth. He argues that hermeneutics, guided by language, puts us in a better position of “knowing” because it does not rely on an exact method for which to inquire about truth. This is the case because language is the ubiquitous manifold for which we come know things about the world. Hence, language is the starting point from which all inquiries about knowledge begin and should be the center of any theory of knowledge. See Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*, 2nd Revised ed., Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall, eds. (New York: Continuum, 1994), 164-5, 389-405.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 174. Rorty’s emphasis.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 174.

¹⁴² Ibid., 170.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 360.

revolutionary: in Kuhn's terms, it is articulated in an abnormal discourse, for it is "the power of strangeness" that enables the shedding of "our old selves...to aid us in becoming new beings."¹⁴⁴ In order to create new words and utterances to redescribe ourselves, the discourse to articulate such a vocabulary would, necessarily, need to be of a different and new brand than that of the normal discourse. The new terms in which to redescribe the familiar are non-conformists and subversive, thus, the language used to describe the new and novel cannot be that which reflects the conformity of normal discourse. Hence, for Rorty, it requires an openness to new ways of thinking and speaking to overcome the traditions of philosophy that are no longer useful.¹⁴⁵

If edification requires an abnormal, revolutionary discourse to redescribe our familiar mode of being, then Rorty believes a certain attitude is required on the part of the philosopher. He observes that the edifying "peripheral, pragmatic philosophers are skeptical primarily about systematic philosophy, about the whole project of universal commensuration...they make fun of the classic picture of man, the picture which contains systematic philosophy, the search for universal commensuration in a final vocabulary."¹⁴⁶ In undermining systematic philosophy, "great edifying philosophers [like Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Dewey] destroy for the sake of their own generation...to keep space open for the sense of wonder which poets can sometimes cause—wonder that there is something new under the sun, something which is not an accurate representation of what was already there."¹⁴⁷ Without the mind as Mirror or Nature, Rorty sees the hope of

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¹⁴⁴ Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 360.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 364.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 368.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 369-70.

plurality and new ways of describing ourselves that move beyond the normal discourse provided by the traditional Western conception of philosophy and epistemology.

Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature not only provides a hopeful vision of post-epistemology philosophy, it is also a historical narrative of the Western philosophical tradition. Much like Dewey's attempt in *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, Rorty in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* portends an account of the origins of the tradition. Both Dewey and Rorty found the historicist approach to be of crucial import in philosophical inquiry: to understand the origins of a philosophical problem, the historical roots of the dilemma must be uncovered.¹⁴⁸ Both men believed that philosophical theories and methodologies contain a sociological dimension that is implicit to philosophical doctrines. The notion, then, of there being philosophical theories that exist in a vacuum apart from a socio-historical context is untenable for both Dewey and Rorty. Rather, philosophy represents the needs and concerns of people in a specific context at a certain historical moment. For Dewey and Rorty, the story of philosophy is not one of the perennial investigations of the same core of "foundational" problems; rather, philosophy is a story of intellectual responses to human needs and desires throughout history.

The socio-historical dimensions of Dewey's and Rorty's philosophy are quite similar. In his discussion of the origins of philosophy, Dewey argues that the tradition is constructed of various images and symbols that are less scientific than they are emotional. That is, the history of philosophy reflects more of the temperaments of those

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¹⁴⁸ By historicism, I do not intend to imply the somewhat radical position maintained by some post-structuralists and other cultural relativists who argue that historical periods exist in random isolation. The use I have in mind is a strict awareness of the various historical contingencies that affect thought during a given moment in history. For Dewey and Rorty, philosophical thought is deeply entangled in the social context in which it arises. Indeed, for all the pragmatists, awareness of historical time did not necessarily entail relativity of knowledge.

who construct the problems, rather than perpetual problems that arise from so-called foundational investigation.¹⁴⁹ Dewey writes:

To treat the early beliefs and traditions of mankind as if they were attempts at scientific explanation of the world, only erroneous and absurd attempts, is thus to be guilty of a great mistake. The material out of which philosophy finally emerges is irrelevant to science and to explanation. It is figurative, symbolic of fears and hopes, made of imaginations and suggestions, not significant of a world of objective fact intellectually confronted. It is poetry and drama, rather than science...¹⁵⁰

Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature shares a common vision with Dewey of philosophy as historically-contingent stories shot through with literary metaphor, not true pictures of reality. Rorty describes what he sees the history of philosophy encompassing:

It is pictures rather than propositions, metaphors rather than statements, which determines most of our philosophical convictions. The picture which holds traditional philosophy captive is that of the mind as a great mirror, containing valuable representations—some accurate, some not—and capable of being studied by pure, nonempirical methods. Without the notion of the mind as mirror, the notion of knowledge as accuracy of representation would not have suggested itself.¹⁵¹

Thus, both Rorty and Dewey see philosophy built not on an objective foundation that represents a clear explication of reality.¹⁵² Rather, philosophy is *figurative, symbolic,*

¹⁴⁹ This statement is not meant to imply that Dewey found science to have serious shortcomings. It is well known that Dewey worshipped science and all the possibilities it held for mankind. In the context of *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, Dewey is critiquing the ways in which philosophical “problems” have been articulated in the past. His criticisms centers on the fact that what those philosophizing in the past took to be the ‘pure philosophical problems’ “originated not out of intellectual material, but out of social and emotional material.” *Reconstructions in Philosophy*, 25. Seen in this light, philosophical problems established 2000, 200, or 20 years ago reflect more of social and historical interests, than they do methods of rigorous scientific investigation.

¹⁵⁰ Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 7.

¹⁵¹ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 12.

¹⁵² The connection that I am proposing here—one in vision—is not outlandish. On many occasions, Rorty credited Dewey with influencing the questions that he asked and the conclusions he would draw. For example, Rorty said in 1985 that “For some years, whenever I thought I had something general or useful to say, it sounded like an echo of something I had once read. When I tried to run it down, I was constantly led back to Dewey.” See Richard Rorty, “Comments on Sleeper and Edel,” in *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 21, no. 1 (1985): 39. Neil Gross makes a similar connection. He posits a direct link between Rorty’s “sociologization” and Dewey. Gross observes “Dewey...had viewed philosophy through a sociological lens. Indeed, especially given the affective connection to Dewey that Rorty felt, it would have been strange for him to re-read books like *Reconstruction in Philosophy*—his

comprised of pictures of what reality is *metaphorically* made out to be. Therefore, the legacy inherited from Descartes and Kant is a story of reality created from imagination and memory. Taken together, these are developed into pictures of philosophical reality. What is missing, though, from Dewey's and Rorty's assessment is the notion of correspondence between the mind and the world. This, perhaps, is the most lasting legacy inherited from both men's reworking of the history of the Western tradition.

Rorty's celebration of pragmatism comes out most clearly in his next book, *The Consequences of Pragmatism*. In this collection of essays, Rorty outlines what he sees as the utility of pragmatism to remedy the loss of the mirror of philosophy—the “consequences of pragmatism”. Although *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* attacks analytic philosophy, it is not yet debunked by an explicit pragmatist line of argumentation.¹⁵³ This said, it is here where Rorty sketches out his formulation of the history of pragmatism, what it entails to be a “pragmatist,” and what the consequences of pragmatism are for analytic philosophy.

The unifying thread that ties each essay together is a consistent identification made by Rorty between philosophers of the Platonic and Kantian schools, and pragmatic philosophers. The former, as Rorty sees it, view philosophy “as a name for the study of problems which any attempt at vision must confront: problems which professors of philosophy have a moral obligation to continue working on, whatever their current

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favorite book—and not come to the conclusion that there were fundamental similarities between his philosophy and Dewey's own.” See Neil Gross, “Richard Rorty's Pragmatism”, 121.

¹⁵³ Gross observes that “despite his attachment to Dewey, however, and articulation of a conception of truth that arguably owed more to the tradition of classical American pragmatism than to any other, Rorty was not at great pains in [*Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*] to label himself a pragmatist, at one point passing up the opportunity to do so on the grounds that the term had become ‘a bit overlaiden.’” See Gross, *Richard Rorty: The Making of an American Philosopher*, 21.

preoccupations.”¹⁵⁴ The latter, who Rorty is sympathetic towards, “is dominated by a sense of the contingency of history, the contingency of the vocabulary which he himself is using, the sense that nature and scientific truth are largely beside the point and that history is up for grabs.”¹⁵⁵ To be sure, on Rorty’s historicist criterion of pragmatism, many a philosopher would qualify as a pragmatist. However, Rorty clearly has Dewey in view in *Consequences of Pragmatism*.

Rorty’s assessment of American pragmatism is sweeping. Rorty explains that pragmatism as a theory “says that truth is not the sort of thing one should expect to have a philosophically interesting theory about. For pragmatists, “truth” is just the name of a property which all true statements share.”¹⁵⁶ Setting pragmatism against the Western philosophical tradition, Rorty argues that “the pragmatist sees no need to worry about whether Plato or Kant was right in thinking that something nonspatio-temporal made moral judgments true, nor about whether the absence of such a thing means that such judgments are ‘merely expressions of emotion’ or ‘merely conventional’ or ‘merely subjective.’”¹⁵⁷ Furthermore, Rorty believes pragmatism to be more radical in implication than Logical Positivism: “[The pragmatist] shares with the positivist the Baconian and Hobbesian notion that knowledge is power, a tool for coping with reality. But he carries this Baconian point through to its extreme, as the positivist does not. He drops the notion

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¹⁵⁴ Richard Rorty, “Keeping Philosophy Pure: An Essay of Wittgenstein,” in *The Consequences of Pragmatism: Essays 1972-1980* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 31.

¹⁵⁵ Richard Rorty, “Philosophy in America Today,” in *The Consequences of Pragmatism*, 228-9. Throughout Rorty’s works, I believe, he has two sorts of philosophers in mind. The first type is the philosopher engaged in traditional philosophical discourses—those of the normal discourse. They are conservative in approach and believe that value still exists in epistemology and traditional philosophical methodologies, and that consensus can be attained. The second type is the radical, *avant garde* philosopher who rejects the normal discourse by engaging in an abnormal discourse. It is clear that Rorty prefers the latter who, along with him, pelt the mirror of nature with hermeneutic rocks.

¹⁵⁶ Richard Rorty, “Introduction,” in *The Consequences of Pragmatism*, xiii.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, xvi.

of truth as correspondence with reality altogether, and says that modern science does not enable us to cope because it corresponds.”¹⁵⁸ Taken on the whole, Rorty paints the history of pragmatism with broad strokes. To many, such a method distorts the major differences between the early pragmatists and his brand of philosophy.¹⁵⁹ Rorty appears self-serving in his assessment of the historical tenets of pragmatism so as to allow for conformity of the tradition to his own philosophical agenda. This bending is seen as vulgar and intellectually careless, leading to the charge of anachronistic scholarship. This issue will be addressed in detail below.

It is also in *Consequence of Pragmatism* where Rorty extrapolates the reasons for his affinity for Dewey. Earlier in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty declares that “the three most important philosophers of our century...[are]...Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Dewey. Each tried, in his early years, to find a new way of making philosophy “foundational”—a new way of formulating an ultimate context for thought.”¹⁶⁰ However, Rorty observes that in each of their later works, a consistent moving away from foundationalism can be found. He argues that “their later work is therapeutic rather than constructive, edifying rather than systematic, designed to make the reader question his own motives for philosophizing rather than to supply him with a new

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¹⁵⁸ Rorty, “Introduction,” in *The Consequences of Pragmatism*, xvii.

¹⁵⁹ Many major scholars of early pragmatism criticize the historical accuracy of Rorty’s account of pragmatism. See Thomas Alexander, “John Dewey and the Moral Imagination: Beyond Putnam and Rorty toward a Postmodern Ethics,” in *Transactions of the Charles Sanders Peirce Society* 29 (1993): 369-400; Richard Bernstein, *The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992); Brodsky, “Rorty’s Interpretation of Pragmatism”; James Campbell, “Rorty’s Use of Dewey”; James Gouinlock, “What is the Legacy of Instrumentalism? Rorty’s Interpretation of Dewey,” in *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 28, no. 2 (April 1990): 251-69; Ralph Sleeper, “Rorty’s Pragmatism: Afloat in Neurath’s Boat, But Why Adrift?” in *Transactions of the Charles Sanders Peirce Society* 21 (1985): 9-20 and *The Necessity of Pragmatism: John Dewey’s Conception of Philosophy*; John Stuhr, *Genealogical Pragmatism: Philosophy, Experience, and Community* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1987) and *Pragmatism, Postmodernism, and the Future of Philosophy* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003).

¹⁶⁰ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 5.

philosophical program.”¹⁶¹ A reader, though, finds in *Consequences of Pragmatism* Rorty moving even farther beyond edification as an element of the criterion of antifoundational philosophy. Whereas Rorty’s champions in *Philosophy and the Mirror* were those that embodied a revolutionary spirit in their attacks on traditional philosophy, his antifoundationalist/historicist criterion becomes much stricter in his second book.

Rorty’s growing emphasis on historicism leads him to attack Heidegger’s historicism as inadequate when compared with Dewey. In “Overcoming the Tradition,” Rorty observes that “Heidegger...thinks of philosophy—of Thought as opposed to ontology—as something which might be recaptured...*The whole force of Heidegger’s thought lies in his account of the history of philosophy.*”¹⁶² While Rorty finds Heidegger’s historicism both appropriate and necessary for the overcoming of the negative aspects of the philosophical tradition he inherits, he argues that Heidegger does not take it far enough. Again, Rorty’s aim in this text is to demarcate the philosophers and philosophies that still hold onto the tradition, and those who successfully move beyond it. He believes that Heidegger’s historicism is hopelessly rooted in the tradition it seeks to overcome. Hence, on Rorty’s assessment, his formulations are self-refuting:

Heidegger’s attachment to the notion of “philosophy”—the pathetic notion that even after metaphysics goes, something called “Thought” might remain—is simply the sign of Heidegger’s own fatal attachment to the tradition: the last infirmity of the greatest of the German professors...No matter how much Heidegger seems to have overcome our professional urge to compete with the great dead philosophers on their own ground, no matter how much he may try to distance himself from the tradition...he is still insistent that the tradition offered us “words of Being.” He still thinks that the place where philosophy was is the place to be.¹⁶³

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¹⁶¹ Ibid., 5-6.

¹⁶² Richard Rorty, “Overcoming the Tradition,” in *The Consequences of Pragmatism*, 52. Rorty’s emphasis.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 52.

It is only with Dewey, then, that Rorty locates a philosopher who is willing to abandon the tradition.

As shown above, Rorty argues that Heidegger's historicism is deficient in that his antifoundationalism was still grounded in the traditions and language of earlier philosophy. For Rorty, this tendency exists for a single reason: "Heidegger's weakness was that he could not escape the notion that philosophers' difficulties are more than *just* philosophers' difficulties."¹⁶⁴ He asserts that Dewey does not succumb to the constraints of the tradition. Dewey does not, as Rorty argues, bow to the obsolete monolith of philosophy as Heidegger does. In so doing, Dewey's historicism is far more radical in its consequences and implications.

Rorty believes that Dewey successfully moves beyond the tradition because he grounds his inquiries in concerns for the "problems of men." Rorty argues that "Dewey found what he wanted in turning away from philosophy as a distinctive activity altogether, and towards the ordinary world—the problems of men, freshly seen by discarding the distinctions which the philosophical tradition has developed."¹⁶⁵ To be sure, Dewey sought to conflate facts and values, science and ethics under the banner of pragmatism. On Rorty's assessment, then, the calculated effort made by Dewey to discard such distinctions provides a more radical and cutting philosophy that is conscious of the social and historical elements that constitute a given philosophy during a given period. Thus, the move that allows Dewey to free himself from the tradition is the destruction of the fact/value dichotomy and the conceptualization of philosophy as addressing the "problems of men."

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¹⁶⁴ Rorty, "Overcoming the Tradition," 54.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

A consistent feature of Rorty's first two major works (if not all of his works) is his tendency to reduce a problem to two opposing sides, align with one of them, and then brush aside the opposition. In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty demarcates between philosophy that takes part in the normal discourse, epistemology, and the vanguard philosophy that employs an abnormal discourse, hermeneutics. In so doing, philosophers that still place value on epistemology are labeled foundationalists because of the representationalism that is associated with Kantian epistemology. Those that shattered the Mirror of Nature metaphor—the Wittgensteins, Heideggers, and Deweys of the philosophy world—are hailed as rebels who had the fortitude to acknowledge the uselessness of an obsolete tradition. Similarly, in *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Rorty delineates between those who continue to maintain a philosophy based in the Platonic and Kantian traditions, and the pragmatists. Rorty notes the pervasiveness of the former tradition, then sets out on an antifoundationalist road, denouncing the foundationalists along the way. Richard Bernstein describes this persistent “either/or” as “Cartesian Anxiety”—the tendency to reduce every problematique to a dualism.¹⁶⁶ If the classical pragmatists sought to collapse as many of the traditional dualisms and dichotomies of their day in the name of pluralism, then does Rorty create a contradiction by reinforcing the foundational-antifoundational dichotomy? Indeed, a major theme among the early pragmatists was that of consensus-based problem solving. Pierce, James, and Dewey all emphasized the notion of fallibilism and group testing of ideas. Does Rorty's continual dichotomization of those that maintain and uphold the Western philosophical traditions,

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¹⁶⁶ See Richard Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivity and Relativism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 18. For an extended discussion on Rorty's use of dualisms and how they hurt his pragmatism, see Cull, “The Betrayal of Pragmatism? Rorty's Quarrel with James,” 87-9.

and those that move past it, make it seem that consensus cannot be achieved? These questions illustrate but a few of the many charges leveled against Rorty's pragmatism. They show why many observers believe that Rorty fundamentally distorts the pragmatist tradition and does a disservice by identifying himself as such. These issues will be examined more fully below.

Good Rorty, Bad Rorty: Rorty and the Pragmatist Tradition¹⁶⁷

John Patrick Diggins observes that "where most philosophers believed it necessary to move beyond pragmatism, Rorty argued that it was necessary to return to it."¹⁶⁸ In the context of the late 1970s and early 1980s, Rorty viewed analytic philosophy as having had its run, leaving its promise of clarity and a broader understanding of the fundamental philosophical issues largely unfulfilled. Although this contention is debatable, most would agree that philosophy had become the enterprise that had underwritten the projects of modern epistemology. On the whole, philosophy and philosophers were still operating under the traditional paradigm of Western philosophy that began with Plato and was reinforced by Kant. This paradigm prescribed that philosophy was to engage in the uncovering of "foundations of knowledge" which would lead to the discovery of "truth." It was during this time that Rorty suggested that such quests were the residue of an accepted paradigm that needed to be overcome. What was needed was a pragmatic shift that embraced uncertainty in a world without any guarantee of foundations of knowledge or truth. With the mind as Mirror of Nature shattered, Rorty pushed pragmatism as the

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¹⁶⁷ This is a reference to Rorty's essay "Philosophy in America Today," in *Consequences of Pragmatism*. Here, Rorty delineates between "Good Dewey" and "Bad Dewey." The former refers to the Dewey that is antifoundational, antirealist, and antimetaphysical. The latter refers to the more metaphysically-inclined Dewey, most explicitly in *Experience and Nature*. See *Consequences of Pragmatism* 211-14.

¹⁶⁸ Diggins, *The Promise of Pragmatism*, 407.

only alternative. Rorty's choice in taking a pragmatist position afforded him the comfort of believing "what we cannot know we need not worry about. No truth, no sweat."¹⁶⁹

The revival of pragmatism created a controversy among scholars of pragmatism, as well as among intellectual historians, philosophers, and social critics. The central issue at hand is whether Rorty's "pragmatism" is really pragmatism. This issue soon created a gulf between those that agreed with Rorty, and those who saw him as threatening the tradition. To understand the issues that divide Rorty into the "good" and the "bad," a look into the historiographical debate will be beneficial.

Many observers view Rorty positively for the good he has done in revitalizing the pragmatist movement. The good Rorty is the one that brought pragmatism back into academic discourses and got people talking about pragmatism during the early 1980s. In so doing, he renewed interest in an American intellectual tradition that he believes offers valuable insights for present philosophical and moral questions. Also, he successfully brought the history of philosophy back into Philosophy departments as an essential element of curriculum. The historical sweep of philosophy's past was once again seen as important. These achievements would be readily agreed upon by most observers regardless of one's personal thoughts on Rorty's position in the pragmatist tradition.¹⁷⁰ However, the unanimity ends here.

Some take a strong position in their endorsement of Rorty. They argue that Rorty's pragmatism does not misappropriate the tradition and see nothing wrong with his taking the 'linguistic turn.' In so doing, it served to validate Rorty's self-identification as

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¹⁶⁹ Diggins, *The Promise of Pragmatism*, 407.

¹⁷⁰ See Dickstein, *The Revival of Pragmatism*, 9-17. See also Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Pragmatism*, 539-42. This is meant to say that even Rorty's strongest critics would agree that he played an integral part in the revival of American pragmatism, which was of positive benefit.

a pragmatist. For example, intellectual historian David Harlan argues that there is nothing wrong with Rorty's use of the pragmatist tradition. Speaking in terms of the history of ideas, Harlan observes that Rorty "gives up any pretense of discovering 'what really happened' in the past."¹⁷¹ Harlan believes that Rorty is well justified in giving up on a "true account" of pragmatism and, specifically, Dewey's philosophical intentions. This justification centers on what constitutes an intellectual historian and how the history of ideas operates as a discipline. For Harlan, intellectual historians practicing in the postmodern academic setting must abandon the notion of objectivity in their work and come to recognize the moral nature of their undertakings. That is, intellectual history is a story of picking and choosing a disciple and putting them to use to explain the processes of coming to know ourselves in the present. Harlan argues that Rorty "does not want to explain the origins of Dewey's ideas; he wants to employ them...He is not trying to explain how the past flowed into the present; he is trying to ransack the past for images, metaphors, ideas—anything that can cast new light on the present."¹⁷² Rorty, then, chooses Dewey as his disciple from whom he will construct an intellectual narrative in which to purport his own views. In Harlan's view, Rorty is justified to do so since intellectual history is implicitly a moral activity: his choosing Dewey involves a value judgment as to who would make a suitable intellectual predecessor to inform his own philosophy.

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¹⁷¹ David Harlan, *The Degradation of American History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 154.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 154. Harlan has been attacked by a few historians of notable standing for his views on intellectual history and the role of postmodern techniques in historical inquiry. For a particularly strong exchange, see David Harlan, "Intellectual History and the Return of Literature," and David A. Hollinger, "The Return to the Prodigal: The Persistence of Historical Knowing," in *The American Historical Review* 94, no. 3 (June 1989): 581-621. For a third party commentary on this exchange, see Joyce Appleby, "One Good Turn Deserves Another: Moving beyond the Linguistic; A Response to David Harlan," in *The American Historical Review* 94, no. 5 (December 1989): 1326-1332.

Harlan is not alone in defending Rorty and his self-identification with the pragmatist tradition. Neil Gross argues that although Rorty's historical account of pragmatism is problematic in a number of ways, his intentions were pure in its revival. That is, Rorty did not set out to undermine a rich tradition for his own purposes. More specifically, Rorty's self-identification with the pragmatic tradition can be explained by examining Rorty's background. He argues that Rorty's 'pragmatist turn' was the result of several "socio-biographical" experiences: "the self-concept of a leftist American patriot, and that of a philosopher attuned to the ways in which philosophical inquiry is shaped by the social and historical settings where it occurs."¹⁷³ On this line, Rorty's leftist upbringing (with Dewey as his family's central prophet) and his growing disdain for analytic philosophy account for his "falling in love" with pragmatism.¹⁷⁴ Combined, Rorty was predisposed to a "sociological understanding of philosophy" where the philosopher is never detached from her or his social and historical context (and, therefore, from the "problems of men"). Gross observes that, for Rorty, "philosophy emerges in response to felt societal needs, originally coming into being in response to the crisis traditional societies experience when, due especially to advances in science and technical knowledge, alternatives to customary ways of life come into view."¹⁷⁵ Gross argues that this sociological minded philosophy is consistent with Dewey's own perspective on the function of philosophy in a community. He asserts that "Dewey insisted that as a society changes, changes also occur in both the problems philosophers are asked to address and

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¹⁷³ Neil Gross, "Richard Rorty's Pragmatism," 94.

¹⁷⁴ Hans Joas offers an insightful essay on the intimate appeal of pragmatism to the disillusioned intellectual. See "The Inspiration of Pragmatism: Some Personal Remarks," in Dickstein, *The Revival of Pragmatism*, 190-8.

¹⁷⁵ Gross, "Richard Rorty's Pragmatism," 121.

the answers to those problems they are likely to give.”¹⁷⁶ Thus, Gross sees both Rorty and Dewey sharing a sociological understanding of philosophy that recognizes the social and historical context in which their practice is developed and unfolds. For Rorty, Dewey served as a model to nurture his leftist concerns for social justice and his intellectual prowess for historicism in philosophizing. It is, then, that Rorty has not missed the mark by much in his attachment to Dewey.¹⁷⁷

For many other scholars, though, these defenses of Rorty simply do not hold. Critics argue that Rorty espouses a pragmatism that is simply an old name for some new ways of thinking.¹⁷⁸ This is the bad Rorty. The bad Rorty’s pragmatism is that which extols language at the cost of experience. The exorcism of experience that Rorty performs illustrates the profound difference between his pragmatism and the “pure” classical tradition of pragmatism. The bad Rorty reduces knowledge to conversation.¹⁷⁹ The hard-line stance of bad Rorty against any hint of foundationalism fundamentally distorts the pluralism of the early pragmatists.¹⁸⁰ The ironism of bad Rorty sacrifices the social for

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¹⁷⁶ Gross, “Richard Rorty’s Pragmatism,” 121.

¹⁷⁷ Cotkin believes that an argument can be made for an affinity between James and Rorty. He asserts that both James and Rorty share similar sentiments on the utility of pluralism, the power of romantic thinking, and the inevitability of a tragic side of life. See Cotkin, “William James and Richard Rorty: Context and Conversation,” 38-9.

¹⁷⁸ In his article “Pragmatism: An Old Name for Some New Ways of Thinking?”, Kloppenberg attacks Rorty for doing just this. Kloppenberg argues that Rorty neglects Dewey’s challenge on ethics and too quickly dismisses his call for philosophy to act as social critic. Kloppenberg concludes that “Rorty’s position is insufficiently pragmatic...his liberal ironism encourages selfishness, cynicism, and resignation by undercutting efforts to confront the hard facts of poverty and greed.” (125)

¹⁷⁹ See Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, 197-207. Bernstein is critical of Rorty’s attempt in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* to deny that he is “laying the foundations for a new type of philosophy.” Bernstein believes that reducing knowledge to conversation is a feeble way of avoiding such “constructive” charges which would lead to foundationalist implications. Illustrating Rorty’s elusiveness, Bernstein observes that “every time we think we can really pin him down, he nimbly dances to another place and introduces a new set of distinctions.” (202)

¹⁸⁰ See Cull, “The Betrayal of Pragmatism?: Rorty’s Quarrel with James,” 83-95.

private play.¹⁸¹ More strongly, some label Rorty not as a pragmatist, but a relativist whose antifoundationalism fundamentally undermines his philosophical project.¹⁸²

A formidable challenge that unifies many of the attacks against Rorty is his use of Dewey. It is argued that Rorty's co-opting of Dewey is, at best, a misguided attempt to link himself to the pragmatist tradition, an attempt that misuses and misrepresents the central aims of classical pragmatism, and that does a fundamental disservice to the contemporary pragmatic movement. Ralph Sleeper argues that Rorty's pragmatism "is all too deconstructionist" and that he "seems to be trying to play the game without any rules at all, or as if we could just make them up as we go along."¹⁸³ Sleeper asserts that Rorty's emphasis on "the qualitative uniqueness of every new situation and upon the futility of trying to establish some permanent matrix," goes against Dewey's entire conception of "situations." He asserts that "'precariousness,' 'stability,' and 'qualitative individuality' are just those traits that Dewey says are 'generic' features of our environment, features that help us understand both why 'inquiry' is necessary and why it is possible...and why 'epistemology' must be rescued from the camp of the positivists and put back into the service of the 'problems of men.'"¹⁸⁴ It is for these reasons that Sleeper disagrees with Rorty's pragmatism.

Abraham Edel argues that Rorty "softened the notion of knowledge" so much that he neglects the early pragmatists' emphasis on the "growth of knowledge." He asserts that Rorty's obsession with "overcoming" the tradition carries with it contradictory aims

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¹⁸¹ See Cotkin, "William James and Richard Rorty: Context and Conversation," 48-52.

¹⁸² The figure most often associated with this position is Hilary Putnam. For Putnam, Rorty's antifoundationalism undermines his view of knowledge, which leads to a position of relativism. As a result, his relativism translates into doubts about the possibility of knowledge at all. For Putnam, this leads to an interminable position of irrationalism. See Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 103-26.

¹⁸³ R.W. Sleeper, "Rorty's Pragmatism: Afloat in Neurath's Boat, But Why Adrift," 12, 14.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

to those of Dewey. For Dewey, Edel observes, the goal of knowledge was to enable us to be in better positions to judge what is better from what is worse (philosophically, scientifically, ethically, etc.). Edel concludes that “instead of looking to overcoming the tradition we had better think in terms of long-range philosophical experiments and the criteria for their assessment.”¹⁸⁵

James Gouinlock argues that Rorty’s self-description as a “Deweyan” is a vulgar misappropriation. Gouinlock argues that Rorty’s reconfiguration of Dewey’s intellectual legacy results in the rejection of “what was surely dearest to Dewey himself.”¹⁸⁶ Specifically, he argues that Rorty’s appraisal of the “bad” Dewey ignores the centrality of metaphysics in Dewey’s philosophy. Gouinlock identifies Dewey’s works that address metaphysics, *Experience and Nature* and *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, as the works that are most “precious in his heritage.” He argues that these works define “Dewey’s uppermost concern and guiding aim as a philosopher: the commitment to a *methodic* social reconstruction.”¹⁸⁷ Accordingly, Gouinlock observes that “Dewey’s metaphysics is an attempt to characterize the inclusive context of human existence in such a way that we may learn how to function in it as effectively as possible...This vision is unrecognizable in Rorty, where nature is and must be a meaningless cipher.”¹⁸⁸ Rorty’s dismissal of the

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¹⁸⁵ Abraham Edel, “A Missing Dimension in Rorty’s Use of Pragmatism,” in *Transactions of the Charles Sanders Peirce Society* 21 (1985): 22.

¹⁸⁶ James Gouinlock, “What is the Legacy of Instrumentalism?” 251. A similar argument is made by Garry Brodsky. He argues that Rorty’s behaviorist-historicist epistemology is incompatible with Dewey’s naturalist epistemology. He observes that “Dewey argues that if we take biological psychology seriously we uncover a generic form of human behavior,—a kind of dynamic groping and coping with the environment in the course of responding to its stimuli and recovering a dynamic equilibrium with it—which manifests itself in one or another way in the various modes of human life.” This is a crucial caveat for Dewey’s notion of social reconstruction and it serves to contradict Rorty’s account of knowledge that is “what society lets us say.” See Garry Brodsky, “Rorty’s Interpretation of Pragmatism,” 332.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 252.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 266.

“bad” Dewey, the one that had the tendency of “backsliding” into metaphysics, loses sight of “the only Dewey.”

Susan Haack has been one of the most virulent critics of Rorty. In *Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate*, Haack observes that “somehow classical pragmatism, in the form of Peirce’s aspiration to renew philosophy by making it more scientific has been transmuted into the vulgar pragmatism fashionable today.”¹⁸⁹ She is troubled by “Rorty’s hopes of a post-philosophical culture in which “we pragmatists” give up the old-fashioned idea that truth is a goal of inquiry, and remake philosophy as a genre of literature, just a kind of writing.” Haack argues that “playfulness has its price...literary dilettantism of Rortyesque neo-pragmatism is crippled by its disastrous inability even to acknowledge the truths that literature can teach us.” She also thinks that Rorty’s conflation of science and literature “is bizarre,” in that he makes the mistake of concluding that “because scientific inquiry often involves linguistic shifts and innovations and relies on metaphors, science is really a genre of literature.”¹⁹⁰ From all of this, Haack concludes that Rorty misses the point of the early pragmatists, and fundamentally skews the legacy which he claims as his own.

One can begin to see in the historiographical overview the polemical effect of Rorty. This is important, for the “pragmatist turn” made by Rorty and the effective revival represents a crucial moment in the history of American pragmatism. Although he is credited with revival, this does not entail a position of leadership among those who identify themselves as “neopragmatists.” From the outset, he served as a divisive figure: some would be

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¹⁸⁹ Susan Haack, *Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate: Unfashionable Essays* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 2.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

drawn to his linguistic pragmatism, while others took up more reactionary and defensive positions against him. This point deserves extrapolation. From my perspective, the controversy created by Rorty's "pragmatist turn" illustrates two important points about the legacy of pragmatism: first, for those that are sympathetic to Rorty's pragmatism, an implicit flexibility can be found in the tradition of pragmatism that makes room for his "linguistic turn." On this view, pragmatism can be embodied in a number of positions, while staying true to the "spirit" of the tradition. Second, for those that find Rorty's self-identification with pragmatism problematic, it is presupposed that a unified tradition with certain "core ideals" exists. That is, something that is "classical pragmatism" can be located and identified. Hence, Rorty's historical reinterpretation distorts the tradition. Where one sits on this issue determines how they perceive Rorty's pragmatism and his place in the tradition.

Is Rorty guilty of historical inaccuracy? If so, does it damage his pragmatist credentials? Perhaps a foreboding warning in *Pragmatism*, James writes "Woe to him whose beliefs play fast and loose with the order which realities follow in his experience; they will lead him nowhere or else make false connexions."¹⁹¹ Although James is writing in the context of truth and of our judgments of reality, his message can be aptly applied to the examination of Rorty and his treatment of the history of pragmatism. The generally accepted accusation against Rorty is well worn: Rorty's critics charge him with jumping on board the pragmatist band wagon during the 1970s and early 1980s to distance himself from analytic philosophy. On this line, pragmatism provided him the philosophical justification for making this departure. That is, pragmatism provided him with the arguments necessary to strip himself of the analytic tradition that he was trained in and

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¹⁹¹ James, *Pragmatism*, 205.

associated with in the early years of his career. By aligning himself with the tradition, so say his critics, he distorts many of the fundamental features of the American philosophical legacy. In so doing, his “pragmatism” is not really pragmatism. Thus, to use James’s words, Rorty has played it fast and loose with the historical facts of the pragmatist traditions.

However, to sympathize with his critics, or apologists, is abiding to and perpetuating the either/or polemic that defines the controversy. Rorty’s linguistically-based pragmatism appears to take him places the pragmatists, specifically Dewey, would not or cannot go. For Rorty’s critics, his commitment to antifoundationalism requires a reworking of Dewey that divides his pragmatism into two parts: a good side and a bad side. Still more, reducing knowledge to linguistic agreement appears to lend itself to charges of relativism and subjectivism. Taken together, Rorty’s pragmatism does appear to deviate from the historical facts of the tradition. Indeed, Rorty himself recognizes the differences between his pragmatism and that of his predecessors. He describes his pragmatism as “a fairly simple, albeit sketchy, outline,” that “makes no pretence of being faithful to the thoughts of either James or Dewey (much less Peirce, whom I barely mention).”¹⁹² Instead, Rorty’s pragmatism involves “idiosyncratic...restatements of Jamesian and Deweyan themes.”¹⁹³ As Harlan points out, though, this reworking of pragmatism is warranted. Rorty is simply looking for answers to present problems in Dewey: as a philosopher committed to historicist approaches and the linguistic turn, Rorty is attempting to navigate his pragmatist boat around the postmodernist buoys that dot the intellectual waters in contemporary times.

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¹⁹² Rorty, “Preface,” in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, xiii.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, xiii.

It is for these reasons that I believe the time has now come to mediate (in true pragmatist spirit) the either/or polemic surrounding Rorty's pragmatism. I assert that, historical inaccuracies aside, Rorty has some very important things to say about pragmatism, and philosophy in general. Although classical pragmatism can be described and defined in a general way (as shown above), with unifying tenets that bind Peirce, James, and Dewey, the tenets themselves allow room for Rorty. While it can be conceded that there is "something" behind the meaning of pragmatism, this "something" is not so specific as to clearly define who is to be included and excluded from the club. One would be hard-pressed to illustrate the pragmatist virtues of, say, Hegel or Thomas Aquinas, but placing Rorty within the tradition is not as hard to do. Hence, Rorty exhibits enough of the fundamental qualities of the pragmatist spirit to qualify as such.

The more contentious qualities of Rorty's pragmatism, as I believe, represent a twenty-first century type of pragmatism, making use of all the new conceptual tools unavailable to the early pragmatists. Rorty's use of new conceptual tools, though, fuels challenges that he is nothing more than a postmodernist who is under the delusion of being a pragmatist. To address these charges, I wish to examine the origins of Rorty's pragmatism briefly, then conclude with a discussion on the pragmatist emphasis on pluralism and how it shows that there is room for Rorty within the tradition. In so doing, I hope to show how and why a new perspective is in order from which to view Rorty and the pragmatist tradition.

Rorty's Pragmatism: A Defense

Like many of Rorty's positions, his 'linguistic turn' represents a radical step for pragmatist philosophy. To many, Rorty's linguistically-based pragmatism looks a lot like

the doctrines of many of the postmodernist intellectuals that came onto the scene during the 1960s and 70s. Whereas Rorty's predecessors invested heavily in experience as a test of knowledge, he felt that the time had come to do away with the outdated and problematic epistemological tool.¹⁹⁴ He asserts that experience carries with it a variety of foundationalist implications that James and Dewey did not necessarily consider.¹⁹⁵ It is in this context that Rorty moves away from experience to an entirely linguistically-based epistemology. However, to many scholars of classical pragmatism, this move sweeps away the very core of the pragmatist attitude with it. Rorty maintains that this move is entirely consistent with pragmatists' forms of inquiry. Could this be, though, a veil to disguise his postmodernist tendencies?¹⁹⁶ Although his linguistic pragmatism makes use of the conceptual tools most often associated with the deconstructionists, Rorty employs several intellectual approaches that prevent him from "going all the way."

One mechanism that keeps Rorty from actualizing a postmodernist position is his use of simple, non-technical language. Unlike many postmodernists, Rorty's vocabulary does not take on a condescending tone that serves to vex the reader. As Christopher Duncan observes "for the most part, Rorty does not hide behind the obfuscatory jargon of his postmodern counterparts thereby making his insurgent radicalism and honest

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¹⁹⁴ Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 315.

¹⁹⁵ For a discussion on the foundationalist implications of James's and Dewey's emphasis on experience, see Koopman, "Language is a Form of Experience: Reconciling Classical Pragmatism and Neopragmatism," in *Transactions of the Charles Sanders Peirce Society* 43, no. 4 (2007): 694-727.

¹⁹⁶ Postmodernism as an intellectual category is well worn. It has been used in so many capacities and contexts that its meaning is nearly unintelligible. Indeed, Rorty himself is quite aware of the status of the term: "The word 'postmodernism' has been rendered almost meaningless by being used to mean so many different things. If you read a random dozen out of the thousands of books whose titles contain the word 'postmodern,' you will encounter at least half a dozen widely differing definitions of that adjective. I have often urged that we would be better off without it—that word is simply too fuzzy to convey anything." See Rorty, "Pragmatism, Pluralism, and Postmodernism," in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, 262.

approach simultaneously refreshing, accessible, daunting, and tendentious.”¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, Rorty is never so cavalier as to reduce knowledge to brute power, systems of dominance, or underlying currents of discourse. Rather, knowledge is a conversation that has been unfolding throughout human history. In so doing, he avoids the tendency among postmodernists to “mock all norms.”¹⁹⁸ That is, while Rorty deconstructs the epistemological traditions of Western philosophy, his proclaimed efforts toward the edification of philosophy and his commitment to democratic liberalism illustrate creative responses to intellectual and social problems of today.

This brings up an important aspect of Rorty’s philosophy that serves to demarcate his philosophy from postmodern literary criticism, while simultaneously illustrating his pragmatist commitments: meliorism. Too often, Rorty’s linguistically-based pragmatism serves to overshadow his meliorism, which some believe to be a central feature of pragmatism.¹⁹⁹ Koopman underscores the centrality of meliorism when observing that “Rorty’s pragmatism expresses the hope that we can make a difference between a world sustained by our values and a world to which our values are irrelevant. Rorty places pragmatism in the service of meliorism’s enabling mood.”²⁰⁰ Indeed, it is Rorty’s proactive meliorism that separates his philosophy from that of his postmodernist counterparts. It being the case that he holds out for the *possibility* of social betterment should be a key indicator of his anti-postmodernist position.

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¹⁹⁷ Christopher Duncan, “A Question for Rorty,” in *The Review of Politics* 66, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 385-413, at 388.

¹⁹⁸ Bernstein, “The Resurgence of Pragmatism,” 839.

¹⁹⁹ For an important essay on the importance of Rorty’s meliorism in relation to Dewey’s and Foucault’s social philosophy, see James Marshall, “On What We May Hope: Rorty on Dewey and Foucault,” in Michael A. Peters and Paulo Ghiraldelli Jr., eds., *Richard Rorty: Education, Philosophy, and Politics* (Lanham, MD.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 79-100.

²⁰⁰ Koopman, “Pragmatism as a Philosophy of Hope,” 110-1.

Rorty's meliorism is most apparent in his emphasis on the beneficial nature of democracy in human society. It is here where Rorty's writings are shot through with an alert and immediate sense of the need for a philosophy of social hope, aimed at "a utopia in which moral identity of every human being is constituted in large part, though obviously not exclusively, by his or her sense of participation in a democratic society."²⁰¹ If Rorty's meliorism is compared with Foucault's vision of democratic society, then the difference becomes quite apparent. Rorty describes Foucault's vision of America as "a disciplinary society, dominated by an odious ethos of 'liberal individualism', an ethos which produces racism, sexism, consumerism, and Republican presidents."²⁰² More broadly, Rorty observes that postmodernists tend to "participate in...the 'America Sucks Sweepstakes.' Participants in this event compete to find better, bitterer ways of describing the United States. They see our country as embodying everything that is wrong with the post-Enlightenment West."²⁰³ Where these criticisms fall short, Rorty believes, is in their lack of a call "to formulate a legislative program, to join a political movement, or to share in a national hope."²⁰⁴ That is, postmodernists espouse what is wrong without providing an outline on how to fix it. Rorty, on the other hand, keeps as an object of affirmation the possibility of democracy becoming realized and does not succumb to impotent implications of postmodernist criticisms.

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²⁰¹ Rorty, "Globalization, the Politics of Identity and Social Hope," in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, 238.

²⁰² Rorty, "Trotzky and the Wild Orchids," in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, 4.

²⁰³ Ibid., 4. Not all observers agree with Rorty's patriotic nationalism. This aspect of Rorty's thought comes out most explicitly in *Achieving Our Country* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998). Raymond Geuss argues that this text represents "a step too far." Geuss believes that "the very idea that the United States was 'special' has always seemed to me patently absurd, and the idea that in its present, any of its past, or any of its likely future configurations it is in any way exemplary, a form of gross narcissistic self-deception which was not transformed into something laudable by virtue of being embedded in a highly sophisticated theory which purported to show that ethnocentrism was in a philosophically deep sense unavoidable." See Geuss, "Richard Rorty at Princeton," 97.

²⁰⁴ Rorty, *Achieving Our Country*, 8.

Thus, Rorty's commitment to the ameliorative effects of democracy in human life stands as one of the most explicit features abating postmodernist charges and illustrating his pragmatist credentials. It is in his meliorism that one finds a profound concern for social hope and democracy that is absent in the garden variety of postmodernist literature. Indeed, this aspect of Rorty's philosophy most resembles the classical pragmatist's emphasis on possibility. In this respect, Rorty never gives up the possibility of a utopian democracy coming to fruition in the future, which a postmodernist would never give consent to. It appears that although Rorty makes use of the linguistic tools made available by the practitioners of literary criticism, he maintains only the more beneficial elements without bringing on the full force of postmodern criticisms.

Now that the charges of postmodernism have been addressed, other questions concerning the validity of Rorty's pragmatism can now be examined. The question of belonging is one that perplexes many observers. Rorty's critics who argue that his views "are so weird as to be merely frivolous,"²⁰⁵ question the alignment with such a rich tradition that, for all intents and purposes, does not appear to suit his training in analytic philosophy. Any fruitful explanation, then, of why Rorty chose to align himself with the pragmatist tradition will need to take account of the important nuances in Rorty's background that lead him to the adopt pragmatism. Such an explanation, I believe, will show that Rorty's "pragmatist turn" is less of conversion than it is a manifestation of certain aspects of his experiences as a child of leftist parents and his training in university.

One aspect that cannot be overlooked is Rorty's background and how it shaped his intellectual growth. For some, Rorty's leftist upbringing and subsequent

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²⁰⁵ Rorty, "Trotzky and the Wild Orchids," in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, 5.

disillusionment with analytic philosophy during the early years of his career may have predisposed Rorty to take the “pragmatist turn.” To the former, Rorty recalls that “I grew up knowing that all decent people were, if not Trotskyites, at least socialists...I knew that poor people would always be oppressed until capitalism was overcome...So, at age 12, I knew that the point of being human was to spend one’s life fighting social injustice.”²⁰⁶ An integral figure that would have a profound influence on Rorty was Leon Trotsky. Although Rorty’s parents were supporters of the Communist movement in the United States in the 1920s, they soon broke ties when the atrocities Stalin was inflicting within the Soviet Union began to become apparent. For the Rortys and other like-minded New York intellectuals, Trotsky represented a humanist figure who believed that human rights and social justice should never be sacrificed for ideological purposes.²⁰⁷ Trotsky inspired a sense of value in democratic virtues in the fight against fascism during the 1930s and 40s, which Rorty saw as a real threat to the future of the United States.²⁰⁸ From this, Rorty learned the intrinsic worth of social justice in a world that faced the immanent threat of total destruction. The imperative to ameliorate cruelty in the public sphere was a pressing issue with immediate consequences. To be sure, this is consistent with the meliorism most effervescent in the pragmatism of James and Dewey, whose own philosophies of social hope grew out of similar political concerns.

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²⁰⁶ Rorty, “Trotsky and the Wild Orchids,” in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, 7.

²⁰⁷ See Gross’s discussion on the impact of Trotsky on the Rorty family in *Richard Rorty: The Making of an American Philosopher*, 50-6.

²⁰⁸ Cotkin suggests that the specter of fascism throughout Europe in the 1930s and 40s, which resulted in the “end of ideology” in the 1950s, influenced Rorty’s demarcation between the public and private spheres. In such tenuous times, the potential for “radical transformations of the public sphere” posed a threat to human life itself. Thus, James’s notion of the heroic life, where the individual takes hold of the precariousness of existence, now carried fatal implications. See Cotkin, “William James and Richard Rorty: Context and Conversation,” 45.

A second figure who informed Rorty's concern for social justice and the amelioration of suffering was John Dewey. The impact of Dewey on Rorty's philosophy does not require restatement, but his influence on Rorty's formulation of social virtues should be examined briefly. Rorty observes that

Dewey thought, as I now do, that there was nothing bigger, more permanent and more reliable, behind our sense of moral obligation to those in pain than a certain contingent historical phenomenon—the gradual spread of the sense that the pain of others matters, regardless of whether they are of the same family, tribe, color, religion, nation, or intelligence as oneself.²⁰⁹

Dewey articulated for young Rorty the rationale behind the need for social justice and how it was connected with larger philosophical problems. When a socio-historical philosophical perspective is applied to real-world situations, the need becomes apparent for a philosophy focused on consequences, not theory. Thus, Rorty's "pragmatist turn" can be seen as taking root early in his life.

Critics of Rorty's "pragmatist turn" are quick to point out that Rorty's training is in analytic philosophy. If one follows the general line that this turn was in fact a conversion rather than a manifestation of certain aspects of Rorty's past, then it is indeed problematic. Conversion entails trading in one set of convictions and beliefs for another. However, upon closer examination, pragmatic concerns are a consistent feature throughout Rorty's college experiences as an undergraduate and graduate student at Chicago, and as a doctoral student at Yale. Gross reports that Rorty's training took place "in departments where, on the whole, analytic philosophy was looked on with skepticism."²¹⁰ Although Rorty's master's thesis and doctoral dissertation involved analytic topics, he voiced numerous concerns about the dangers of myopic approaches

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²⁰⁹ Rorty, "Trotsky and the Wild Orchids," in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, 14.

²¹⁰ Gross, *Richard Rorty: The Making of an American Philosopher*, 308.

which analytic philosophy employed.²¹¹ Rorty studied as a PhD candidate at Yale from 1952 to 1956. During this period at Yale, some of the sentinels of American philosophy who kept it alive in the classroom during the moribund period were teaching there. Several of these figures include Rulon Wells, John E. Smith, and Rorty's dissertation supervisor Paul Weiss. The fact remains, though, that Rorty knowingly and willingly went into analytic philosophy. If his heart was with the pragmatists, then why was this move ever made?

An explanation for Rorty's training in analytic philosophy involves two interrelated parts: the dominance of analytic philosophy in academic discourses and economics. For the most part, Rorty's training in analytic philosophy represents more of a smart career move than of a fundamental concern for the questions asked by the analytics. As shown above, analytic philosophy came to dominate philosophy departments in the United States during the post-World War II. As a result, the need for more qualified professors to teach the subject increased substantially. Thus, if one wished to gain employment in a philosophy department during the 1950s and 60s, the potential candidate would be well served to go into analytic philosophy. The need for economic stability, then, can account for Rorty's choosing analytic philosophy as a professional field. After all, it is not an outlandish proposition to say that people enter into careers that they are less than passionate about for the economic security they provide. A rebel cannot be so unless she is well fed.²¹²

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²¹¹ Gross, *Richard Rorty: The Making of an American Philosopher*, 308.

²¹² Gross argues that "with respect to Rorty's analytic turn, theories emphasizing the strategic nature of intellectual life offer a convincing explanation. Rorty was professionally ambitious and realized he could not get a job in a top philosophy department—much less tenure—unless he became a participant in the analytic enterprise." See Gross, *Richard Rorty: The Making of an American Philosopher*, 308.

With these considerations in mind, Rorty's "pragmatist turn" appears less a conversion than a reversion to a philosophical attitude that informed his more fundamental concerns conceived at a young age. For Rorty, from the outset of his training, he found analytic philosophy problematic because it operated in such a way as to create boundaries which cut off forms of inquiry that were potentially beneficial.²¹³ Analytic philosophy operated under a paradigm where only certain questions were asked for very specific reasons. By the late 1970s, Rorty had enough. For Rorty, pragmatism represented "a break from the demands of analytic paradigmaticity—a break from the felt sense that what it meant to be a good and serious philosopher was to fashion solutions to current disciplinary controversies using technical methods of the day."²¹⁴ Indeed, pragmatism spoke to Rorty's genuine concerns for social justice and the applicability of philosophy in real life social contexts.

Combine this reworking with a true affinity for Dewey, and a clearer picture begins to emerge of Rorty's self-identification with pragmatism. Rorty appears less disingenuous and less discursive in his pragmatic formulations. Some may argue, though, that sincerity only does so much. The intellectual climate during the 1960s and 70s period meant that Rorty's pragmatism was going to look quite different than James, Dewey, or Peirce's pragmatism. Rorty's pragmatism illustrates the training as an analytic philosopher, his deep affinity for Dewey and the pragmatic tradition, the impact of literary criticism in the humanities during the 1970s, and the Kuhnian revolution. These historical contingencies affect Rorty's pragmatism just as a variety of historical contingencies affected the early practitioners of pragmatism. This being the case, I hope

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²¹³ Rorty, "Thomas Kuhn, Rocks and the Laws of Physics," in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, 178.

²¹⁴ Gross, "Richard Rorty's Pragmatism," 120.

to show in Chapter 4 that Rorty maintains enough family resemblances to appropriately qualify as a pragmatist, and that the tradition which champions pluralism is large enough to include him.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION: A QUESTION OF PLURALISM

What, then, can be made of Rorty and the pragmatist tradition? Two points will serve well to summarize. On one hand, Rorty has done more than anyone to revive pragmatism. His pragmatism reasserts many of the central aims of the early forerunners of the movement. Rorty's criticism of representationalist epistemologies, his socialization of knowledge, and his emphasis on both fallibilism and possibility clearly keep in line with the pragmatist tradition. By bringing these pragmatist methods and concerns back into to the fold, Rorty reinvigorated a rich philosophical tradition, thus enabling it to be put to use for inquiry into present problems. More practically, Rorty's philosophy has important things to say in an age dominated by deconstructionists whose record appears less edifying than destructive to moral and social structures. What makes Rorty so refreshing in the present intellectual climate is his willingness to maintain an object of affirmation that operates in company with his criticism. Rorty's notion of a "post-philosophical culture," in which traditional intellectual constraints will give way to playful ironism and a more democratic society, is a source of hope in times when all the effects of global capitalism are being manifested, terror is the new warfare, and fewer and fewer intellectual discourses seek to address concrete social realities. Rorty's meliorism is his object of affirmation that shows a profound difference between himself and the more radical of the contemporary deconstructionists. It is in this historically-specific concern for the "problems of men" that Rorty best shows his pragmatist credentials. Thus, Rorty represents a strong intellectual voice deserving of our attention.

On the other hand, Rorty's pragmatism is admittedly more radical in several ways that the classical tradition cannot allow for. His strict antifoundationalism and linguistic-based pragmatism goes farther than the early pragmatists would be willing to go. Taken to its logical end, Rorty's skepticism towards all foundations results in the loss of any base on which to form consensus. To be sure, none of the early pragmatists would have endorsed a position that entailed such a loss. Hence, Rorty's less than rigorous methodology and less than precise accounting of his predecessors' thought cannot be excused entirely. Although Harlan and others believe that all is fair in an intellectual world where concepts like "objectivity," "authorial intention," and "the agent-knower," are subject to increasing scrutiny, a minimum standard can exist to judge historical accuracy.²¹⁵ Credible scholars have valid arguments and grievances with Rorty's version of the pragmatist tradition that deserve attention. If the principle criterion of a good intellectual historian is to treat her or his subject with fairness, then Rorty can be seen as going only half way. Rather than taking the good with the bad, Rorty seems to only want to take what is most useful and leave behind everything else. Couple this criticism with those of Sleeper, Edel, Gouinlock, and Haack, and it can be appropriately concluded that Rorty has some formidable charges against him. However, the argument here is

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²¹⁵ This assertion cuts to the heart of a debate that continues to rage in intellectual history. Intellectual historians like David Harlan argue that literary criticism has shown that the practice of historical inquiry is susceptible to postmodernist-type critique. This is particularly troubling to historians, in that history is a form of inquiry that depends upon the "agent-knower" to achieve "authorial intentions" which are aimed at a degree of "objective" knowledge. When all of these concepts are thrown into question, one wonders how history (or anthropology, sociology, English, philosophy, and all of the humanities) as a discipline can continue to proceed, business as usual. An epistemological crisis of this sort appears insurmountable. However, as Joyce Appleby observes, "Language, purpose, power, free choice, determinism—these are heady words, redolent with meaning and brimming with evocative power that we smuggle into codes and embed in myths...The library of human chatter is vast; meanings have been catalogued; expressions checked out and lost...If the poststructuralists are correct that we cannot fathom the original meaning of the texts offering us a window on other human experience, we will remain imprisoned in the present. Small wonder that historians draw upon their practice of reconstructing the past in order to resist the verdict." See Appleby, "One Good Turn Deserves Another," 1332.

concerned with the move beyond the either/or nature of the controversy, so it is my intent to show a possible way of moving beyond the Rorty polemic.

Thinking Beyond the Pragmatist Controversy: Recovering Pluralism

Strong emphasis is placed on how Rorty deviates from or distorts the pragmatist tradition. This point certainly needs no reexamination. It is from this perspective that critics assert the impossibility of congruity ever being achieved between Rorty and the early pragmatists. To overcome this attitude, the concepts of refinement and pluralism will be explored to show how they lead into the possibility of multiple “pragmatisms.” To this end, it will be argued that if the perspective of disunity is dropped in favor of a position that emphasizes pluralism and recognizes the historically-specific contingencies that shape all the pragmatist’s philosophies, then it will be possible to move beyond the controversy.

On this new perspective, Rorty’s pragmatism is one among many in the great sweep of the pragmatist tradition. Rorty’s is a refined pragmatism, just as Dewey refined James’s pragmatism, and James refined Peirce’s pragmatism. Each pragmatist has had to build in and excavate certain features from the tradition so that their pragmatism could answer to a variety of socially and historically specific problems. As such, Rorty’s pragmatism should be recognized as refining the pragmatist position to enable its maneuverability in a late-twentieth and early twenty-first century intellectual and social context. In so doing, Rorty maintains the essential spirit of the tradition while making it consistent with paradigm shifts that have occurred over the long stretch of pragmatism’s history.

As a central feature in the history of pragmatism, pluralism allows Rorty's position to be validated as sufficiently pragmatist. For Peirce, a community of diverse minds was the only real means to refine knowledge and reach a "final opinion." James held pluralism to be a crucial philosophical and moral concept. In *A Pluralistic Universe*, James argues that there exists no "final word," no "one true perspective." He observes that "the pluralistic view...is willing to believe that there may ultimately never be an all-form at all, that the substance of reality may never get totally collected, that some of it may remain outside of the largest combination of it ever made."²¹⁶ In this acquiescence to the pluralistic universe, James maintains that mankind can leave its mark through strenuous, active creation. For Dewey, pluralism promotes diversity in viewpoints, which serves to expand the potentials of human knowledge and discovery. In *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, Dewey argues that "every combination of human forces that adds its own contribution of value to life has for that reason its own unique and ultimate worth."²¹⁷ Indeed, Rorty's emphasis on conversation is implicitly pluralistic. For Rorty, knowledge is contingent upon access to a particular language-game, which depends on a confluence of social and historical factors that determine the type of conversation taking place. Thus, knowledge is not singular, but plural, depending on place and time. A consistent emphasis among the early pragmatists, then, was on the value of multiple viewpoints in the testing of ideas and the creation of knowledge. It is this vein that Rorty's voice cannot be dismissed wholesale as irrelevant to the pragmatist tradition.

Taken in the context of this thesis, pluralism can account for changes in the complexion of pragmatism that are the natural product of historical time. That is,

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²¹⁶ James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, 20.

²¹⁷ Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 204.

pluralism is not a historically-specific category; rather pluralism allows for the grouping of similar ideas over time and space. Gary Brodsky unpacks this idea by suggesting that the differences between Rorty and the early pragmatists are inevitable, but continuity is not difficult to locate among them. He observes that "Rorty deals with pragmatism in the light of contemporary philosophical developments and among these developments Kuhn's work on scientific revolutions looms quite large in Rorty's thought."²¹⁸ Brodsky posits further that "This is as it should be and it can be argued that contemporary followers of the pragmatists who also appreciate Kuhn's work would accept the thesis on the grounds that it preserves as much of pragmatism as is now possible. It might even be argued that the pragmatists themselves would have accepted Kuhn's work and modified their views in the direction of Rorty's thesis."²¹⁹ It follows, then, that although Rorty's pragmatism differs from the historically-specific methods of the early pragmatists, he maintains the pragmatist spirit in his inquiries. Rorty is merely synthesizing the pragmatic attitude with new conceptual tools available to him. As Brodsky illustrates, it is not unfathomable that had such tools been available to, say, James or Dewey, similar models may have emerged from these thinkers. It is this sense that Rorty's historical misgivings are repaid in his refinement of some of the more problematic aspects of the pragmatic tradition.²²⁰

Rorty's philosophical strength lies in his taking the best and most important tenets of the pragmatist tradition, while simultaneously drawing on the powerful theories that have "cleaned up" intellectual thinking in our times. It is this sense that we are well

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²¹⁸ Brodsky, "Rorty's Interpretation of Pragmatism," 329.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 329.

²²⁰ For an extended argument on this notion of refinement, see Koopman, "Language is a Form of Experience."

served to take a look at what Rorty can say about present intellectual troubles. It could be argued further that this is a very pragmatic take on Rorty, keeping in line with Peirce's and Dewey's notion of fallibilism and reconstruction in thought and modes of inquiry. On this view, Rorty can be seen as practicing just one of several versions of pragmatisms that originate from the classical tradition.

Several problems arise, though, when discussing the notions of pluralism and multiple pragmatisms. The former is a particularly problematic category. Such a mindset runs the risk of infinite regress, ending in unintelligible relativism. Under such a label, the line between inclusion and exclusion becomes blurred if not wholly dissolved. As for the latter, the notion of multiple pragmatisms serves to contradict the notion of a unified tradition. Both charges can be answered with a single reply. The notion of "a" pragmatism and multiple pragmatisms is not a contradiction. Nor does pluralism (as pertaining to pragmatism) entail relativism. Why? Pragmatism, as a philosophical attitude, is set up in such a way as to purport both unity and pluralism. To many observers, though, this simply cannot be the case. Such a conclusion is merely the result of faulty logic. I would argue that pragmatism is united by a general set of principles, one of which is an emphasis on pluralism. So, pragmatism is both inclusive and exclusive. It is inclusive in the sense that it champions a wide and diverse range of viewpoints to expand the domains of knowledge and possibility. It is exclusive, though, in that it has a set of general principles that outline what can and cannot count as pragmatism. On this assessment, pragmatism is open to a number of different offshoots of itself (as shown in Peirce's form of pragmatism, James's form of pragmatism, Rorty's pragmatism, and so on), while maintaining a general theme as to what it espouses to be and do. It is, then, that

pragmatism can have a unified body of principles that demarcates itself from, say, German Idealism or Logical Positivism, while promoting pluralistic endeavors within itself. Thus, because pragmatism champions pluralism, it is able to include multiple pragmatisms while not resulting in an all-inclusive relativism.

Thus, if we view Rorty's pragmatism as one among many, then the controversy falls to the wayside. It is no longer identified as an "other" who crashes the pragmatist party. Conversely, the intrinsic pluralism that is shot through classical pragmatism allows Rorty to practice his own brand of pragmatism, while recognizing it as a part of the tradition as a whole. Koopman agrees that it is time for resolution in the ongoing "internecine conflicts" in contemporary pragmatist philosophy. In so doing, he reinforces this notion of plural pragmatisms. He argues that rather than viewing scholars of classical pragmatism (who he calls "primapragmatists") and the linguistic neopragmatists as diametrically opposed, "it is time to consider the possibility of yet another stage in pragmatist thought which will combine the best insights of each of its predecessors. This would require reinterpreting this intramural debate such that primapragmatism and neopragmatism could be seen as two moments in a broader pragmatist sweep."²²¹ To do so, Koopman urges his readers to rekindle the pragmatist spirit of pluralism, which sees pragmatism as "capacious enough to house both of its major moments."²²² With such a perspective, it can be hoped for that Rorty will no longer resemble an intruder as much as a contributing member of the "Revival Generation" of pragmatism.

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²²¹ Koopman, "Language is a Form of Experience," 695. Koopman advances a third version of pragmatism that he believes "does justice to both Rorty and Dewey by focusing on experience as a temporal field." He argues that by emphasizing the temporality and historicity of experience in James and Dewey, while concurrently abetting the foundationalist implications inherent in such an emphasis, "we can slowly work our way toward a conception of experience that is sufficiently appreciative of the motivations behind Rorty's linguistic turn." 710-13.

²²² *Ibid.*, 695.

Conclusion

Where did we come from and where have we arrived? Among the early pragmatists, consistencies are equaled by inconsistencies. Peirce was interested in the main with the scientific and logical consequences of pragmatism. His concern with the methods of inquiry and the outcomes of experimentation illustrate the germinal concepts on which James and Dewey would build off of and rework. Moreover, his pragmatism is marked by a clarity and eye for detail that is unmatched by James and Dewey. Unlike James and Dewey, though, Peirce lived a troubled life and only attained real notoriety after his death in 1914.

More than any one of the three, William James did more to bring pragmatism into the public fold. If there was a rock star of American pragmatism, James would be it. His approachable prose and rhetorical style, coupled with a concern for everyday issues, show why James reached the level of success he did. Dewey represents the coming full circle of American pragmatism. His emphasis on the scientific and the social provide a clear blend of Peirce and James, but retrofitted to accommodate both a post-Darwin and post-World War II world. Dewey also stands as the bridge between contemporary pragmatism and classical pragmatism. He was the last of the old guard to fall victim to the confluence of social, intellectual, and political forces that pushed pragmatism into decline during the 1950s. However, he was also the philosopher neopragmatists looked to when they attempted to revive the movement in the 1970s and 1980s.

The unifying thread among each of the early philosophers was an emphasis on the consequences, not causes, of actions, beliefs, knowledge, and experience. For these men, causes are the stuff of Descartes and Kant. Their search for causes had proved futile and

morally dangerous to the early pragmatists. By the mid-nineteenth century, times had changed. The early pragmatists sought to adapt philosophy to the social contexts of their times. Philosophy had to “work,” it had to be able to make a difference, both concretely and morally, in a person’s life. Still more, philosophy had to be flexible enough to incorporate changes as they came. Philosophy no longer had to provide the answers to eternal and foundational questions that stood against the everyday, changing ones. Rather, philosophy had to bend and flex with the changes if it was going to make a difference. Whether or not a difference was achievable was unknowable, but hope lay in the possibility for the early pragmatists. So, it can be seen in the philosophies of Peirce, James, and Dewey that a firm commitment existed to these sorts of principles in the ways they approached philosophy.

When Richard Rorty rumbled onto the scene in 1979, philosophy in America had experienced a generational separation from the classical pragmatists. In that time, much had changed and transformed. Socially, the status quo had become challenged during the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights movement. Conformity gave way to eccentricity. Intellectually, Logical Positivism and the Analytic school had become entrenched in the American university. With it, a sense of “rigorism” had taken hold as the guiding principle not only in philosophy, but in academia in general. Analytic techniques were developed and employed to sharpen knowledge, to cut out the questions not worthy of interrogation, and most importantly, to get some answers. Thomas Kuhn’s articulation of the nature of scientific revolutions and the fallibility of paradigms would prove to be a crucial moment in the revival of pragmatism by Rorty.

With the publication of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* in 1979, Rorty's career as a philosopher and intellectual historian would be given a jump start that sent him to the top. This critical history of the origins of philosophical problems in the Western tradition harkened back to agendas held by James and Dewey. Rorty's call for a return to more tentative and flexible forms of philosophical inquiry was a bold maneuver, in that analytic philosophy reigned supreme at that time. However, a small minority of philosophers and social scientists had grown dissatisfied by the absolutism of the analytic methods. The time had come for a change and Rorty (in true pragmatist fashion) called into question the very foundations on which philosophy had been built for two thousand years.

Rorty's revival of pragmatism was both positive and negative. In emphasizing the antifoundational and anti-essentialist aspects of pragmatism, he also brought back into view a rich and valuable philosophical tradition that was thoroughly American. In so doing, he brought back the issues of social justice, democratic liberalism, and historicism into philosophical discourses that had been abandoned by analytic philosophy.

However, to scholars of classical pragmatism, Rorty was seen as a wolf in sheep's clothing. He called himself a pragmatist, but his doctrines and posture spoke otherwise. His willingness to cherry pick the history of pragmatism for bits and pieces that informed his theories caused an outrage. Moreover, Rorty's dumping of experience for language was seen as removing the heart of pragmatism. Thus, Rorty served as a polemical figure.

I have suggested an alternative though. Rorty's pragmatism reflects philosophical, social, and historical transformations that serve to distance him from the contexts of his pragmatist forefathers. It would seem intuitive that his pragmatism would necessarily

look different because of these factors. What Rorty has done was to revise and update the core doctrines of pragmatism to conform to the challenges of analytic philosophy, the loss of epistemological foundations in the wake of postmodern criticism, and the Kuhnian revolution. In a sense, then, Rorty has refined pragmatism to better correspond to the realities that he faces in a contemporary setting. On my view, this move is entirely pragmatic and one that the early pragmatists would probably have endorsed. Although Rorty's pragmatism is historically inaccurate, it is of value to our present dilemmas in philosophy. If we can somehow regain the sense of plurality that the early pragmatists championed, then I believe that the controversy over Rorty will fall to the wayside, and his pragmatism can exist as one among many different pragmatisms.

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