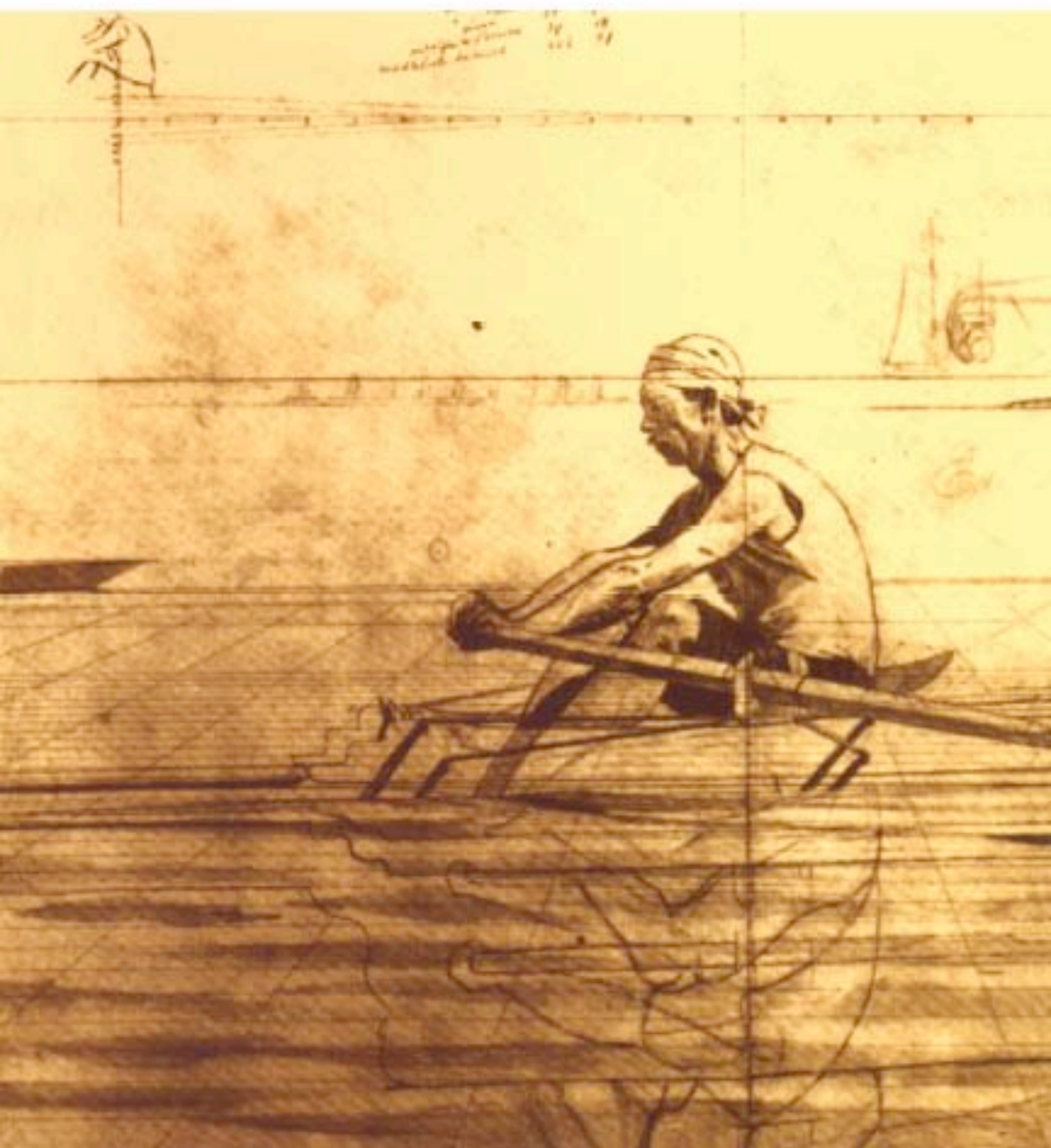


Edited by Morris Dickstein



# THE REVIVAL OF PRAGMATISM

*New Essays on Social Thought, Law, and Culture*

**THE REVIVAL  
OF  
PRAGMATISM**

Duke University Press   Durham and London, 1998

---

# The Revival of Pragmatism

Edited by Morris Dickstein

NEW ESSAYS  
ON SOCIAL  
THOUGHT, LAW,  
AND CULTURE

Second printing, 1999

© 1998 Duke University Press

“Pragmatism Then and Now” © 1998 Morris Dickstein;

“Another Pragmatism: Alain Locke, Critical ‘Race’

Theory, and the Politics of Culture” © 1998 Nancy

Fraser; “Pragmatism and Poets: A Response to Richard

Poirier” © Louis Menand

All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America  
on acid-free paper ∞

Typeset in Minion by Keystone Typesetting, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
appear on the last printed page of this book.

# Contents

Acknowledgments ix

Introduction: Pragmatism Then and Now, Morris Dickstein 1

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES PRAGMATISM MAKE?  
THE VIEW FROM PHILOSOPHY

Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism, Richard Rorty 21

Pragmatism and Realism, Hilary Putnam 37

Response to Hilary Putnam's "Pragmatism and Realism"  
Sidney Morgenbesser 54

The Moral Impulse, Ruth Anna Putnam 62

What's the Use of Calling Emerson a Pragmatist?  
Stanley Cavell 72

PRAGMATISM AND THE REMAKING OF  
SOCIAL THOUGHT

Pragmatism: An Old Name for Some New Ways of Thinking?  
James T. Kloppenberg 83

Pragmatism and Democracy: Reconstructing the Logic of  
John Dewey's Faith, Robert B. Westbrook 128

Community in the Pragmatic Tradition, Richard J. Bernstein 141

Another Pragmatism: Alain Locke, Critical “Race” Theory, and the  
Politics of Culture, Nancy Fraser 157

Going Astray, Going Forward: Du Boisian Pragmatism  
and Its Lineage, Ross Posnock 176

The Inspiration of Pragmatism: Some Personal Remarks  
Hans Joas 190

The Missing Pragmatic Revival in American Social Science  
Alan Wolfe 199

Pragmatism and Its Limits, John Patrick Diggins 207

#### PRAGMATISM AND LAW

Pragmatic Adjudication, Richard A. Posner 235

Freestanding Legal Pragmatism, Thomas C. Grey 254

What’s Pragmatic about Legal Pragmatism?, David Luban 275

Pragmatism and Law: A Response to David Luban, Richard Rorty 304

It’s a Positivist, It’s a Pragmatist, It’s a Codifier! Reflections  
on Nietzsche and Stendhal, Richard H. Weisberg 312

Pragmatism, Pluralism, and Legal Interpretation: Posner’s  
and Rorty’s Justice without Metaphysics Meets Hate Speech  
Michel Rosenfeld 324

#### PRAGMATISM, CULTURE, AND ART

Why Do Pragmatists Want to Be Like Poets?  
Richard Poirier 347

Pragmatists and Poets: A Response to Richard Poirier  
Louis Menand 362

The Novelist of Everyday Life, David Bromwich 370

When Mind Is a Verb: Thomas Eakins and the Work of Doing  
Ray Carney 377

Religion and the Recent Revival of Pragmatism  
Giles Gunn 404

AFTERWORD

TRUTH AND TOILETS: PRAGMATISM AND THE PRACTICES OF LIFE  
STANLEY FISH 418

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY 435

CONTRIBUTORS 441

INDEX 445



## Acknowledgments

This book originated in a conference on the revival of pragmatism that took place at the Graduate School of the City University of New York on November 3–4, 1995. It was organized by the Center for the Humanities and cosponsored by the New York Council for the Humanities, the Jacob Burns Institute for Advanced Legal Studies at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law of Yeshiva University, and the Simon Rifkind Center for the Humanities at City College. I am especially grateful for the constant and unremitting support of President Frances Degen Horowitz, Provost Geoffrey Marshall, and Dean Alan Gartner of the CUNY Graduate School. The conference could not have taken place without help from Professors David Gray Carlson, Michael Herz, Michel Rosenfeld, and Richard H. Weisberg of the Cardozo School of Law, Jay Kaplan of the New York Council for the Humanities, and Dean Martin Tamny and Paul Sherwin of City College. Jeffrey Kittay and *Lingua Franca* hosted a festive dinner for all the participants.

At the CUNY Graduate School the conference was first proposed by Charles Molesworth and planned by a committee that also included John Patrick Diggins, Charles Landesman, Louis Menand, and Joan Richardson. Their deep interest in pragmatism and advice in shaping the conference proved most valuable. Elizabeth Rosen offered some timely assistance in seeking funding. My assistants at the Center for the Humanities, especially Micki Grover and Pati Cockram, worked hard to make the conference a success.

Most of the essays included here are revised versions of papers originally presented at the conference, but this volume also includes additional essays by Richard J. Bernstein, Ray Carney, John Patrick Diggins, Giles Gunn, James T. Kloppenberg, Ross Posnock, Michel Rosenfeld, and Alan Wolfe, as well as Richard Rorty's response to the papers on legal pragmatism. Some of the conference participants were also generous with advice

in planning it, especially Richard Rorty, Stanley Fish, Michel Rosenfeld, Thomas Grey, Alan Wolfe, and Richard J. Bernstein. Louis Menand gave me some helpful comments on my introduction. I am especially grateful for Richard Rorty's courtesy and encouragement and Stanley Fish's early and unflagging enthusiasm for publishing this volume.

With meticulous care, good humor, and attention to detail, Mary-Jo Haronian gave invaluable assistance in the preparation of this book. Mark Noonan and Vincent Bissonette provided much additional help in preparing the manuscript for publication.

## Introduction: Pragmatism Then and Now

MORRIS DICKSTEIN

The revival of pragmatism has excited enormous interest and controversy in the intellectual community over the past two decades. By the middle of the twentieth century, pragmatism was widely considered a naively optimistic residue of an earlier liberalism, discredited by the Depression and the horrors of the war, and virtually driven from philosophy departments by the reigning school of analytic philosophy. Now once again it is recognized not only as the most distinctive American contribution to philosophy but as a new way of approaching old problems in a number of fields. As the present volume shows, pragmatism has become a key point of reference around which contemporary debates in social thought, law, and literary theory as well as philosophy have been unfolded. It has appealed to philosophers moving beyond analytic philosophy, European theorists looking for an alternative to Marxism, and postmodernists seeking native roots for their critique of absolutes and universals. The revival has not only drawn new attention to the original pragmatists but altered our view of writers as different as Emerson and Frost, Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, Santayana and Stevens, Du Bois and Ellison, all of whom have been reconsidered in the light of a broader conception of pragmatist thinking.

Pragmatism as a branch of philosophy is exactly a hundred years old. The term was first brought forward by William James in a lecture in Berkeley in 1898, published as "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results." In developing pragmatism as a critique of abstractions and absolutes and as a philosophy oriented toward practice and action, James insisted that he was only building on thoughts developed by his friend Charles Sanders Peirce in Cambridge more than twenty years earlier. But the cantankerous Peirce was far from pleased with what James did with his ideas. Pragmatism's early years were as filled with controversy as its recent career. James plunged into the fray with his usual zest, and the lectures published as *Pragmatism* in 1907 became one of his most widely read

books. In part because they were so clearly yet provocatively formulated, James' lectures created something of a scandal. James had targeted rationalists and idealists of every stripe, and pragmatism was widely attacked as an extreme form of relativism that undermined any notion of objective truth.

As it is used in common speech, the qualities associated with "pragmatism" generally win our enthusiastic assent. Politicians and pundits see pragmatism as the essence of American politics—the art of the possible, rooted in our aversion to ideology and our genius for compromise. Those who take a pragmatic approach to diplomacy and foreign policy—or those who craft legislation and strike political deals—pride themselves in negotiating differences and achieving incremental results rather than holding out for unbending moral absolutes. Others condemn this kind of pragmatism as policy without principle, goal-oriented but lacking a moral anchor. When presidents like Franklin Roosevelt, John Kennedy, or Bill Clinton are described as the ultimate pragmatists, this may mean that they got something done, or that their behavior, for better or worse, differed from their rhetoric, or that they were cunning and pliable men with few consistent values or ideals. "I'm a pragmatist, a problem solver," said one recent presidential advisor to explain his seemingly contradictory approach to two different issues.

As a philosophical position, pragmatism seems at first to have little in common with this widespread usage. John Dewey's ideas were radical and dynamic rather than limited to practical considerations. His emphasis on "creative intelligence," especially in education, stressed the transformation of the given rather than the acceptance of the status quo. Despite the value it places on doing and practice, in some ways it was more utopian than practical. This is why Dewey repeatedly criticizes empiricism, to which his work otherwise shows a strong kinship. "Empiricism is conceived of as tied up to what has been, or is, 'given,'" Dewey wrote. "But experience in its vital form is experimental, an effort to change the given; it is characterized by projection, by reaching forward into the unknown; connection with a future is its salient trait."<sup>1</sup> For pragmatists the upshot of thought comes not in logical distinctions or intellectual systems but in behavior, the translation of ideas into action. As Peirce wrote in "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," one of pragmatism's founding texts,

The essence of belief is the establishment of a habit, and different beliefs are distinguished by the different modes of action to which they give rise. . . . Imaginary distinctions are often drawn between

beliefs which differ only in their mode of expression. . . . [T]he whole function of thought is to produce habits of action. . . . To develop its meaning, we have, therefore, simply to determine what habits it produces, for what a thing means is simply what habits it involves.<sup>2</sup>

Within the American tradition, this practical, result-oriented side of Peirce, James, and Dewey places their work in a line that goes back at least to Benjamin Franklin, while the pragmatists' commitment to creative self-transformation shows the influence of Emerson. "The world stands really malleable, waiting to receive its final touches at our hands," says James near the end of *Pragmatism*. He goes on to describe a world that "suffers human violence willingly," that is "still in the making, and awaits part of its complexion from the future."<sup>3</sup> A bit disingenuously, James presents pragmatism not as philosophy but as a way of doing philosophy, "a method of settling metaphysical disputes that otherwise might be interminable" (42). Pragmatism provides a practical test but "it does not stand for any special results," he claimed. "It is a method only" (46). Yet its consequences were far-reaching.

James himself was exhilarated by the controversy that surrounded his lectures on pragmatism. Just as Marx saw his materialist version of Hegel as a Copernican turn in philosophy, James quite seriously compared pragmatism to the Protestant Reformation, which augmented the authority of the individual conscience against the power of the Church.<sup>4</sup> He also suggested that his account of truth, once it was definitively settled, would "mark a turning-point in the history of epistemology, and consequently in that of general philosophy" (196). Yet in the subtitle of his book, James described pragmatism as "a new name for some old ways of thinking," perhaps to deflect the charges of outrageous novelty and irresponsibility that were already being leveled against him.

In the first decade of the century James's pragmatism was under sharp attack from adherents of philosophical and religious idealism. Pragmatism had a considerable tradition behind it, yet it was also part of a larger modern turn marked by the inexorable growth of science, secularism, and the historical consciousness in American thinking. In Dewey's hands especially, it reflected an evolutionary perspective that showed the influence of both Hegelian historicism and Darwinian naturalism. Darwin's work undercut not only traditional religious belief but also the sense of an unchanging, essential nature. As Hegel (and Marx) fostered a dynamic view of history, Darwin legitimized a genetic approach to animal and human behavior. Social Darwinists took this as a justification of the harsh struggle

for life under unregulated capitalism, but for progressive thinkers it meant that the sources of social inequality, far from being a given, could be traced empirically and altered by changes in education and public policy. In Dewey's work as an active reformer and prolific theorist, pragmatism became part of the surge of liberalism, progressivism, and social reform in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Yet even apart from questions of social policy, pragmatism also had its cultural dimension. Though pragmatism and modernism often diverge, and the early pragmatists themselves had mixed feelings about modern art, the moment of pragmatism was also the moment of Picasso's and Braque's cubism, Einstein's theory of relativity, and a new wave of advanced literature. Realism and naturalism, which had sought an objective standpoint on man and society, gave way to experiments that tried to capture the flow of the individual consciousness. William James' focus on the stream of consciousness in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890), his admired friend Henri Bergson's studies of *durée*, or experienced time, in his *Time and Free Will* (1899), and Freud's explorations of the unconscious in his *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) ran parallel to these literary experiments, including the close attention to point of view in the difficult late novels of Henry James. The James brothers were often impatient with each others' work, but they achieved a momentary convergence in 1907 when Henry, after reading *Pragmatism*, wrote that "I was lost in the wonder of the extent to which all my life I have . . . unconsciously pragmatized,"<sup>5</sup> and the easily exasperated William yielded conditionally to the prismatic hall of mirrors he saw with some astonishment in *The American Scene*. Together and separately, James, Bergson, and Freud had an incalculably large influence on the forms and outlook of modern art.

Pragmatism, like modernism, reflects the break-up of cultural and religious authority, the turn away from any simple or stable definition of truth, the shift from totalizing systems and unified narratives to a more fragmented plurality of perspectives. In modern literature this would be epitomized by Joyce's shaping of the interior monologue, Ford Madox Ford's use of the unreliable narrator, Gertrude Stein's flow of verbal association, and Faulkner's overlay of multiple perspectives in *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*. Literary modernism displaces the omniscient narrator in fiction as religious liberalism unseats the omniscient deity. But where many modernists, especially after World War I—the *Waste Land* generation—would portray the fragmentation of the modern world with an acrid nostalgia for earlier hierarchies, the pragmatists tend to be exuberant and constructive rather than pessimistic. The dark and apocalyptic

strain of modernism held little appeal for them; the rupture with past certainties opened up new horizons. They saw “the quest for certainty” as the futile and misguided remnant of an outworn metaphysics, and they take the new, contingent, human-centered world as source of opportunity and possibility. For the pragmatists, truth is provisional, grounded in history and experience, not fixed in the nature of things. In the words of historian John P. Diggins, “pragmatism offered uncertainty and plurality as an answer to the exhausted past ideas of authority.”<sup>6</sup>

Yet the break with the past would also involve a new emphasis on history. The edifice of the law especially came to be seen as an evolving process rather than a set of fixed principles. As Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., wrote near the beginning of *The Common Law*, “It is something to show that the consistency of a system requires a particular result, but it is not all. The life of the law has not been logic: it has been experience. The felt necessities of the time, the prevalent moral and political theories, institutions of public policy, avowed or unconscious, even the prejudices which judges share with their fellow-men, have had a good deal more to do than the syllogism in determining the rules by which men should be governed.”<sup>7</sup>

Such an empirical outlook offended formalists, rationalists, philosophical idealists, and traditional moralists alike. Pragmatism became a new chapter in the struggle between defenders of the ancients and the moderns that went back to Aristophanes and Euripides. In 1915 Walter Lippmann was still the young progressive, not yet the expounder of natural law he became in later works like *The Public Philosophy* (1955). As a gifted undergraduate at Harvard, he had attracted the notice of William James, whom he immensely admired. But in a *New Republic* essay of 1915 he initially expressed concern that Dewey, with his radical experimentalism, was “urging us to do something never done before by any other people. He is urging us consciously to manufacture our philosophy.” It would be hard to imagine a better description of what Emerson or Whitman were propounding for the new American nation: a genuinely fresh start, an escape from the heavy hand of European tradition, an emancipation by self-definition. “The whole value of philosophies up to the present,” says Lippmann, “has been that they found support for our action in something outside ourselves. We philosophized in order to draw sanction from God, or nature or evolution.”<sup>8</sup> A few years later Lippmann’s Harvard classmate, T. S. Eliot, objected to “a certain meanness of culture” in the philosophy of William Blake, which he compared to “an ingenious piece of home-made furniture: we admire the man who has put it together out of the odds and

ends about the house.”<sup>9</sup> For Eliot, too, philosophy was something you inherited, something externally sanctioned, not ideas and beliefs that could be shaped to your own needs.

But the Lippmann of 1915 quickly reversed field and went on to argue that in fact philosophers had always done what Dewey (and Freud) described: projected general ideas out of their own temperament and needs. “Most philosophy is not a revelation of absolute principles, but a human being’s adjustment of his desires to his limitations.” Lippmann’s sympathy for pragmatism would not endure, but for now he puts an eloquent spin on Dewey’s views:

All philosophies are experiments, but they are unconscious ones. They all represent an attempt to make ourselves better at home in the world. . . . Instead of spinning our thoughts blindly and calling them absolute truth, let us spin them deliberately and be ready to change them. Let us continue to write autobiographies, but let us be sure we know they are autobiographies. Let us recognize that the true use of philosophy is to help us to live.<sup>10</sup>

Dewey could not have been entirely pleased to see himself defended in such a spongy, subjective vein. Just as Blake tried to escape Romantic subjectivity by creating an immense, eclectic mythology, the pragmatists hoped to avoid relativism by developing an evolutionary outlook in social and intersubjective rather than merely subjective terms. Working from a scientific model like the one later developed by Thomas Kuhn, Dewey envisioned a self-correcting community of enquirers who would proceed experimentally according to fallibilistic norms of “warranted assertability,” instead of claiming to discover timeless truths that corresponded to the way the world actually is. Richard Rorty has described this as “a search for the widest possible intersubjective agreement,” adding that “objectivity is not a matter of corresponding to objects but of getting together with other subjects.”<sup>11</sup>

As Rorty would be drawn to literature, especially the novel, for its concrete portrayal of intersubjectivity, James evoked a Whitmanesque version of truth still grounded in “the muddy particulars of experience,” a truth whose claims were “conditional” and constantly evolving rather than abstract and absolute (149, 150). In an arresting passage in *Pragmatism*, James also turned to the common law to describe this process of accretion and transmutation. The key metaphor here is a biological one:

Distinctions between the lawful and the unlawful in conduct, or between the correct and incorrect in speech, have grown up incidentally

among the interactions of men's experiences in detail; and in no other way do the distinctions between the true and the false in belief ever grow up. Truth grafts itself on previous truth, modifying it in the process, just as idiom grafts itself on previous idiom, and law on previous law. . . .

All the while, however, we pretend that the eternal is unrolling, that the one previous justice, grammar or truth are simply fulgurating and not being made. . . . These things *make themselves* as we go. (158)

Such parallels between law and language, language and truth, all seen as part of an evolving historical process, were prophetic of the later directions of pragmatism, as the essays in the present volume make clear. James sees laws and languages, if not truth itself, as "man-made things." "Human motives sharpen all our questions, human satisfactions lurk in all our answers, all our formulas have a human twist" (159).

When James says that the pragmatist turns away from abstraction and absolutes "towards facts, towards action and towards power," when he adds that this empiricist temper "means the open air and the possibilities of nature, as against dogma, artificiality, and the pretence of finality in truth" (45), he is expressing his own robust temperament, his love of the outdoors, of risk and adventure, but also a typical American preference for action over reflection, for facts over theories, and above all for results. "Pragmatism unstiffens all our theories, limbers them up and sets each one to work" (46–47). What made pragmatism so embattled in its original form was also what made it strikingly American: its practical, situational, problem-solving emphasis.

James puts all this in an inflammatory way as a foil to idealism, metaphysics, and popular notions about what philosophy is and what philosophers do. Instead of words like God, matter, and reason that play an almost magical, incantatory role in metaphysics, the pragmatic method prevents you from looking "on any such word as closing your quest. You must bring out of each word its practical cash-value, set it at work within the stream of your experience" (46). James insists that truth or meaning is a process, an action leading to a pay-off, a verb rather than a noun. "The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth *happens* to an idea. It *becomes* true, is *made* true by events. . . . Its validity is the process of its *validation*" (196). "It is the nature of truths to be validated, verified. It pays for our ideas to be validated. Our obligation to seek truth is part of our general obligation to do what pays" (149–50). Truth is the outcome of experience. "Men's beliefs at any time are so much experience *funded*" (146).

James' aim with these and other pointed metaphors is to ground ideas in lived experience—to see them as emerging from a living subject and issuing in real consequences, to see them as made rather than given. He uses loaded words like “power” or “cash-value” not to ally pragmatism with force or business—two major American preoccupations during Teddy Roosevelt's presidency, when he wrote his book—but as a way of jolting his audience, appealing to them almost too vividly in terms of the forces that were really running the world.

By stating his case polemically in such charged language, James opened pragmatism to the charge that it was philistine, a methodology without a moral compass, an epistemology with a merely tactical sense of truth. Pragmatism is always contextual. It sees things not in isolation, not as essences existing in and of themselves, but as belonging to contexts that shape their meaning and value. It is concerned about the *production* of meaning, the production of truth, because it sees them as dynamic, always in formation. To its detractors, this emphasis on the situation and the “cash” payoff revealed a method that could be used to justify anything. Had not James himself said that “the true, to put it very briefly, is only the expedient in the way of our thinking, just as the right is only the expedient in our way of behaving”? (196).

The most damning attack on pragmatism as expediency came not from metaphysicians or traditional moralists but from one of Dewey's most gifted admirers, Randolph Bourne. In “Twilight of Idols” (1917), Bourne argued that Dewey's pragmatic justification for the America's entry into World War I, which shocked many of his followers, showed up his concern with technique and efficiency at the expense of consistent values, and revealed the limits of Dewey's instrumentalism: it was a narrowly expedient philosophy of “adaptation” and “adjustment” bereft of ultimate goals. (Dewey's educational views were often attacked in the same terms.) Bourne was appalled that a pragmatist approach could be made to serve repugnant ends. He complained that Dewey's young disciples—like the “best and brightest” who would prosecute a later American war—“have absorbed the secret of scientific method as applied to political administration. They are liberal, enlightened, aware. . . . They are making themselves efficient instruments of the war-technique, accepting with little question the ends as announced from above. . . . To those of us who have taken Dewey's philosophy almost as our American religion, it never occurred that values could be subordinated to technique.”<sup>12</sup> If the social conscience that led to progressive reforms showed Dewey's break with tradition in the best light, the war revealed its darker side.

Bourne's critique became the template for subsequent attacks on pragmatism from both left and right. The date alone, 1917, was momentous: even more than America's entry into the war, the Russian Revolution would energize and divide the left while terrifying and galvanizing the right. Soon cultural critics like Van Wyck Brooks and Lewis Mumford would develop Bourne's attack. To later Marxist critics like Theodor Adorno, pragmatism was hopelessly wedded to the status quo; they saw it as little more than a rationale for America's ruthless and amoral business civilization. Conservatives would be just as offended by its relativism and optimism, its critique of moral absolutes and foundational values. Near the end of the essay Bourne places himself among the young "malcontents" created by the war, who reject "a philosophy of adjustment" and react with "robust desperation" to "the continual frustrations and aridities of American life."<sup>13</sup> He thus became the prototype of the disillusioned modernist intellectual who would turn against pragmatism during the next two decades, looking instead toward Europe, toward modern art, and eventually toward Marxism and revolution.

The war 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 as among radicals who castigated its abuses and inequalities. The reaction against pragmatism became even more marked after World War II, abetted by a variety of new influences including existentialism, crisis theology, the cold war, psychoanalysis, European modernism, and a cultural conservatism bred of growing prosperity and the fear of Communism. Part of this story was told many years ago in Morton White's 1949 book *Social Thought in America: The Revolt Against Formalism*, where White points to "the submersion of a certain style of thinking which dominated America for almost half a century—an intellectual pattern compounded of pragmatism, institutionalism, behaviorism, legal realism, economic determinism, and the 'new history.'" "It might be argued," he writes in his introduction, "that these movements are not dead, but one cannot avoid the feeling that they are past the peak of their influence. These are days in which Dewey's views are being replaced by Kierkegaard's in places where once Dewey was king."<sup>14</sup>

Other versions of this narrative of liberalism in decline can be found in Lionel Trilling's *The Liberal Imagination* (1950), where socially oriented naturalists like Dreiser and Sherwood Anderson give way before modernists like Faulkner and Hemingway, or in Richard Hofstadter's books on the

Age of Reform and the Progressive Historians, which ratified the decline of progressive historiography. Trilling complained of liberalism in exactly the same terms Bourne and Van Wyck Brooks had used in attacking pragmatism: it lacked imagination, it was spiritually empty, it lacked a sense of tragedy, it had become identified with bureaucracy and social engineering—the “organizational impulse.”<sup>15</sup> Yet the eclipse of pragmatism was never complete. Trilling’s and Niebuhr’s critiques of moral absolutes—a key part of their attack on utopian and totalitarian thinking—were deeply influenced by the spirit of pragmatism. Writing as self-described realists skeptical of progressive idealism, they turned instinctively to pragmatism as a supple and concrete form of critical thinking, a refuge from abstraction.<sup>16</sup>

At the same time Kierkegaard and Niebuhr displaced Dewey, just when the lively ghost of Henry James can be said to have displaced William James, at the very moment Trilling’s version of “tragic realism” became canonical for critics and legal realism was under withering assault in the law schools, the beginnings of a revival of pragmatism could already be seen among analytic philosophers like W. V. Quine. This would later be brought to the attention of a wider audience by Richard Rorty in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979) and the essays collected in *Consequences of Pragmatism* (1982). Meanwhile, a handful of other philosophers like Richard J. Bernstein, John E. Smith, and John McDermott kept pragmatism alive in the schools. During the very period when it seemed least fashionable, the pragmatist renewal was already under way.

The current revival of pragmatism is a varied and complex phenomenon involving many crosscurrents. But a few broad patterns suggest themselves.

—After the chill of the postwar years, which put progressive ideas into cold storage, the 1960s provided a new impetus to radical thinking beyond the exhausted Marxism of the Old Left. Dewey’s ideas about democracy in works like *The Public and Its Problems* (1927), particularly his defense of a town-meeting model of participatory democracy against the authority of elites and the reign of experts, found their way into the Port Huron Statement (1962), the founding document of the Students for a Democratic Society (largely written by Tom Hayden), and into the work of widely read social critics and educational theorists like C. Wright Mills and Paul Goodman.

—The subsequent collapse of the New Left shifted these critical currents into the university. This contributed to the rising influence of European

theory, first with the neo-Marxism of the Frankfurt School, then in linguistically based forms of deconstruction and poststructuralism. As postmodern theorists announced the exhaustion of the “grand narratives,” Americans discovered that the pragmatists had been there first, developing a skeptical theory of knowledge and a well-articulated critique of essentialism and foundationalism that did not devolve into nihilism but emphasized the contingencies of language and context.

—As the Marxism of the 1970s and 1980s once again became the God that failed, intellectuals searched for an incremental, democratic alternative: the French rediscovered liberalism, the Germans discovered empiricism, Americans rediscovered pragmatism. Apocalyptic thinking, the grand narratives of earlier systems, began to go out of fashion in all three countries. The work of Richard Rorty formed a bridge between a Deweyan faith in liberal democracy and a postmodern antifoundationalism. As James and Dewey had attacked formalism, “intellectualism,” and metaphysics, Rorty attacked philosophy itself, deriding its Platonic quest for a truth beyond appearances, its self-described position as an arbiter of knowledge, and insisting that its traditional debates were simply part of an ongoing process of linguistic redescription.

Dewey himself had said that old philosophical problems were never resolved; they simply stopped mattering. Rorty had emerged from the analytical tradition, which had developed its own version of the “linguistic turn” and the critique of metaphysics. Focusing on language rather than on experience as the basis of all our understanding, he forged a synthesis between Dewey and James on the one hand, Heidegger and Derrida on the other—freely discarding what he did not like, such as Dewey’s faith in science. To Rorty science had its own metaphysical assumptions; far from being provisional and experimental, it was another form of the quest for certainty, the faith in an objective order of truth. If pragmatism began with James’s strong misreading of Peirce, it came to life again with Rorty’s strong misreading of Dewey, whom he described as “a postmodernist before his time.”<sup>17</sup>

Rorty’s strikingly contemporary versions of Dewey and James led to equally vigorous rejoinders by other students of the original pragmatists, including Richard Bernstein, Robert Westbrook, and Hilary Putnam. Putnam has devoted much of his recent work, including the new essay published here, to a defense of philosophical realism. As these controversies heated up, pragmatism became a broad terrain of ongoing debate rather than a musty historical legacy. The present volume shows up the major

fault lines in that contested ground. This book is not primarily concerned with philosophy, or indeed with the classical pragmatists, although they figure repeatedly in these pages. Instead it focuses on the cultural impact of the pragmatist revival in different yet overlapping regions of contemporary thought.

A major issue that emerges in the discussion of the law is whether legal pragmatism is “freestanding,” perhaps simply common-sensical, or depends on adherence to some form of pragmatist philosophy. Both Richard Posner and Thomas Grey find pragmatism so intrinsic to the way legal decisions are actually made that they paradoxically need no philosophical justification. As Grey writes: “Pragmatist jurisprudence is a theoretical middle way between grand theorizing and anti-intellectual business as usual.” He connects basic legal reasoning to two of the main lines of pragmatic thinking.

Law is contextual: it is rooted in practice and custom, and takes its substance from existing patterns of human conduct and interaction. To an equal degree, law is instrumental, meant to advance the human good of those it serves, hence subject to alteration to achieve this end. Law so conceived is a set of practical measures for cooperative social life, using signals and sanctions to guide and channel conduct. (“Freestanding Legal Pragmatism”)

From this viewpoint, most jurists, like the happily surprised Henry James, have been unconsciously pragmatizing all their lives, with little need for theoretical scaffolding. They are likely to agree with Grey that “more precise and determinate general theories of the nature and function of law should be viewed with suspicion, at least when put forward to control practice.” Legal theory, it is said, has value only as a description of legal practice or as an independent inquiry into it, not as a ground or justification for it. (This is very much like what Rorty says of philosophy in general.) Grey points to a friend who, unlike him, is a religious believer and foundationalist but shares his legal views and agrees with him that “law itself imposes no absolute moral claims.” David Luban complicates this argument that legal pragmatism is “freestanding” by introducing another distinction: between philosophical pragmatism, which (he argues) *does* provide a useful basis for judicial thinking, and the kind of post-philosophical pragmatism associated with Rorty, which generally does not.

The parallel debate among social theorists and historians centers on the question of whether pragmatism provides a rationale for democracy and community, as Dewey clearly thought it did, or is simply a method that

presupposes no particular politics, social views, or religious views. “If pragmatism is true it has nothing to say to us,” says Stanley Fish in his afterword to this volume; “no politics follows from it or is blocked by it; no morality attaches to it or is enjoined by it.” Rorty has always insisted that his liberal democratic views are completely independent of his pragmatism, while some acute students of Dewey’s work, including Westbrook, Bernstein, James Kloppenberg, and Hilary Putnam, have tried to reinforce the connections between democratic practice and a pragmatic theory of knowledge.

In his searching essay “A Reconsideration of Deweyan Democracy” (in *Renewing Philosophy*), Putnam finds in Dewey an “epistemological justification of democracy,” which “rests at every point on arguments which are not at all transcendental, but which represent the fruit of our collective experience.”<sup>18</sup> Bernstein stresses Dewey’s view that “regarded as an idea, democracy is not an alternative to other principles of associated life. It is the idea of community life itself.” This belief forms the kernel of *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey’s only work of political theory, but Dewey himself adds realistically that “democracy in this sense is not a fact and never will be.” His aim is to approach the problem more pragmatically: “Only when we start from a community as a fact, grasp the fact in thought so as to clarify and enhance its constituent elements, can we reach an idea of democracy which is not utopian.”<sup>19</sup> This is precisely what critics like Alan Wolfe and John P. Diggins maintain that Dewey and pragmatism are unable to do. Both insist that Deweyan ideas of community are utopian and future-oriented, and are therefore of little help in describing communities as they actually exist or have existed in the past.

In his important new essay for this volume, Rorty, criticizing Nietzsche’s contempt for democracy (and for John Stuart Mill) as “an adventitious extra, inessential to his overall philosophical outlook,” comes much closer to identifying pragmatism with democracy—at least with the kind of democracy he finds in Mill’s *On Liberty*. For Rorty, Mill’s conception of liberty—the freedom to pursue private happiness without impinging on others—is virtually identical with Nietzsche’s sparkling meditation on polytheism in *The Gay Science* as a “*plurality of norms*” in which “one god was not considered a denial of another god, nor blasphemy against him.” Joined to Isaiah Berlin’s pluralist argument that different people live with incommensurable values, this polytheism in turn becomes a strong metaphor for Rorty’s pragmatism. It leads him to say that “you are a polytheist if you think there is no actual or possible object of knowledge which would permit you to commensurate and rank all human needs.”

Once one sees no way of ranking human needs other than playing them off against one another, human happiness becomes all that matters. Mill's *On Liberty* becomes all the ethical instruction you need—all the philosophical advice you are ever going to get about your responsibilities to other human beings. For human perfection becomes a private concern, and our responsibility to others becomes a matter of permitting them as much space to pursue these private concerns—to worship their own gods, so to speak—as is compatible with granting an equal amount of space to all. The tradition of religious toleration is extended to moral toleration. (“Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism”)

Rorty has always been extraordinarily resourceful in finding new metaphors for his pragmatism and antirepresentationalism; the notion of “romantic polytheism” is one of the most suggestive. But the metaphor has powerful implications of its own. Rorty has been accused of an implacable antitheism—“proscribing god talk,” as Eugene Goodheart puts it<sup>20</sup>—but Rorty's expansion of this new metaphor is at least rhetorically more sympathetic to religion than anything he has previously written. He positions his essay as a rejoinder to “those who think that pragmatism and religion do not mix.” A critic might argue that “ranking human needs” is at best a reductive description of ethical and religious values. But by identifying polytheism with toleration and monotheism with intolerance and absolutism, Rorty creates a bridge from religion and ethics, as he understands them, to democracy. The multiplicity of gods becomes a metaphor for the multiplicity of ethical goals and private needs in a democratic society. This becomes a version of the “negative liberty,” the freedom from unnecessary constraint, that Berlin saw as the essence of Mill's liberalism. But as Rorty's religion offers little comfort to believers, dissolving God into a “personal symbol of ultimate concern,” it offers even less to those who feel that “democratic politics” must involve more than what he calls “a free consensus about how much space for private perfection we can allow each other.” They are likely to feel, as Giles Gunn does, that Rorty sacrifices the public sphere for private life and, unlike Dewey, purchases individual liberty at the expense of community.

Rorty's emphasis on personal happiness, his agnosticism about social theory except as a gloss on social practice, may explain why his work has been more warmly received by literary critics than by historians or social scientists. The literary side of the revival of pragmatism has been much con-

cerned with critical method, more skeptical of any specific social goals, more postmodernist, and hence more closely allied with Rorty than with Putnam or Bernstein. At one extreme, a recent collection of essays draws pragmatism into the orbit of new work on rhetoric, and especially on the sophists; pragmatism becomes another name for radically detaching the sign from its referent.<sup>21</sup> Closer to the mainstream of literary thinking are those who see pragmatism as a way out of the cul-de-sac of theory, much as Giovanni Papini once called pragmatism a philosophy for getting along without philosophy.<sup>22</sup> Stanley Fish, in *Is There a Text in This Class?*, and Barbara Herrnstein Smith, in *Contingencies of Value*, have adapted Dewey's idea of the community of enquirers into a pragmatic view of the "interpretive community," which makes critical interpretation and evaluation contingent on the changing assumptions of different reading communities at different times and places. From this viewpoint, statements about the world or judgments of value are always provisional: constructions of language that belong to a particular context. Such arguments, like similar ones in legal interpretation, have drawn outrage from critics upholding a more stable or objective view of linguistic meaning and literary judgment.

The work of Richard Poirier in *The Renewal of Literature* (1987) and *Poetry and Pragmatism* (1992) represents yet another strand of literary pragmatism. Like Harold Bloom and Stanley Cavell, Poirier identifies a tradition of "Emersonian linguistic skepticism" which undermines the once-dominant way of reading American literature through the prism of modernism or New Critical formalism. That kind of formalist modernism had been integral to F. O. Matthiessen's work on the American Renaissance and much of the criticism that followed. Using Emerson and William James—and poets like Frost and Stevens—as touchstones of American writing, Poirier emphasizes the layered, dynamic, self-undoing complexity of literary language, with its residues of historical meaning and individual effort. "When used in the intensely self-reflecting way that literature uses them," Poirier writes in *The Renewal of Literature*, "words not only continuously modify but actually tend to dissolve one another." When language reaches this "point of incandescence," he says, "it marks the disappearance of individuality on the occasion of its triumph." We can feel a kind of amazement "that any one person, any author (or reader), can be responsible for what we see and hear going on."<sup>23</sup> Poirier picks up this theme in *Poetry and Pragmatism*, referring to "the responsibilities to words which reading entails, an obligation to all the barely audible cultural inheritances carried within them."<sup>24</sup>

Poirier gives a dynamic Emersonian turn to the New Critical emphasis on the irony and complexity of poetic language, disengaging it from the formalism that sees literary works as static, self-contained objects. Poetry, like pragmatism, is provisional, contextual. In contrast to most New Critics, who saw in literature a principle of order, and to more recent cultural conservatives, who cast it a stable source of virtues or values, Poirier sees the twists and turns of literary language as an endless self-remaking, very much in the spirit of William James or of Emerson's "Circles," with its ecstatic, Whitmanesque peroration:

Do not set the least value on what I do, or the least discredit on what I do not, as if I pretended to settle any thing true or false. I unsettle all things. No facts are to me sacred; none are profane; I simply experiment, an endless seeker with no Past at my back. . . . In nature every moment is new; the past is always swallowed and forgotten; the coming only is sacred. Nothing is secure but life, transition, the energizing spirit.<sup>25</sup>

"I simply experiment." Emerson is too protean to be entirely identified with pragmatism, but this is one strand of Emerson that is central to both the American tradition and the recent revival of pragmatism. It also helps explain why pragmatism remains as controversial today as it was in James' and Dewey's day. Whether we see pragmatism in terms of the flux of the moment, the orientation toward the future, or what Holmes describes as the residue of past experience, to its critics it remains a dangerous and irresponsible form of moral and epistemological relativism.

Today's debate takes place in a different world from Emerson's or James', though many of the same criticisms have surfaced. Despite the conservative nostalgia of bestselling books like Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*, the current orthodoxy in academic life arises not from a dominant idealism or an array of traditional moral absolutes but out of a mixture of European theories from Marxism to poststructuralism. Within this context, pragmatism has come to be seen as an American alternative, an escape from the abstraction of theory and the abyss of nihilism. We might describe it as a constructive skepticism. If liberal politicians and intellectuals share one thing at this moment, it is the loss of old certainties. Pragmatism today is less an attack on the foundations of knowledge, as it was portrayed by its early critics, than a search for method when the foundations have already crumbled.

Just as each generation reshapes the classics to its own needs, each generation resurrects earlier thinkers and reconfigures them in its own

image. The decline of pragmatism belonged to a moment of deep pessimism in American thought, the moment of the Holocaust, of original sin, of global cold war and nuclear stand-off. But the tragic realism and fashionable dark theology of the 1940s and 1950s proved as perishable as the progressive liberalism that preceded it. They were anchored in their cultural moment. Sartre himself turned against an existentialism that was entirely conditioned by the war experience. The 1960s, which made Emerson and Whitman readable, even inspiring, to a new generation, also contributed to the revival of pragmatism. To everyone's surprise, Dewey returned not only to replace Kierkegaard but to jostle Derrida, Lacan, and Foucault. One would hardly say that it is the same Dewey the second time around, but a Dewey unexpectedly compatible with main currents of American thinking from Emerson to postmodernism. For Americans, at least, always suspicious of abstractions, pragmatism has been the perennial philosophy, one that has become contemporary again in today's post-ideological climate.

## Notes

- 1 John Dewey, "The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy," in *John Dewey: The Essential Writings*, ed. David Sidorsky (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 71. First published in a collection of essays edited by John Dewey, *Creative Intelligence: Essays in the Pragmatic Attitude* (1917).
- 2 Charles Sanders Peirce, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," in *Pragmatism: A Contemporary Reader*, ed. Russell B. Goodman (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 42–43.
- 3 William James, *Pragmatism and Four Essays from the Meaning of Truth*, ed. Ralph Barton Perry (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1955), p. 167. Page numbers of further references are in parentheses in the text.
- 4 *Letters of William James*, ed. Henry James, Jr. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1920), vol. 2, p. 279.
- 5 Quoted in R. W. B. Lewis, *The Jameses: A Family Narrative* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991), p. 565.
- 6 John P. Diggins, *The Promise of Pragmatism: Modernism and the Crisis of Knowledge and Authority* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 342.
- 7 Quoted in *Ibid.*, pp. 352–53.
- 8 Walter Lippmann, "The Footnote," in *Early Writings*, ed. Arthur Schlesinger Jr. (New York: Liveright, 1970), p. 307. First appeared in *The New Republic* (July 17, 1915). Also quoted in Diggins, *Promise of Pragmatism*, p. 341.
- 9 T. S. Eliot, "William Blake," in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), p. 321.
- 10 Lippmann, *Early Writings*, pp. 308, 309.
- 11 Richard Rorty, "Does Academic Freedom Have Philosophical Presuppositions?" in *The Future of Academic Freedom*, ed. Louis Menand (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 21, 29.
- 12 Randolph Bourne, "Twilight of Idols," in *The Radical Will: Selected Writings, 1911–1918*, ed. Olaf Hansen (New York: Urizen Books, 1977), pp. 342–43.

- 13 *Ibid.*, pp. 345–46.
- 14 Morton White, *Social Thought in America: The Revolt Against Formalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), p. 3.
- 15 Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York: Viking Press, 1950), p. xiv.
- 16 Trilling, for example, writes of a would-be revolutionary in Henry James's *The Princess Casamassima* that she "cannot but mistake the nature of reality, for she believes it is a thing, a position, a finality, a bedrock. She is, in short, the very embodiment of the modern will which masks itself in virtue, . . . that despises the variety and modulations of the human story and longs for an absolute humanity" (*The Liberal Imagination*, pp. 91–92). And Niebuhr's great admirer, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., describes how "the penetrating critic of the Social Gospel and of pragmatism . . . ended up, in a sense, the powerful reinterpreter and champion of both. . . . [T]he resources of democratic pragmatism turned out to be greater than many people—including Niebuhr himself in certain moods—had imagined" (*The Politics of Hope*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963, pp. 123–24).
- 17 Quoted in Diggins, *Promise of Pragmatism*, p. 453.
- 18 Hilary Putnam, "A Reconsideration of Deweyan Democracy," in his book *Renewing Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 183, 195.
- 19 John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1954), pp. 148–49.
- 20 Eugene Goodheart, "The Postmodern Liberalism of Richard Rorty," in Goodheart, *The Reign of Ideology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 52. Goodheart focuses his criticism of Rorty for extruding religion from the liberal commonwealth on statements like the following: "In its ideal form, the culture of liberalism would be one which was enlightened, secular, through and through. It would be one in which no trace of divinity remained, either in the form of a divinized world or a divinized self. Such a culture would have no room for the notion that there are nonhuman forces to which human beings should be responsible. It would drop, or drastically reinterpret, not only the idea of holiness but those of 'devotion to truth' and of 'fulfillment of the deepest needs of the spirit'" (Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 45).
- 21 See Steven Mailloux (ed.), *Rhetoric, Sophistry, Pragmatism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
- 22 See Diggins, *Promise of Pragmatism*, p. 408. John Ashbery develops a philosophy for living without philosophy in an amusing but serious poem, "My Philosophy of Life," in *Can You Hear, Bird* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), pp. 73–75. First trying to live "the way philosophers live, / according to a set of principles," he soon wonders: "What was the matter with how I acted before?" By the end he discovers that "there's a lot of fun to be had in the gaps between ideas. / That's what they're made for!"
- 23 Richard Poirier, *The Renewal of Literature: Emersonian Reflections* (New York: Random House, 1987), p. 45.
- 24 Richard Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 175.
- 25 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Circles," in *The Complete Essays and Other Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: Modern Library, 1940), pp. 288, 289.

WHAT DIFFERENCE  
DOES PRAGMATISM  
MAKE? THE VIEW  
FROM PHILOSOPHY



## Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism

RICHARD RORTY

In 1911 a book appeared in Paris with the title *Un Romantisme Utilitaire: Étude sur le Mouvement Pragmatiste*. This was the first of three volumes on the subject by René Berthelot. Berthelot had been struck by the resemblances between the views of William James, John Dewey, Nietzsche, Bergson, Poincaré, and certain Catholic Modernists. He was the first to treat them as belonging to the same intellectual movement. A convinced Cartesian, Berthelot disliked and distrusted all these thinkers, but he wrote about them with acuity and verve. He traced the romantic roots of pragmatism back behind Emerson to Schelling and Hölderlin, and the utilitarian roots to the influence of Darwin and Spencer.<sup>1</sup> But he thought that the difference between these two modes of thought was too great to permit synthesis. "In all its different forms," Berthelot said, "pragmatism reveals itself to be a romantic utilitarianism: that is its most obviously original feature and also its most private vice and its hidden weakness."<sup>2</sup>

Berthelot was probably the first to call Nietzsche "a German pragmatist," and the first to emphasize the resemblance between Nietzsche's perspectivism and the pragmatist theory of truth. This resemblance—frequently noted since, notably in a seminal chapter of Arthur Danto's book on Nietzsche—is most evident in the *The Gay Science*. There Nietzsche says "We do not even have any organ at all for *knowing*, for 'truth'; we 'know' . . . just as much as may be *useful* in the interest of the human herd."<sup>3</sup> This Darwinian view lies behind James' claim that "thinking is for the sake of behavior" and his identification of truth as "the good in the way of belief."

That identification amounts to accepting Nietzsche's claim that human beings should be viewed, for epistemological purposes, as what Nietzsche called "clever animals." Beliefs are to be judged solely by their utility in fulfilling these animals' varied needs. James and Nietzsche did for the word "true" what John Stuart Mill had done for the word "right." Just as

Mill says that there is no ethical motive apart from the desire for the happiness of human beings, so James and Nietzsche say that there is no will to truth distinct from the will to happiness. All three philosophers think that the terms “true” and “right” gain their meaning from their use in evaluating the relative success of efforts to achieve happiness.

Nietzsche, to be sure, had no use for Mill, but this was a result of arrogant ignorance, which resulted in a failure to grasp the difference between Mill and Bentham. James, on the other hand, dedicated his first philosophical treatise to Mill’s memory, and tried to cultivate not only the debunking, Benthamite strain in Mill’s thought but also the romantic, Coleridgean strain. The latter led Mill to choose an epigraph from Wilhelm von Humboldt for *On Liberty*: “The grand, leading principle, towards which every argument unfolded in these pages directly converges, is the absolute and essential importance of human development in its richest diversity.” As a romantic utilitarian, Mill wanted to avoid Benthamite reductionism, and to defend a secular culture against the familiar charge of blindness to higher things.

This led him, as M. H. Abrams has pointed out, to share Arnold’s view that literature could take the place of dogma. Abrams quotes Alexander Bain as saying of Mill that “he seemed to look upon Poetry as a Religion, or rather as Religion and Philosophy in One.” Abrams also quotes a letter of Mill’s which says that “the new utilitarianism”—his own as opposed to Bentham’s—holds “Poetry not only on a par with, but the necessary condition of, any true and comprehensive Philosophy.” Abrams argues that Mill and Arnold, despite their differences, drew the same moral from the English Romantics: that poetry could and should take on “the tremendous responsibility of the functions once performed by the exploded dogmas of religion and religious philosophy.”<sup>4</sup> The exploded dogmas included the claim that, whereas there can be many great poems, there can be only one true religion, because only one true God. Poetry cannot be a substitute for a monotheistic religion, but it can serve the purposes of a secular version of polytheism.

The substitution of poetry for religion as a source of ideals, a movement that began with the Romantics, seems to me usefully described as a return to polytheism. For if, with the utilitarians, you reject the idea that a nonhuman authority can rank human needs, and thus dictate moral choices to human beings, you will favor what Arnold called “Hellenism” over what he called “Hebraism.” You will reject the idea, characteristic of the evangelical Christians whom Arnold thought of as “Hebraist,” that it suffices to love God and keep his commandments. You will substitute what

Arnold called the idea of “a human nature perfect on all its sides.”<sup>5</sup> Different poets will perfect different sides of human nature, by projecting different ideals. A romantic utilitarian will probably drop the idea of diverse immortal persons, such as the Olympian deities, but she will retain the idea that there are diverse, conflicting, but equally valuable forms of human life.

A polytheism of this sort is recommended in a famous passage near the end of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* at which James says

If an Emerson were forced to be a Wesley, or a Moody forced to be a Whitman, the total human consciousness of the divine would suffer. The divine can mean no single quality, it must mean a group of qualities, by being champions of which in alternation, different men may all find worthy missions. Each attitude being a syllable in human nature’s total message, it takes the whole of us to spell the meaning out completely.<sup>6</sup>

James’ loose use of the term “the divine” makes it pretty much equivalent to “the ideal.” In this passage he is doing for theology what Mill had done for politics when he cited von Humboldt’s claim that “human development in its richest diversity” is the aim of social institutions.

There is a passage in Nietzsche in praise of polytheism that complements the one I have just quoted from James. In section 143 of *The Gay Science* he argues that morality—in the wide sense of the need for acceptance of binding laws and customs—entails “hostility against the impulse to have an ideal of one’s own.” But, he says, the pre-Socratic Greeks provided an outlet for individuality by permitting human beings “to behold, in some distant overworld, a *plurality of norms*: one god was not considered a denial of another god, nor blasphemy against him.” In this way, Nietzsche says, “the luxury of individuals was first permitted; it was here that one first honored the rights of individuals.” For in pre-Socratic polytheism “the free-spiriting and many-spiriting of man attained its first preliminary form—the strength to create for ourselves our own new eyes.”<sup>7</sup>

Here is a definition of “polytheism” that covers both Nietzsche and James. You are a polytheist if you think that there is no actual or possible object of knowledge that would permit you to commensurate and rank all human needs. Isaiah Berlin’s well-known doctrine of incommensurable human values is, in my sense, a polytheistic manifesto. To be a polytheist in this sense you do not have to believe that there are nonhuman persons with power to intervene in human affairs. All you need do is to abandon

the idea that we should try to find a way of making everything hang together, which will tell all human beings what to do with their lives, and tell all of them the same thing.

Polytheism, in the sense I have defined it, is pretty much coextensive with romantic utilitarianism. For once one sees no way of ranking human needs other than playing them off against one another, human happiness becomes all that matters. Mill's *On Liberty* provides all the ethical instruction you need—all the philosophical advice you are ever going to get about your responsibilities to other human beings. For human perfection becomes a private concern, and our responsibility to others becomes a matter of permitting them as much space to pursue these private concerns—to worship their own gods, so to speak—as is compatible with granting an equal amount of space to all. The tradition of religious toleration is extended to moral toleration.

This privatization of perfection permits James and Nietzsche to agree with Mill and Arnold that poetry should take over the role that religion has played in the formation of individual human lives. They also agree that nobody should take over the function of the clergy. For poets are to a secularized polytheism what the priests of a universal church are to monotheism. Once you become polytheistic, you will turn away not only from priests but from such priest-substitutes as metaphysicians and physicists—from anyone who purports to tell you how things *really* are, anyone who invokes the distinction between the true world and the apparent world that Nietzsche ridiculed in *Twilight of the Idols*. Both monotheism and the kind of metaphysics or science that purports to tell you what the world is *really* like are replaced with democratic politics. A free consensus about how much space for private perfection we can allow each other takes the place of the quest for “objective” values, the quest for a ranking of human needs that does not depend upon such consensus.

So far I have been playing along with Berthelot's emphasis on the similarities between Nietzsche and the American pragmatists. Now I want to turn to the two most obvious differences between them: their attitude toward democracy and their attitude toward religion. Nietzsche thought democracy was “Christianity for the people”—Christianity deprived of the nobility of spirit of which Christ himself, and perhaps a few of the more strenuous saints, had been capable. Dewey thought of democracy as Christianity cleansed of the hieratic, exclusionist elements. Nietzsche thought those who believed in a traditional monotheistic God were foolish weaklings. Dewey thought of them as so spellbound by the work of one

poet as to be unable to appreciate the work of other poets. Dewey thought that the sort of “aggressive atheism” on which Nietzsche prided himself is unnecessarily intolerant. It has, he said, “something in common with traditional supernaturalism.”<sup>8</sup>

I want first to argue that Nietzsche’s contempt for democracy was an adventitious extra, inessential to his overall philosophical outlook. Then I shall get down to my main task in this paper—defending Dewey’s tolerance for religious belief against those who think that pragmatism and religion do not mix.

Nietzsche was a utilitarian only in the sense that he saw no goals for human beings to pursue other than human happiness. He had no interest in the greatest happiness of the greatest number, but only in that of a few exceptional human beings—those with the capacity to be *greatly* happy. Democracy seemed to him a way of trivializing human existence. By contrast, James and Dewey took for granted, as Mill had, the ideal of universal human fraternity. Echoing Mill, James wrote, “Take any demand, however slight, which any creature, however weak, may make. Ought it not, for its own sole sake, to be desired?”<sup>9</sup>

Romantic utilitarianism, pragmatism, and polytheism are compatible with both wholehearted enthusiasm and whole-hearted contempt for democracy. The frequent complaint that a philosopher who holds the pragmatic theory of truth cannot give you a reason not to be a fascist is perfectly justified. But neither can that person give you a reason to be a fascist. For once you become a polytheist in the sense I just defined, you have to give up on the idea that philosophy can help you choose among the various deities and the various forms of life offered. The choice between enthusiasm and contempt for democracy becomes more like a choice between Walt Whitman and Robinson Jeffers than between competing sets of philosophical arguments.

Those who find the pragmatist identification of truth with what is good to believe morally offensive often say that Nietzsche, rather than James and Dewey, drew the proper inference from the abandonment of the idea of an object of knowledge that tells one how to rank human needs. Those who think of pragmatism as a species of irrationalism, and of irrationalism as selling the pass to fascism, say that James and Dewey were blind to the antidemocratic consequences of their own ideas, and naive to think that one can be both a good pragmatist and a good democrat.

Such critics make the same mistake that Nietzsche made. They think that the idea of fraternity is inextricable from Platonism. Platonism, in

this sense, is the idea that the will to truth is distinct from the will to happiness—or, to be a bit more precise, the claim that human beings are divided between a quest for a lower, animal form of happiness and a higher, God-like form of happiness. Nietzsche mistakenly thought that once (with Darwin's help) you had given up this idea, and had gotten used to the idea that you are just a clever animal, you could have no reason to wish for the happiness of all human beings. He was so impressed by the fact that Christianity would have seemed ludicrous to the Homeric heroes that he was unable, except at occasional fleeting moments, to think of Christianity as the work of strong poets. So Nietzsche assumed that once poetry had replaced religion as the source of ideals, there would be no place for either Christianity or democracy.

Nietzsche would have done better to ask himself whether the Christian emphasis on human fraternity—the idea that for Christians there is neither Jew nor Greek, and the related idea that love is the only law—might have been only accidentally, for contingent historical reasons, associated with Platonism. This ideal might have gotten along nicely without the logocentrism of the Gospel of John, and without Augustine's unfortunate suggestion that Plato had prefigured Christian truth. In a different, but possible, world, some early Christian might have anticipated James' remark about Emerson and Wesley by writing "If Caesar were forced to be Christ, the total human consciousness of the divine would suffer."

A Christianity that was merely ethical—the sort Jefferson and other Enlightenment thinkers commended and was later propounded by theologians of the social gospel—might have sloughed-off exclusionism by viewing Jesus as one incarnation of the divine among others. The celebration of an ethics of love would then have taken its place within the relatively tolerant polytheism of the Roman Empire, having disjoined the ideal of human brotherhood from the claim to represent the will of an omnipotent and monopolistic Heavenly Father (not to mention the idea that there is no salvation outside the Christian Church).

Had they preached such a merely moral and social gospel, the Christians would never have bothered to develop a natural theology. So thirteenth-century Christians would not have worried about whether the Scriptures could be reconciled with Aristotle. Seventeenth-century believers would not have worried about whether they could be reconciled with Newton, nor those in the nineteenth century about whether they could be reconciled with Darwin. These hypothetical Christians would have treated Scripture as useful for purposes for which Aristotle, Newton, and Darwin were useless, and as useless for purposes of prediction and control of the environment. As things stood, however, the Christian

churches remained obsessed by the Platonic idea that both Truth and God are One. So it was natural, when physical science began to make some progress, that its practitioners should take over this rhetoric, and thereby stir up a war between science and theology, between Scientific Truth and Religious Faith.

I have imagined such a non-Platonic and nonexclusivist form of Christianity in order to emphasize that no chain of inference links the ideal of human fraternity to the ideal of escaping from a world of appearance inhabited by animals to a real world in which humans will become as gods. Nietzsche and contemporary critics who see Nietzsche and Dewey as holding similarly dangerous “irrationalist” doctrines have been tricked by Plato into believing that, unless there is such a real world, Thrasymachus, Callicles, and Hitler are unanswerable. But they are unanswerable only in the sense that, *pace* Habermas, there are no premises to which they must assent simply by virtue of being rational, language-using animals. *A fortiori*, there are no such premises that would lead them to agree that they should treat all other human beings as brothers and sisters. Christianity as a strong poem, one poem among many, can be as socially useful as Christianity backed up by the Platonist claim that God and Truth are interchangeable terms.

Although I do not think that there is an inferential path that leads from the antirepresentationalist view of truth and knowledge common to Nietzsche, James, and Dewey either to democracy or antidemocracy, I do think there is a plausible inference from democratic convictions to such a view. Your devotion to democracy is unlikely to be wholehearted if you believe, as monotheists typically do, that we can have knowledge of an “objective” ranking of human needs that can overrule the result of democratic consensus. But if your devotion is wholehearted, then you will welcome the utilitarian and pragmatist claim that we have no will to truth distinct from the will to happiness.

So much for the disagreement between Nietzsche and his American colleagues about the value of democracy. I turn now to the other big difference between Nietzsche on the one hand and James and Dewey on the other. Nietzsche thinks religious belief is intellectually disreputable; James and Dewey do not.

In order to defend James and Dewey’s tolerance for theism against Nietzsche, I shall sketch a pragmatist philosophy of religion in five brief theses. Then I shall try to relate these theses to what James and Dewey actually said about belief in God.

First, it is an advantage of the antirepresentationalist view of belief that

James took over from Bain and Peirce—the view that beliefs are habits of action—that it frees us from the responsibility to unify all our beliefs into a single worldview. If our beliefs are all parts of a single attempt to represent a single world, then they must all hang together fairly tightly. But if they are habits of action, then, because the purposes served by action may blamelessly vary, so may the habits we develop to serve those purposes.

Second, Nietzsche's attempt to "see science through the optic of art, and art through that of life," like Arnold's and Mill's substitution of poetry for religion, is an attempt to make more room for individuality than can be provided either by orthodox monotheism, or by the Enlightenment's attempt to put science in the place of religion as a source of Truth. So the attempt, by Tillich and others, to treat religious faith as "symbolic," and thereby to treat religion as poetic and poetry as religious, and neither as competing with science, is on the right track. But to make it convincing we need to drop the idea that some parts of culture fulfill our need to know the truth and others fulfill lesser aims. The pragmatists' romantic utilitarianism does drop this idea: if there is no will to truth apart from the will to happiness, there is no way to contrast the cognitive with the noncognitive, the serious with the nonserious.

Third, pragmatism does permit us to make another distinction, one that takes over some of the work previously done by the old distinction between the cognitive and the noncognitive. The new distinction is between projects of social cooperation and projects of individual self-development. Intersubjective agreement is required for the former projects, but not for the latter. Natural science is a paradigmatic project of social cooperation: the project of improving man's estate by taking account of every possible observation and experimental result in order to facilitate the making of predictions that will come true. Law is another such paradigm. Romantic art, by contrast, is a paradigmatic project of individual self-development. Religion, if it can be disconnected from both science and morals—from the attempt to predict the consequences of our actions and the attempt to rank human needs—may be another such paradigm.

Fourth, the idea that we should love Truth is largely responsible for the idea that religious belief is "intellectually irresponsible." But there is no such thing as the love of Truth. What has been called by that name is a mixture of the love of reaching intersubjective agreement, the love of gaining mastery over a recalcitrant set of data, the love of winning arguments, and the love of synthesizing little theories into big theories. It is never an objection to a religious belief that there is no evidence for it. The

only possible objection to it can be that it intrudes an individual project into a social and cooperative project, and thereby offends against the teachings of *On Liberty*. Such intrusion is a betrayal of one's responsibilities to cooperate with other human beings, not of one's responsibility to Truth or to Reason.

Fifth, the attempt to love Truth, and to think of it as One, and as capable of commensurating and ranking human needs, is a secular version of the traditional religious hope that allegiance to something big, powerful, and nonhuman will persuade that powerful being to take your side in your struggle with other people. Nietzsche despised any such hope as a sign of weakness. Pragmatists who are also democrats have a different objection to such hope for allegiance with power. They see it as a betrayal of the ideal of human fraternity that democracy inherits from the Judeo-Christian religious tradition. That ideal finds its best expression in the doctrine, common to Mill and James, that every human need should be satisfied unless doing so causes too many other human needs to go unsatisfied. The pragmatist objection to religious fundamentalists is not that fundamentalists are *intellectually* irresponsible in disregarding the results of natural science. Rather it is that they are *morally* irresponsible in attempting to circumvent the process of achieving democratic consensus about how to maximize happiness. They sin not by ignoring Mill's inductive methods, but by ignoring his reflections on liberty.

I turn now to the question of how the view of religious belief epitomized in my five theses accords with the views of James and Dewey. It would not, I think, have been congenial to James. But I think it might have suited Dewey. So I shall argue that it is Dewey's rather unambitious and half-hearted *A Common Faith*, rather than James' brave and exuberant "Conclusion" to *Varieties of Religious Experience*, that coheres best with the romantic utilitarianism which both accepted.

James says, in that chapter of *Varieties*, that "the pivot round which the religious life revolves . . . is the interest of the individual in his private personal destiny." By "repudiating the personal point of view," however, science gives us a picture of nature that "has no distinguishable ultimate tendency with which it is possible to feel a sympathy." The "driftings of the cosmic atoms" are "a kind of aimless weather, doing and undoing, achieving no proper history, and leaving no result."<sup>10</sup> On the view I have just outlined, he should have followed this up by saying "But we are free to describe the universe in many different ways. Describing it as the drifting of cosmic atoms is useful for the social project of working together to

control our environment and improve man's estate. But that description leaves us entirely free to say, for example, that the Heavens proclaim the glory of God."

Sometimes James seems to take this line, as when, with obvious approval, he quotes James Henry Leuba as saying

*God is not known, he is not understood, he is used*—sometimes as meat-purveyor, sometimes as moral support, sometimes as friend, sometime as an object of love. If he proves himself useful, the religious consciousness can ask no more than that. Does God really exist? How does he exist? What is he? are so many irrelevant questions. Not God, but life, more life, a larger, richer, more satisfying life, is, in the last analysis, the end of religion.

Unfortunately, however, almost immediately after quoting Leuba James says "we must next pass beyond the point of view of merely subjective utility and make inquiry into the intellectual content itself." He then goes on to argue that the material he has gathered together in *Varieties* provides empirical evidence for the hypothesis that "the conscious person is continuous with a wider self through which saving experiences come." He calls this "a positive content of religious experience which, it seems to me, is literally and objectively true as far as it goes."<sup>11</sup>

On the view I have been suggesting, this claim to literal and objective truth is unpragmatic, hollow, and superfluous. James should have rested content with the argument of "The Will to Believe." As I read that essay, it says that we have a right to believe what we like when we are, so to speak, on our own time.<sup>12</sup> But we abandon this right when we are engaged in, for example, a scientific or a political project. For when so engaged it is necessary to reconcile our beliefs, our habits of action, with those of others. On our own time, by contrast, our habits of action are nobody's business but our own. A romantic polytheist will rejoice in what Nietzsche called the "free-spiritedness and many-spiritedness" of individuals, and see the only constraint on this freedom and this diversity as the need not to injure others.

James wobbled on the question of whether what he called "the religious hypothesis" was something to be adopted on "passional" or on "intellectual" grounds. This hypothesis says that "the best things are the more eternal things, the overlapping things, the things in the universe that throw the last stone, so to speak, and say the final word."<sup>13</sup> In "The Will to Believe" this is put forward as a hypothesis to which considerations of evidence are irrelevant, and must therefore be turned over to our emo-

tions. But in the “Conclusion” to *Varieties of Religious Experience*, the hypothesis that “God’s existence is the guarantee of an ideal order that shall be permanently preserved” is one for which he has accumulated evidence. There he also says that the least common denominator of religious beliefs is that “The solution [to the problem presented by a ‘sense that there is something wrong about us as we naturally stand’] is that we are saved from the wrongness by making proper connection with the higher powers.” Again, he says that “the conscious person is continuous with a wider self from which saving experiences come.”<sup>14</sup>

James should not have made a distinction between issues to be decided by intellect and issues to be decided by emotion. If he had not, he might have wobbled less. What he should have done instead was to distinguish issues that you must resolve cooperatively with others and issues that you are entitled to resolve on your own. The first set of issues are about conciliating your habits of action with those of other human beings. The second set are about getting your own habits of action to cohere with each other sufficiently so that you acquire a stable, coherent, self-image. But such a self-image does not require monotheism, or the belief that Truth is One. It is compatible with the idea that you have many different needs, and that the beliefs that help you fill one set of needs are irrelevant to, and need not be made to cohere with, those that help you to fill another set.

Dewey avoided James’ mistakes in this area. One reason he did so is that he was much less prone to a sense of guilt than was James. After he realized that his mother had made him unnecessarily miserable by burdening him with a belief in original sin, Dewey simply stopped thinking that, in James’ words, “there is something wrong about us as we naturally stand.” He no longer believed that we could be “saved from the wrongness by making proper connection with the higher powers.” He thought that all that was wrong with us was that the Christian ideal of fraternity had not yet been achieved—society had not yet become pervasively democratic. That was not a problem to be solved by making proper connection with higher powers, but a problem of men to be solved by men.

Dewey’s steadfast refusal to have any truck with the notion of original sin, and his suspicion of anything that smacked of such a notion is bound up with his lifelong distaste for the idea of authority—the idea that anything could have authority over the members of a democratic community save the free, collective, decisions of that community. This anti-authoritarian motif is perhaps clearest in his “Christianity and Democracy”—an early essay to which Alan Ryan has recently called our attention, saying that it is “a dazzling and dazzlingly brave piece of work.”<sup>15</sup> Indeed it

is. It must have seemed strange to the University of Michigan's Christian Students Association to be told, in 1892, that "God is essentially and only the self-revealing" and that "the revelation is complete only as men come to realize him."

Dewey spelled out what he meant by going on to say, "Had Jesus Christ made an absolute, detailed and explicit statement upon all the facts of life, that statement would not have had meaning—it would not have been revelation—until men began to realize in their own action the truth that he declared—until they themselves began to *live it*."<sup>16</sup> This amounts to saying that even if a nonhuman authority tells you something, the only way to figure out whether what you have been told is true is to see whether it gets you the sort of life you want. The only way is to apply the utilitarian test for whether the suggestion made proves to be "good in the way of belief." Granted that hearing what such a being has to say may change your wants, you nevertheless test those new wants and that purported truth in the same way: by living them, trying them out in everyday life, seeing whether they make you and yours happier.

Suppose that a source you believe to be nonhuman tells you that all men are brothers, that the attempt to make yourself and those you cherish happier should be expanded into an attempt to make all human beings happy. For Dewey, the source of this suggestion is irrelevant. You might have heard it from a god or a guru, but you might just as well have found it carved out by the waves on a sandy beach. It has no validity unless it is treated as an hypothesis, tried out, and found successful. The good thing about Christianity, Dewey is saying, is that it has been found to work.

More specifically, what has been found to work is the idea of fraternity and equality as a basis for social organization. This worked not just as a Thrasymachian device for avoiding pain—what Rawls calls a "mere *modus vivendi*"—but as a source of the kind of spiritual transfiguration that Platonism and the Christian churches have told us would have to wait upon a future intersection of time with eternity. It makes possible precisely the sort of nobility of spirit that Nietzsche mistakenly thought could be had only by the exceptional few—those who were capable of being greatly happy.

"Democracy," Dewey says, "is neither a form of government nor a social expediency, but a metaphysic of the relation of man and his experience in nature."<sup>17</sup> The point of calling it a metaphysic is not, of course, that it is an accurate account of the fundamental relation of reality, but that if one shares Whitman's sense of glorious democratic vistas stretching on indefinitely into the future one has everything which Platonists hoped to get out of such an account. For Whitman offers what Tillich called "a symbol of

ultimate concern," of something that can be loved with all one's heart and soul and mind.

Plato's mistake, in Dewey's view, was having identified the ultimate object of *eros* with something unique, atemporal, and nonhuman rather than with an indefinitely expansible pantheon of transitory temporal accomplishments, both natural and cultural. This mistake lent aid and comfort to monotheism. Dewey might well have agreed with Nietzsche that "Monotheism, this rigid consequence of the doctrine of one normal human type—the faith in one normal god beside whom there are only pseudo-gods—was perhaps the greatest danger that has yet confronted humanity."<sup>18</sup>

When Christianity is treated as a merely social gospel, it acquires the advantage which Nietzsche attributes to polytheism: it makes the most important human achievement "creating for ourselves our own new eyes," and thereby "honors the rights of individuals." As Dewey put it, "Government, business, art, religion, all social institutions have . . . a purpose[:] . . . to set free the capacities of human individuals. . . . [T]he test of their value is the extent to which they educate every individual into the full stature of his possibility."<sup>19</sup> In a democratic society, everybody gets to worship his or her personal symbol of ultimate concern, unless worship of that symbol interferes with the pursuit of happiness by his or her fellow-citizens. Accepting that utilitarian constraint, the one Mill formulated in *On Liberty*, is the only obligation imposed by democratic citizenship, the only exception to democracy's commitment to honor the rights of individuals.

This means that nobody is under any constraint to seek Truth, nor to care, any more than Sherlock Holmes did, whether the earth revolves around the sun or conversely. Scientific theories become, as do theological and philosophical ones, optional tools for the facilitation of individual or social projects. Scientists thereby lose the position they inherited from the monotheistic priesthood, as the people who pay proper tribute to the authority of something "not ourselves."

"Not ourselves" is a term that tolls like a bell throughout the text of Arnold's *Literature and Dogma*, and this may be one of the reasons Dewey had a particular dislike for Arnold.<sup>20</sup> Once he got out from under his mother's Calvinism, Dewey distrusted nothing more than the suggestion that there was a nonhuman authority to which human beings owed respect. He praised democracy as the *only* form of "moral and social faith" that does *not* "rest upon the idea that experience must be subjected at some point or other to some form of external control: to some 'authority' alleged to exist outside the process of experience."<sup>21</sup>

This passage in an essay of 1939 echoes one written forty-seven years

earlier. In "Christianity and Democracy" Dewey had said that "The one claim that Christianity makes is that God is truth; that as truth He is love and reveals Himself fully to man, keeping back nothing of Himself; that man is so one with the truth thus revealed that it is not so much revealed to him as *in* him; he is its incarnation."<sup>22</sup> For Dewey God is in no way Kierkegaard's Wholly Other. Nor is he One. Rather, he is all the varied sublimities human beings come to see through the eyes that they themselves create.

If atheism were identical with antimonotheism, then Dewey would have been as aggressive an atheist as has ever lived. The idea that God might have kept something back, that there might be something not ourselves that it was our duty to discover, was as distasteful to him as was the idea that God could tell us which of our needs took priority over others. He reserved his awe for the universe as a whole, "the community of causes and consequences in which we, together with those not born, are enmeshed." "The continuing life of this comprehensive community of beings," he said, "includes all the significant achievement of men in science and art and all the kindly offices of intercourse and communication."

Notice, in the passages I have just quoted, the phrase "together with those not born" and also the adjective "continuing." Dewey's distaste for the eternity and stability on which monotheism prides itself is so great that he can never refer to the universe as a whole without reminding us that the universe is still evolving—still experimenting, still fashioning new eyes with which to see itself.

Wordsworth's version of pantheism meant a great deal to Dewey, but Whitman's insistence on futurity meant more. Wordsworth's pantheism saves us from what Arnold called "Hebraism" by making it impossible to treat, as Dewey put it, "the drama of sin and redemption enacted within the isolated and lonely soul of man as the one thing of ultimate importance." But Whitman does something more. He tells us that nonhuman nature culminates in a community of free men, in their collaboration in building a society in which, as Dewey said, "poetry and religious feeling will be the unforced flowers of life."<sup>23</sup>

Dewey's principal symbol of what he called "the union of the ideal and the actual" was the United States of America treated as Whitman treated it: as a symbol of openness to the possibility of as yet undreamt of, ever more diverse, forms of human happiness. Much of what Dewey wrote consists of endless reiteration of Whitman's caution that "America . . . counts, as I reckon, for her justification and success, (for who, as yet, dare claim success?) almost entirely on the future. . . . For our New World I

consider far less important for what it has done, or what it is, than for results to come.”<sup>24</sup>

## Notes

- 1 René Berthelot, *Un Romantisme Utilitaire: Étude sur le Mouvement Pragmatiste*, vol. 1 (Paris: F. Alcan, 1911), pp. 62–63. Berthelot also looked back behind Darwin and Spencer to Hume, whom he regarded as “la transition entre la psychologie utilitaire et intellectualiste d’Helvétius et la psychologie vitaliste de l’instinct que nous rencontrons chez les Ecossais.” He views Lamarck as “la transition entre cette conception vitaliste de la biologie et ce qu’on peut appeler l’utilitarisme mécanique de Darwin” (vol. 1, p. 85).
- 2 Berthelot, *Romantisme Utilitaire*, vol. 1, p. 128.
- 3 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, section 354: Wir haben eben gar kein Organ fuer das *Erkennen*, fuer die ‘Wahrheit’; wir ‘wissen’ . . . gerade so viel, als es im Interesse der Menschen-Herde, der Gattung, *nuetzlich* sein mag.
- 4 M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953; quotes on pp. 334–35, 333 (quoting a letter to Lytton Bulwer), and 335 respectively.
- 5 Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, ed. Samuel Lipman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 37.
- 6 William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 384.
- 7 “Aber ueber sich and ausser sich, in einer fernen Ueberwelt, durfte man eine *Mehrzahl von Normen* sehen; der eine Gott war nicht die Leugnung oder Laesterung des anderen Gottes. . . . Hier erlaubte man sich zuerst Individuen, hier ehrte man zuerst das Recht von Individuen. . . . In Polytheismus lag die Freigeisterei und Vielgeisterei des Menschen vorgebildet; die Kraft, sich neue und eigne Augen zu schaffen” (Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, sec. 143).
- 8 John Dewey, “A Common Faith,” in *Later Works of John Dewey*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), vol. 9, p. 36.
- 9 William James, *The Will to Believe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 149.
- 10 James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp. 387–88.
- 11 *Ibid.*, pp. 399 and 405, respectively.
- 12 See my “Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility, and Romance,” in *The Cambridge Companion to William James*, ed. Ruth Anna Putnam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- 13 James, *The Will to Believe*, p. 29.
- 14 James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp. 407, 400, 405 respectively.
- 15 Alan Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism* (New York: Norton, 1995), p. 102.
- 16 John Dewey, *Early Works of John Dewey* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), vol. 3, pp. 6–7.
- 17 Dewey, “Maeterlinck’s Philosophy of Life,” *The Middle Works of John Dewey*, vol. 6. Dewey says that Emerson, Whitman, and Maeterlinck are the only three to have grasped this fact about democracy.
- 18 Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, section 143: “Der Monotheismus . . . diese starre Konsequenz der Lehre von einem Normalmenschen—also der Glaube an einen Normalgott,

neben dem es nur noch falsche Luegengoetter gibt—war vielleicht die groesste Gefahr der bisherigen Menschheit.”

- 19 Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, in *Middle Works*, vol. 12, p. 186.
- 20 See Dewey, *A Common Faith*, in *Later Works*, vol. 9, p. 36, and also Dewey’s early essay “Poetry and Philosophy.” In the latter Dewey says that “the source of regret which inspires Arnold’s lines is his consciousness of a twofold isolation of man—his isolation from nature, his isolation from his fellow-man” (*Early Works*, vol. 3, p. 115).
- 21 “Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us” (1939). The passage cited is in *Later Works*, vol. 14, p. 229. Dewey says that he is here “stating briefly the democratic faith in the formal terms of a philosophic position.”
- 22 Dewey, *Early Works*, vol. 4, p. 5.
- 23 Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, in *Middle Works*, vol. 12, p. 201.
- 24 Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas*, in *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose* (New York: Library of America, 1982), p. 929.