



# ART, SELF and PRAGMATISM

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## INTRODUCTION:

### ON ART, SELF AND PHILOSOPHY IN A PRAGMATIST MANNER

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Pragmatism is an extremely rich philosophical movement, and it is not only the consequence of the lack of canonized directives and rules, but also that of its experiential approach. In this issue we are showing two small slices of this philosophical abundance when we devote separate chapters to art and self with descriptions and discussions of general pragmatist questions in the background.

In pragmatism the philosophy of art began essentially with Dewey's *Art as Experience* whose ideas were developed later in different directions (Rorty, Shusterman, etc.). In this issue Roberta Dreon argues on a Deweyan basis that freedom is not enough for a good life, for we also need aesthetic aspects. Richard E. Hart's paper offers a pragmatist interpretation of Charles Johnson's work, an award-winning African-American author of novels, short stories, critical reviews and philosophical essays. He demonstrates on Johnson's collection *Soulcatcher* why his views can be called "critical pragmatism." Csaba Olay focuses on the question of refusal of a profound difference between works of art and products of popular culture. He claims that Shusterman's argumentation against this distinction is not conclusive and makes efforts to prove this difference on the basis of Adorno's and Arendt's philosophy. John Ryder shows how we can grasp the active and manipulative dimension of experience through Justus Buchler's theory of judgment. Accepting his categorization of assertive, exhibitiv and active judgment, Ryder believes that we will be able to understand art and artworks much better. Ken Stickers throws light on American philosophy, on the anarchist tradition in particular from the point of view of "arts of living." As he emphasizes, "such figures as Thoreau, Goldman, and Henri, thus provides those interested in

the notions of an 'artistry of life' and 'care of the self,' such as Foucault recovers from the ancients in his last writings, with rich resources. Moreover, the aesthetics of existence, or 'arts of living,' provide another example of how American philosophy developed important philosophical themes well in advance of the continent."

The self is an eternal topic of philosophy, since it is a theoretical self-reflection of the human being and already the first Greek philosophers claimed that understanding ourselves is the first step to the good life (*gnothi seauton*). What is more, Socrates also argued that "unexamined life is not worth living." It is beyond question that theoretically we can understand ourselves well only within the whole of Being, but this does not exclude the particular examinations of the self. James Campbell examines James's interpretation of moral growth and compares its individual and social aspects. Alexander Kremer focuses on the narrative and internarrative identity theory of the self as they manifest themselves in Rorty's and Shusterman's neo-pragmatism. Roman Madzia criticizes Mead's concept of the self on the basis of some contemporary interpretations of Husserl's phenomenology of self-awareness. He claims that self and self-awareness are not exclusively products of social interaction as Mead held it, there is rather a primitive bodily self-awareness as a precondition of social interactions which create our self.

The basis of these applications of pragmatism can always be found in more general philosophical questions and answers. These are the questions of the philosophy of history and that of epistemology and ontology. I am convinced that every philosopher must have some kind of ontological theory even if it exists in a latent form in the case of those philosophers who deny the necessity (or the possibility) of a detailed, particular ontology. The reason for this is quite simple: everybody already has a so called ontological principle in his or her world view which is actually an answer to the question, "What is the world like in itself?" If every normal individual has an

answer to this question in his or her world view, then why would the situation be different in the case of philosophers? Miklos Nyiro carries out a thorough comparison between pragmatic naturalism and philosophical hermeneutics within the frame of their non-representationalist paradigm. He takes into account Dewey's and Buchler's naturalism on the one hand and Heidegger's and Gadamer's hermeneutics on the other. After enumerating the main similarities and differences and presenting a short genealogy of their non-representationalism, he describes their relationship with a special emphasis on truth, justification, event and interpretation. Emil Visnovsky examines the relationship between modernity and pragmatism. He claims that pragmatism is not simply the child of modernity, but it is a "type of modern practical philosophy" which, as Habermas formulated it, "embraces modernity in its most radical forms and acknowledges its contingencies, without sacrificing the very purpose of Western philosophy."

If we take to these interesting philosophical papers the two excellent book reviews of Mark A. Halawa and Krzysztof Piotr Skowroński I can be certain that every lover of pragmatism will find some delicacy in this issue.

## **I. ON PRAGAMTIST AESTHETICS**

**THE AESTHETIC, PLEASURE AND HAPPINESS,  
OR: WHY FREEDOM IS NOT ENOUGH**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Do the aesthetic aspects of our experience play a role in our happiness or must we avoid any aesthetic conditioning of our freedom in order to lead a good life? This paper is based on some philosophical ideas derived from John Dewey's thought, which are examined in the light of the debate on happiness, well-being and human flourishing that has productively been conducted on the threshold between philosophy and economics.*

Setting out from Dewey's thesis that aesthetic aspects are structural traits of every experience which concern our dependence on the surrounding environment, the paper suggests that the Enlightenment ideals of freedom and autonomy are not enough to develop a morally and politically good life, because a good life must also be a full, satisfactory one, that is an inclusive, expanding life, emotionally and imaginatively rich, capable of final consummations and not only of analytical reflections.

In particular, the author argues that Dewey's suggestions allow us to consider a further option in addition to those presently discussed: one strictly related to the structurally aesthetic or qualitative traits of our human interactions with the environment and capable of not being confined to an idea of happiness as something totally consisting in momentary sensory pleasure, but also of not neglecting or expunging our sensibility.

Can aesthetics claim to have any serious connection with our idea of happiness and with our actual well-being? Or is it better for this philosophical discipline to merely theorize about Art, still written with a capital "A" and rigorously expressed in the singular?

We might like to refer here to the first letters *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*, in which Friedrich Schiller tries to convince his interlocutor and patron, Prince Friedrich Christian von Schleswig-Holstein-

Augustenburg, that in order to face the dramatic political situation and the moral crisis of the period immediately following the French Revolution, he ought to consider the possibility of a new development of humanity through the medium of an aesthetic education. This long path should start from a new anthropological stance that will neglect neither the human impulse to lend form to every field of experience – the cognitive dimension, but above all the moral one – nor more sensuous, material drives, encouraging us to find satisfaction in our lives. In Schiller's opinion, aesthetic freedom is not foreign to the opposite necessities these impulses force us to follow; on the contrary, it results from the capacity to play opposite necessities off against one another, thereby annulling their coercive qualities.<sup>1</sup>

I am not sympathetic to Schiller's transcendental solution to our moral and political problems, but I believe that he was able to see into some basic human needs, which must be seriously considered if we wish to think about happiness, well-being and freedom – that is, about what kind of life we wish to live – starting from our being peculiarly complex social organisms and not disembodied consciousness, or in other words from the material culture we live in.

My approach will be based on some philosophical ideas derived from John Dewey's thought, which in my opinion can be used and further developed in the debate on happiness, well-being and human flourishing which has productively been conducted on the threshold between philosophy and economics.

### **1. A look at the aesthetic aspects of our experience**

The point of departure of my argument is the fact that the conception of the aesthetic in the thought of John Dewey is not – or not primarily – confined to either the allegedly strict realm of the so-called fine arts, or to the

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<sup>1</sup> Schiller, J.C.F. 1879. *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen*. Stuttgart: J.G. Cotta, in particular the two opening letters.

wider field of human artistic behaviours. Even before being developed and refined into more or less proper artistic activities, the aesthetic aspects of every experience constitute structural traits: they concern our being dependent upon and exposed to our surrounding natural and naturally social environment and our interacting with it from the inside. To use a different, philosophically more traditional language, we might say that the aesthetic concerns the deepest roots of our humanity, that it plays a central role in shaping our humanity. The aesthetic concerns sensibility understood primarily not as sense perception, but rather as affectivity, as emotional exposure to the natural and social environment surrounding and affecting us – from the most bodily aspects to the more intellectual ones.

To be more analytic<sup>2</sup>, we might say that in *Experience and Nature* the adjective “aesthetic” – Dewey never resorts to the noun form – appears to characterize the basic traits of our immediate experience, that is those qualitative aspects unreflexively connoting human interactions with the environment, both in its natural and in its social constituents. I will at once feel the situation I find myself in to be comfortable or dangerous for my own existence, attractive or disgusting, pleasurable or unpleasant. According to Dewey, these experiential traits are meaningful for the impact they have on our lives, because of what things and other individuals can do to us directly. By contrast, when a certain problem arises about what to do, we have to stop, the fulfilment of a certain experience has to be postponed, the complex whole of an immediate experience has to be reflexively reconsidered and thought of as a means to something else – in terms not of what things and persons can do to us directly, but

with reference to further things.<sup>3</sup> This is why Dewey can claim that immediate experience is *consummatory*, that is that it comes at once to the end of the interaction, that it comes to its fulfilment, even if the concept of consummatory experience can be used to identify a certain phase of an experience – but I shall return to this aspect towards the end of my discussion.

Dewey does not feel the need to clarify why he uses the word “aesthetic” – maybe because this use was rather common in pragmatism – but he explicitly bases it on the distinction between *having* or *feeling* a certain situation and *knowing* it, that is analytically reconsidering it in the light of further ends. This is a kind of sensibility which cannot be ascribed to what is allegedly only a form of sensory perception, because the senses themselves, together with our organic constitution, play a central role, yet in affective terms, as something qualitative or emotional and not as a source of alleged primary pure perceptual data.

Hence, aesthetic aspects are basic traits of our environmental experience, which would appear to be an essential part of us as human beings – but of course, they can further be developed into eminently artistic experiences.

This is not a complete novelty: some substantial differences notwithstanding, one might consider the significance of the *Gefühl der Lust und der Unlust* in Kant's *Critique of Judgement* – although this is not the place to pursue such comparison any further.

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<sup>2</sup> I have analysed this subject in the second chapter of my book on sensibility and language: see Dreon, R. 2003. *Il sentire e la parola. Linguaggio e sensibilità tra filosofie ed estetiche del novecento*. Milano-Udine: Mimesis, pp.49-73.

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<sup>3</sup> Dewey, J. 1988. *Experience and Nature*. In: *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953*, Vol.1: 1925, Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.

It has been already noted<sup>4</sup> that William James too assigned a primary role to the aesthetic dimension of experience.

In particular, we might say that James and Dewey share the thesis that the aesthetic, qualitative or affective aspects of our experiences do not match the traditional dichotomy between subjective and objective. Dewey's strong anti-dualism leads him to claim that if I feel a certain environment to be hostile – and later in *Art as Experience* he was to speak of a sad picture<sup>5</sup> – I am not projecting my subjective hostility on a certain context, or my supposedly private mental state on a certain artistic object; rather “hostile” and “sad” are first of all traits of the peculiar interactions that are taking place, and therefore they regard both the subjective and the objective side as non-independent parts of their relations.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Shusterman, R. “Dewey's *Art as Experience*: The Psychological Background”. In: *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 44/1, 2010, pp.26-43 and Shusterman, R. “The Pragmatist Aesthetics of William James”. In: *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 51/4, 2011, pp.347-361.

<sup>5</sup> Dewey, J. 1989. *Art as Experience*. In: *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953*, Vol.10: 1934, Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.

<sup>6</sup> James upholds the thesis (in James, W. 1983. *The Place of Affectional Facts in a World of Pure Experience*. In: *Essays in Psychology*, Cambridge-London: Harvard University Press, pp.168-187) that the ambiguous or hybrid character of affective phenomena proves that the distinction between material and spiritual aspects does not regard two different substances, but only two diverse kinds of functions or relations, because we tend to differentiate things depending on their ways of acting. While according to the individualistic tradition “our pleasures and pains, our loves and fears and angers” but also “the beauty, comicality, importance or preciousness of certain objects and situations” must be ascribed to the spiritual dimension, we must often take into account the “immediate bodily effects” that affectional facts produce on us. Hence, according to James, this instability shows that our distinction between material and spiritual, subjective and objective, is not already given in the world, since in our lives we do not need to classify what is happening. It is rather when “more purely intellectual” needs emerge that we begin to distinguish various aspects, being driven to do so by specific situations. Yet, as Dewey might put it, this kind of distinction is an analytical, reflexive one rather than a primary one, and it

Dewey and James also agree on the thesis that the aesthetic or qualitative aspects of our experience provide crucial orientation even on a cognitive level. Dewey's position – from *Qualitative Thought* and *Affective Thought*<sup>7</sup> to *Art as Experience* – is clear enough in pointing out that these aspects function as selection and guidance criteria to distinguish the relevant factors in our experiences, while also functioning as control criteria to test the capacity of a certain reflexive analysis to resolve the problems arising from an indeterminate situation and to enrich our immediate experiences. We might also suggest that the aesthetic qualities of our interactions with the environment include proto-evaluative elements, granting us a sort of primary orientation in the world both on the cognitive level and on the moral one.<sup>8</sup>

However, I believe that the most typical Deweyan trait is the naturalistic – one might even say existentialistic – background to his position. Chapter Two of *Experience and Nature* emphasizes the precarious and uncertain quality of our experience of the world, forcing us to recognize that if man is fearful, his fear is first of all a

would be fallacious to take its results to be primary elements.

<sup>7</sup> See Dewey, J. 1984. *Qualitative Thought*. In: *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953*, Vol.5: 1929-1930, Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, pp.243-262, and Dewey, J. 1988. *Affective Thought*. In: *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953*, Vol.2: 1925-1927, Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, pp.104-110.

<sup>8</sup> I am referring to Dewey, J. 1978. *Ethics*. In: *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953*, Vol.7: 1932, Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press and Dewey, J. *Ethics* 1985. In: *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924*, Vol.5: 1908, Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press. On the other hand, in the essay quoted before James argues that it is the affective or aesthetic contour of our experiences that lends emphasis to certain objects at the expense of others, by showing that they are important, interesting or salient for us – and therefore allowing us to orientate ourselves in an environment where we would otherwise be exposed to an overwhelming range of stimuli. This last point however has more accurately been examined by Dewey, as I set out to argue in the next section of the text.

function of the environment and not a private feeling. Each form of life belongs to a certain environment, but human organisms, for their own physical, biological and even cultural characteristics, suffer from (or simply have) a peculiar degree and kind of exposure to their environment, because their behavioural answers are not predetermined, but plural as well as relatively free, and hence dangerous, risky. Therefore, it is man's peculiar human exposure to his environment and in particular his dependence from the social environment he belongs to from his premature birth onwards that ensures the central relevance of the so-called aesthetic aspects of our experience. First of all, our world is felt to be threatening or welcoming, fearful or delightful, painful or pleasurable, because every human interaction, from those of our ancestors to our present hyper-technological ones, concerns our survival or our possibility of enhancing our lives, to make them flourish.

If we follow Dewey's reasoning, these aspects cannot be removed from our idea of happiness and even freedom, but must be combined with his more ethical and political observations on these themes. Complementary human experiences cannot be reduced to cognitive inquiries or to reflexive analyses, even if they play a central role in our lives, while the most distinctive trait of our humanity cannot be exclusively confined to reason, because we do not spend our whole lives reflecting and solving problems: very often we simply enjoy or suffer the world around us, being guided within it by our sensibility, and reacting to its affections more or less habitually. Hence, these aspects must be carefully considered if we are to define the peculiar freedom and happiness of human beings as opposed to an alleged disembodied consciousness.

## **2. The ethical and political relevance of aesthetic aspects**

A first very simple observation – a rather trivial point, yet one rarely made by scholars – can help bring into focus the deep moral and political implications of the aesthetic aspects of our experience according to Dewey's thought: we need to remember that the most important texts centred on the aesthetic aspects of our experiences and on the role of art in our interactions with the world – that is Chapter 9. of *Experience and Nature*, dating back to 1925, and *Art as Experience*, published in 1934 – were written in the same period in which Dewey presented two of his most important political essays – *The Public and its Problems*, 1927, and *Individualism Old and New*, 1929 – and prepared the second edition of his *Ethics*, which was developed together with James Tufts and published in 1932.<sup>9</sup>

To any reader of these political writings it is clear that aesthetic questions are an integral part of political questions for Dewey, in the sense that they play a structural role in human interactions with a natural and naturally social environment and hence cannot be

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<sup>9</sup> Dewey, J. 1984. *The Public and Its Problems*. In: *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953*, Vol.2: 1925-1927, Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press and Dewey, J. 1988. *Individualism Old and New*. In: *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953*, Vol.5: 1929-1930, Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press. The first person to grasp the political implications of Dewey's aesthetics was probably George Herbert Mead (see Mead, G.H. 1926. "The Nature of Aesthetic Experience". In: *International Journal of Ethics*. 36/4, pp.382-393), although Georgina Melvin also noted this aspect in 1937 (now Melvin, G. *The Social Philosophy Underlying Dewey's Theory of Art*. In: Tiles, J.E. (ed.) 1992. *John Dewey. Critical Assessments. Vol.III: Value, Conduct and Art*, New York: Routledge, pp.302-311). For an historical as well as theoretical survey of the connections between Dewey's aesthetics and his thoughts on democracy see Westbrook, R. 1991. *John Dewey and American Democracy*. Ithaca-New York: Cornell University Press. With regard to his influence on the cultural policies of the New Deal, see Grieve, V. 2009. *The Federal Art Project and the Creation of Middlebrow Culture*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

abstractly banished from the state – as the Platonic tradition recommends – and from human rational or allegedly purely critical evaluations, choices and actions, as suggested by a typically negative and uncompromising Adornoian position.<sup>10</sup> On the contrary, those aesthetic aspects of our experience – such as the perceived significance of the environmental context with and within which our interactions take place, but also impulses, desires, emotional attitudes, pleasures and pains – have a structural function in pursuing a “public socialism” capable of making everyone's lives rich and expansive – and thus worthy of being lived – instead of merely embellishing people's barren existences in their work-free weekends.<sup>11</sup>

Both *The Public and its Problems* and *Individualism Old and New* suggest a variety of negative examples: as human beings, we need to find gratification in what we are doing, in its social function – as with the satisfaction of being part of a whole afforded by nationalism in 1930s, or even the exclusive and identity-centred communities of today. The need to identify ourselves with more than just intellectual principles, along with the need for an emotionally and imaginatively rich life, can be satisfied by those kinds of powerful totalitarian propaganda capable of eliciting fears and desires. Our need for consummatory experiences can find gratification in the cheap and extremely varied forms of amusement presently guaranteed by the industrial production of commodities and experiences and by their technological means of distribution. I would add that a confirmation of these observations strewn throughout Dewey's texts is now provided by the growing success of the so-called economy of experiences, which in contrast to classical economy considers the customer and his

ways of behaving as bodily, sensuous and emotional needs to be satisfied, while maintaining the pursuit of exclusively private profit as an obvious and unquestionable assumption.<sup>12</sup>

The point is that if we do not recognize that man is a “consuming animal” as well as a “political one”,<sup>13</sup> we remain at the complete mercy of media providing very accessible forms of enjoyment and distracting us from political concerns, instead of enjoying the consequences of shared political actions. Because we do not simply need communication as a medium to convey informations, we tend to appreciate actualized communion – or even to hate it if it is felt to be oppressive rather than expansive and inclusive.

On the ethical side, in the *Ethics*, in contrast to the modern foundation of aesthetics as the philosophy of art, Dewey reminds us of the common, deeply intertwined roots of aesthetic and ethical judgements.<sup>14</sup> Disgust and feelings of repulsiveness go hand in hand with judgements reflecting moral disapproval; feelings of admiration can constitute the basis for moral approval; and the sense of symmetry and proportion is not alien to that of fairness and justice. Of course, our primary sense of orientation in the world – what Dewey describes as customary morality – is above all based on reinforced

<sup>10</sup> The classical references are Plato. *The Republic*. Book X., but also Adorno, T.W.- Horkheimer, M. 1969, *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer and Adorno, T.W. 1970. *Ästhetische Theorie*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

<sup>11</sup> See Dewey, J. 1988. *Individualism Old and New*. cit. p.98.

<sup>12</sup> See Pine, B.J.-Gilmore, J.H. 1999. *The Experience Economy. Work is Theatre and Every Business a Stage*. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Press, Schmitt, B.H. 1999. *Experiential Marketing: How to Get Customers to Sense, Feel, Think, At and Relate to Your Company and Brands*, New York: The Free Press, Ferraresi, M.-Schmitt, B.H. 2006. *Marketing esperenziale. Come sviluppare l'esperienza di consumo*, Milano: Franco Angeli.

<sup>13</sup> Dewey, J. 1984. *The Public and Its Problems*. cit., p.321)

<sup>14</sup> On this point see Gadamer, H.G. 1960, *Wahrheit und Methode*. Tübingen: J.C.B.Mohr, in particular the chapter devoted to the “Humanistische Leitbegriffe”. I have developed the thesis of the common roots of Dewey's aesthetic and ethic evaluations in Dreon R. 2012. *Fuori dalla torre d'avorio. L'estetica inclusiva di John Dewey oggi*. Genova: Marietti, Chapter VI. “Qualcosa in comune tra l'estetico e l'etico. A partire da Dewey”.

habits and on the aesthetic significance that certain things, events and people have and exercise directly upon us, while our morality becomes reflexive by distinguishing between the various aspects of indeterminate situations, including regressive habits, inborn tendencies, impulses and immediate feelings. But we must also remember that, according to Dewey, every reflexive inquiry has to meet the needs of our primary unreflexive experience, has to enrich and expand its possibilities and can be evaluated by once again referring to implicit, often qualitative or aesthetic criteria.<sup>15</sup> As previously noted, we must always remember that experience is not equivalent to – and not exhausted by – cognition (what Dewey defined as the intellectualistic fallacy), even if reason, as an active process of reflection, plays an indispensable function in resolving problems and enriching our ordinary experience with the results of previous inquiries.<sup>16</sup>

### 3. Which idea of freedom?

It is interesting to note that precisely in this period – from the late 1920s to the latter half of the 1930s, if we take *Freedom and Culture* into account – Dewey also developed a critical interpretation of our idea of freedom.<sup>17</sup> In my opinion this analysis is related to his belief that the Enlightenment ideals of freedom and autonomy are not enough to develop a morally and politically good life, because a good life must also be a full, satisfactory, happy one – that is an inclusive,

expanding life, emotionally and imaginatively rich, capable of final consummations and not only of analytical reflections. Criticism in the sense of reflective thinking plays an important part in our everyday life that is in every situation where our habitual behaviours do not match environmental conditions as usual: whenever, that is, we have to act in a different way from what we are used to. We must not forget, however, that “much of life is immediate, appreciative, primary experience”.<sup>18</sup>

The point, as argued in *Freedom and Culture*, is not to give up the idea of freedom – this would be a tragedy for Dewey, of course - but to ask whether our present desire for freedom is “inherent in human nature or is a product of special circumstances”.<sup>19</sup> In this perspective, we should firstly recognize its connections with the social, political and economic conditions of the world where it appeared and secondly the possibility that our deeply changed material culture is ready for the emergence of a different concept of freedom.

The first aspect to consider is the close relation between our idea of freedom and the modern tradition of individualism, already noted by Dewey in *The Public and Its Problems*.<sup>20</sup> It must be recognized that a very strong claim against oppressive forms of power, starting from the Church in European countries, was converted into an inborn attribute, into the natural right of *the* individual, understood as an isolated and independent entity that is predetermined, regardless of any association with other individuals.

Hence, both in the American and in the English liberal tradition, stretching back to Locke, the idea of freedom has been grounded on the individual as opposed to the

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<sup>15</sup> Dewey, J. *Ethics* 1985. cit., p. 271.

<sup>16</sup> About the “intellectualistic fallacy” see Dewey, J. 1988. *Experience and Nature*. cit., pp.26-27, Dewey, J. 1988. *The Quest for Certainty*. In: *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953*, Vol.4: 1929, Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, pp.174-175 and also Dewey, J. 1951, *Experience, Knowledge and Value: a Rejoinder*. In: Schlipp, P.A. (ed.), *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, La Salle: Northern University and Southern Illinois University Press, pp.297-309.

<sup>17</sup> Dewey, J. 1988. *Freedom and Culture*. In: *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953*, Vol.13: 1938-1939, Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, pp.63-188.

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<sup>18</sup> Cfr. Stroud, R. S., “John Dewey and the Question of Artful Criticism”. In: *Philosophy and Rhetoric*. 44/1/2011, p.38.

<sup>19</sup> Dewey, J. 1988. *Freedom and Culture*. cit., p.65.

<sup>20</sup> Dewey, J. 1984. *The Public an Its Problems*. cit., p.289 and p.329.

social and has come to be defined in terms of autonomy or independence of choice.

On the contrary, in *The Public and Its Problems* Dewey does not simply argue that humans are social, as most mammals are, because they structurally depend on their social environment in order to survive and flourish. The point is rather, on the one hand, to understand how human modes of association differ from other animal forms of association and, on the other, to consider how individuals are shaped by social habits, traditional behaviours, etc.<sup>21</sup> From this point of view, freedom is very relevant, of course, as the source of individual identity and responsibility, yet it only comes into play later, within a consolidated system of responses and activities that is already there at the birth of the individual and which contributes to welcoming (or even rejecting) him – as Dewey's argument on the relations between customary and reflexive morality suggests. In this respect, individual freedom has to do with responsibility understood in an almost literary sense: as the need to respond to the impulses and the requests coming from our environment, and especially other people, by saying "I" after having habitually behaved like everyone else.

Furthermore – and this second aspect is very important for the subject we are discussing in this paper – in *Freedom and Culture* Dewey reminds us of the fact that in the continental European tradition the idea of freedom is typically associated with that of pure rationality, as though every affective, qualitative or indeed aesthetic aspect were to be expunged from epistemological judgements and moral evaluations. It has already been recalled that, according to Dewey, "the idea that men are moved by an intelligent and calculated

regard for their own good is pure mythology"<sup>22</sup> – a myth that lives on in the modern idea of the *homo oeconomicus*. It is well known that the American pragmatist, like William James, constantly emphasized the regulative, controlling and selective role of the affective, qualitative aspects of our inquiries – that is, even in relation to our reflexive analysis of our immediate experience, both when an indeterminate situation is eminently a moral one or when it deals more properly with epistemological problems.

I would argue that this criticism has to do with Dewey's rejection of the alleged body-mind dualism and the particular attention he devoted to its political consequences. As he writes in an essay from the same years, *Body and Mind* (1928), the idea of distinguishing an allegedly nobler part of our humanity – the spiritual one – from the more animal-like one – the material side – is not just a speculative question, but "is the most practical of all questions we can ask of our civilization".<sup>23</sup> The problem is that "spiritual idealism" – like traditional modern individualism – is a "state of action" legitimating a situation where "ends are privately enjoyed in isolation from means of execution and consequent public betterment".<sup>24</sup>

Hence, which idea of freedom are we to uphold and develop, once we acknowledge the historical ties of the present conception of liberty to the ideology of individualism – both past and present – and the myth of an allegedly pure rational will?

I would suggest that, even though Dewey is critical of the form of human association achieved by the present technological, industrial and financial means of production, exchange and consumption, he believes that

<sup>21</sup> Dewey developed this second point in his work on social psychology (Dewey, J. 1988. *Human Nature and Conduct*. In: *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924*, Vol.14: 1922, Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press).

<sup>22</sup> Dewey, J. 1984. *The Public an Its Problems*. cit., p.335.

<sup>23</sup> Dewey, J. 1984. *Body and Mind*. In: *The Later Works (1925-1953)*, Vol. 3: 1927-1928, Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, p.8.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem.

we need to consider whether they can create the conditions for new, intelligent and less regressive modes of being free individuals. Maybe they can help us bring out a new form of freedom which is no longer envisaged as standing in contrast to the social and as requiring us to strip every qualitative, affective or emotional aspect from our supposedly pure rational will. What I mean by this is an idea of freedom capable of including aspects of pleasure, the possibility of enjoying what we do, of enjoying our lives and deriving pleasure from our relations with other people and the situations we experience. In contrast with the typical assumptions of the Enlightenment, Dewey tells us that "Fraternity, liberty and equality isolated from communal life are hopeless abstractions".<sup>25</sup> However we can understand and practice freedom otherwise, as "personal participation in the development of a shared culture",<sup>26</sup> as the

"secure release and fulfillment of personal potentialities which take place only in rich and manifold association with others: the power of being an individualized self-making a distinctive contribution and enjoying in its own way the fruits of association."<sup>27</sup>

For the purposes of the present discussion, it might be useful to compare this conception of freedom to some considerations by Amartya Sen on the subject. Firstly, it is worth noting that Sen emphasizes the ambiguities of the concept of individual freedom in his *Individual Freedom as Social Commitment*.<sup>28</sup> By recalling Isaiah Berlin's famous distinction between negative and positive conceptions of liberty,<sup>29</sup> that is between the lack of limitations an individual can impose on another and what a person can achieve, Sen suggests that the limits

between negative and positive forms of freedom are often nuanced and overlapping, because of their reciprocal implications and intertwining. Sen thus upholds the thesis that social commitment in favour of individual freedom has to consider both sides of freedom itself. In the Deweyan perspective, the negative definitions of freedom appear to be historically connected to individualism and the need for a positive form of freedom is invoked as the possibility to develop a new, more intelligent and less regressive form of individual and associated life.

Secondly, it is worth recalling another distinction suggested by Sen some years before, in his 1984 Dewey Lectures *Well-being, Agency and Freedom*, and which can be more fruitfully be compared to Dewey's position. According to Sen, a more basic distinction with regard to freedom than that between its negative and positive meanings is the distinction between power and control. We can understand freedom by focusing on the effective power to achieve some results, to bring certain consequences about, but also by pointing out "whether the person is himself exercising control over the process of choice".<sup>30</sup> In our tradition of moral and political philosophy the tendency to overemphasize the autonomous control of the subject over his own acts has been privileged even at the expense of evaluative considerations of the actual consequences of his actions. Sen criticizes this overestimation of the controlling aspects of freedom in favour of a wider conceptualization of freedom itself, capable of taking into account also the actual power of achieving results. This is an important point because, as may be seen in the following pages of Sen's lecture, it is strictly connected with the structural "interdependency of social living".<sup>31</sup> If we were to couch the question in Deweyan terms, we might say that the consequences of our actions for

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<sup>25</sup> Dewey, J. 1984. *The Public an Its Problems*. cit., p.329.

<sup>26</sup> Dewey, J. 1988. *Individualism Old and New*. cit. p.57.

<sup>27</sup> Dewey, J. 1984. *The Public an Its Problems*. cit., p.329.

<sup>28</sup> Sen, A. 1998, "Individual Freedom as Social Commitment". In: *India International Centre Quaterly*. 1/1998-1999, p.53-69.

<sup>29</sup> Berlin, I. 1969. *Four Essays on Liberty*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.

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<sup>30</sup> Sen, A. 1985. "Well-being, Agency and Freedom: The Dewey Lectures 1984". In: *The Journal of Philosophy*. 82/4, p. 209.

<sup>31</sup> Ibidem, p. 211.

others, what we actually do to others, is at least as important as the fact that we can exercise complete control over our own actions. Furthermore, this is one aspect with regard to which Dewey is able to reconsider Mill's peculiar contribution in comparison with Bentham's, while Sen is more generally critical of utilitarian positions. But I will return to this point later on. What I wish to stress here is that both Sen and Dewey seem to share a view of human social dependence from others as a structural component of a definition of freedom not only in its negative aspects, as independence from foreign coercion, but also in its affirmative and productive sense, as the power to achieve something.

However there is another aspect, apart from structural interdependency, that is lacking in Sen's account of freedom, while it plays a role in Dewey's thought. At a first glance, this might seem like a mere matter of emphasis, but Dewey always includes an element of enjoyment in the free contribution to a community, together with an enhancement of living that can be immediately felt or brought to its consummation. While we cannot ignore the wide number of situations in which freedom stands in contrast to well-being, the American pragmatist seems to suggest that a closer relation exists between the two. In other words, Dewey's argument suggests that a free choice and above all a free life must not only include a reflexive comprehension of what we are doing, but must be also felt and possibly enjoyed in itself.

#### 4. Happiness, well-being and the perceived quality of life

In recent decades a very interesting debate has taken place in the economic field about happiness and its relation to wealth. The problem emerged thanks to Easterlin's famous inquiries on the relation between happiness and riches, dating back to 1970. His researches revealed a paradox, namely that the degree

of happiness felt by an individual does not increase proportionally to the rising of his financial resources. While at a low level an increase of income can be very important for the betterment of life conditions and correlatively of the degree of life satisfaction, further income risings are often only temporarily relevant, but very soon lose their significance.

This discovery of a more complex relationship between happiness and wealth is philosophically significant because it challenges the traditional model of the *homo oeconomicus*, whose individual choices are supposed to be guided exclusively by the calculation of the total amount of utilities he can ensure for himself.<sup>32</sup> Secondly, it has been noted<sup>33</sup> that this interest of economics in happiness is not completely new, because it characterized a minority economic school – the losing one in comparison to the classical economics of Smith and Ricardo, originally oriented to pursuing the wealth of nations, and later just private profit – that is the Italian school of Genovesi, which was focused on the pursuit of “*felicità pubblica*”, or “public happiness”. Evidently, this is no minor difference, because it concerns nothing less than the end which economics is supposed to pursue.

But the important point in relation to our present speech is that this discussion has led to a kind of polarization between two different concepts of happiness, represented by two key figures in the debate, Amartya Sen and Daniel Kahneman.

In brief, the notion of happiness upheld by Kahneman is explicitly derived from Jeremy Bentham and consists in the pursuit of momentary pleasure, in the “hedonic quality”, conceived as “experienced utility”.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> See Motterlini, M.- Piattelli Palmarini M. (eds.), 2012., *Critica della ragione economica*. Milano: il Saggiatore, p.12.

<sup>33</sup> See Bruni, L. 2002, *Felicità e scienza economica. Storia, problemi aperti e spunti teorici*. In: Working Paper Series-University Milan-Bicocca, 48/2002.

<sup>34</sup> Kahneman, D. 1997. “Back to Bentham? Explorations of Experienced Utility”. In: *The Quarterly Journal of*

Kanheman's contribution is centred on the idea of distinguishing a memory-based approach to experienced utility from a moment-based utility, because this distinction enables a more reliable calculation of happiness, understood as the sum of the total utility based on instant utility units, rather than as a final subjective judgement on the happiness of a certain period of time that has already passed. However, it is clear that this position betrays many unquestioned assumptions, the first one being that happiness is equivalent to pleasure or to a sum of pleasures; the second, that pleasure is a sort of sensation that it is instantaneous and can differ only in quantity.

Criticizing the utilitarian concept of happiness and the role it is supposed to play in connection to the administration of our resources. Sen prefers to speak about well-being, "human flourishing" or "fulfilment", by explicitly referring to the ancient Aristotelian idea of *eudaimonia*, where happiness is strictly related to the exercise of virtue.<sup>35</sup> In particular, Sen points to the contrast between happiness as a hedonic quality and freedom, which can be deeply compromised by the pursuit of momentary pleasures. For example people, may feel satisfied by mass consumption or ideological propaganda, but of course these pleasurable experiences could imply a deprivation of freedom.

To summarize Sen's position, we might say – with David Crocker – that "Human well-being cannot be identified with utility, and, for Sen, the human good cannot be identified with well-being".<sup>36</sup> The second part of this

formula lead us back to Sen's thesis according to which a good moral approach – in open contrast with the reductive utilitarian approach - must take into account not only well-being, but also agency as a crucial factor, which cannot be neglected by focusing only on the benefits or the disadvantages we can get from our interactions.<sup>37</sup> But it is the first part of this thesis that is more interesting for the present argument. What is well-being and how can it be defined? According to Sen, it cannot be reduce to either a subjective momentary state or utility, or even to the fulfilment of desire, but rather has to do with human functionings and capacities. If living is "a combination of doings and beings", the functioning vector characterizing each one of us results from "the various combinations of things a person is able to do or be – the various functionings he or she can achieve".<sup>38</sup> Sen suggests that well-being is connected to human capabilities that is to the freedom of choosing between different combinations of functionings, between what we might call different forms of life and different ideas of a good life.

This emphasis on what we could do or be does not at all sound alien to a Deweyan ear, which is used to pragmatically focusing on the consequences of our actions. Nevertheless it must be noted that this conception tends to expunge or almost marginalize human pleasures (at least more material or sensuous ones) – people's needs and desires to derive enjoyment from what they are doing, from their relations with others and their environment, from the perceived quality of their life. Robert Sudgen maintains that the so-called capacity-based approach shared by Sen and Martha Nussbaum is conditioned by their traditionally humanistic attitude, so that, although they grant human

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*Economics*, 112/2, 375-405 and Kanheman, D. 2000. *Experienced Utility and Objective Happiness: A Moment-Based Approach*. In: Kanheman, D., Tversky, A. (eds.) 2000, *Choices, Values and Frames*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.673-692.

<sup>35</sup> See Sen, A. 2006. *La felicità è importante ma altre cose lo sono di più*. In: Bruni, I.- Porta, P.L. (eds.) 2006. *Felicità e libertà. Economia e benessere in prospettiva relazionale*. Milano: Guerini e Associati, pp.39-58.

<sup>36</sup> Crocker D.A. 1992. "Functioning and Capability: The Foundations of Sen's and Nussbaum's Development

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Ethic". In: *Political Theory*, 20/4, p.602.

<sup>37</sup> See Sen, A. 1985. "Well-being, Agency and Freedom: The Dewey Lectures 1984". cit.

<sup>38</sup> Sen, A. *Capability and Well-being*. In: Hausman, M. (ed.) 2007. *The Philosophy of Economics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.270-271.

emotions, desires and even appetites a certain significance, they always subordinate them to the role of our rationality, which is considered as the most distinctive and most authentic trait of the human being.<sup>39</sup>

I believe that some of Dewey's suggestions allow us to consider a third option, strictly related to the structurally aesthetic or qualitative aspects of our human interactions with the environment, capable of not being confined to an idea of happiness as totally consisting in momentary, sensational pleasure, but also of not neglecting or expunging our sensibility. This third possibility may be seen to emerge both from Dewey's discussion of utilitarianism in the first version of his *Ethics* and from his concept of consummatory experience. A new, different kind of individualism – of being individuals – must be sought according to Dewey, but also – I would argue – a different kind of happiness, which is capable of including pleasure, enjoyment and fulfilment, and which does not neglect the characteristic human need to feel welcomed and gratified by one's environment.

It is interesting to note that when he started dealing with the concept of happiness and its role in moral life in his *Ethics* (and particularly in the first 1908 edition) Dewey devoted a good number of pages to discussing utilitarian positions on pleasure. I speak of “positions” in the plural here because in his analysis Dewey is careful to distinguish between Bentham's and John Stuart Mill's interpretation of pleasure. But let us follow Dewey's reasoning.

One of the first points is of course based on the traditional critique of the utilitarian conception of happiness as consisting in a mere cumulative sum of

pleasures, whose differences can be only quantitative – a critique which Sen directs against Kanheman's return to Bentham. If pleasures are isolated entities, how can we measure and compare them, sum them up and subtract the pains? This is an aspect which has created some difficulties in classical economics, leading to the exclusion of factors of this kind from theories about consumer evaluation and choice – while Kahneman's distinction between “moment-based utility” and “memory-based utility” was partially meant to provide a solution to this problem.

But the core of Dewey's criticism concerns two other aspects, deeply interrelated with the one just mentioned. On the one hand, the American pragmatist points out that, in contrast to the hedonistic perspective, we must note that our desires are primarily directed towards objects that can satisfy them and not pleasures, so that pleasure cannot be regarded as the object of desire; rather, a certain object becomes pleasurable because it corresponds to or satisfies a certain desire. This point reflects the Darwinian naturalism of Dewey, who observes that:

„Biological instincts and appetites exist not for the sake of furnishing pleasure, but as activities needed to maintain life – the life of the individual and the species. Their adequate fulfilment is attended with pleasure. Such is the undoubted biological fact. [...] But desire is still for the object, for the food.”<sup>40</sup>

This is the reason why, according to Dewey, there can be no previous determination of allegedly substantive pleasures which our desires are supposed to pursue; rather, from time to time there are pleasurable things, satisfying our desires. But this is the reason why we have to recognize that desires and the need for satisfaction are as structurally human as reflexive reason in both a moral and cognitive sense. Happiness has to conform to these aspects, even if it cannot be reduced to them.

<sup>39</sup> Sudgen, R. 2006. *Capacitazioni, felicità e opportunità*. In: In: Bruni, I.- Porta, P.L. (eds.) 2006. *Felicità e libertà. Economia e benessere in prospettiva relazionale*. cit., pp.95-132.

<sup>40</sup> Dewey, J. 1978. *Ethics*. cit., p. 247.

Hence, we can say that Dewey takes the utilitarian interest in pleasure seriously.

On the other hand, the second problem with a utilitarian conception of happiness is that it does not distinguish between the different existing levels: the first is the level of happiness understood as the fulfilment of desire, as the reaching of the desired end. But even if we understand happiness as the satisfaction of one's deepest needs and as self-development, this is a form of happiness which can be deeply compromised by one's character: a racist may desire to close his country to immigrants seeking political asylum, because "what has been said applies to the criminal as well as to the saint; to the miser and the prodigal and the wisely generous alike".<sup>41</sup> Therefore, we need a "conception of happiness as a standard",<sup>42</sup> that is we need a criterion to distinguish the true or good form of happiness.

This is the point where Dewey discriminates between Bentham and Mill, by generally appreciating the utilitarian social characterization of the good, with its resulting claims to democracy, equality and the structural criticism of established patterns of behaviour and thought. Their shared idea is that because "the true good is [...] an inclusive or expanding end", "the only end which fulfils these conditions is the social good".<sup>43</sup> The problem with Bentham, however, is that in his view "the desired object is private and personal pleasure".<sup>44</sup> On the contrary, Dewey seems to find already in Mill's thought one of his most distinguishing thesis, that is the idea that we are structurally social beings: "We cannot think of ourselves save as to some extent social beings".<sup>45</sup> This means that the happiness of the other people whom we are always more or less associated with is a basic part of our own happiness: we cannot but find our own good in

the good of others.<sup>46</sup> Sympathy or benevolence are not further traits of an individual, which can help him reach his or her ends; rather – together with negative social affections – they are a basic part of naturally social beings, whose well-being depends on and is constituted together with the well-being of others. In this way the common good proves to be a standard for distinguishing what sort of happiness we are pursuing.

Nonetheless, it may be argued that this aspect could be understood as almost partially convergent with the idea of happiness as *eudaimonia*, where virtue is of course not conceived as the property of an isolated and independent individual that can further establish relations with his or her counterparts, but is rather based on humans sharing a common world.

I would not say that Dewey is utterly foreign to the Aristotelian conception of happiness: he explicitly speaks in favour of Aristotele's *eudaimonia* in the second edition of his *Ethics*. What I am suggesting is that Dewey has something more to say about happiness and social ties, since he characterizes the common good as "the adequate aesthetic and intellectual development of the conditions of a common life".<sup>47</sup> "Aesthetic" here does not primarily refer to artistic activities, but rather to the possibility of enjoying perceived qualities of life and in particular what Dewey calls "communion actualized". Desires and pleasures are an integral part of our unreflexive experience and it is necessary to acknowledge that they play an important role even in the constitution of our happiness, in so far as this implies that our experiences must be brought their fulfilment, or consummation, and not merely be critically or reflexively evaluated. Hence, moving towards a conclusion, I would like to spend some words on Dewey's concept of consummatory experience.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibidem, p. 255.

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem, p. 251.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem, p. 261.

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem, p. 263.

<sup>45</sup> Ibidem, p. 268.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibidem, p. 269.

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem, p.272.

### 5. Consummatory experiences and life prosperity

The term *consummation* is introduced in the chapter of *Experience and Nature* entitled “*Nature, Ends and Histories*”, in order to present the thesis that in our immediate unreflexive experience objects are felt to be final: that they “have the same quality of immediate and absorbing finality that is possessed by things and acts dignified by the title of esthetic. For man is more preoccupied with enhancing life than in bare living”.<sup>48</sup>

This quote is especially interesting in two regards.

First of all, it suggests that human beings primarily tend to be absorbed by the world they live in – feeling assaulted, embraced or rejected; that they tend to enjoy or suffer the situations, things and individuals in the environment they are interacting with from within. In other words, human beings are inclined to complete their interactions until their fulfilment, their consummation.

The second interesting point is that Dewey makes this claim within the context of his naturalistic stance – a cultural-naturalistic, not reductionistic one. Against this background, it is clear that no organism is self-sufficient, as it develops and dies only in connection with the environment on which its life energies depend. But the peculiarity of human beings is that the energetic exchange is never oriented towards mere subsistence; rather, it also ensures the enhancement of life itself, of its prosperity and development. Dewey considers the anthropological results of the inquiries of Boas or Goldenweiser as reinforcing his thesis.

Furthermore, we have to remember that various Dewey scholars have pointed out that in *Art as Experience* the concept of consummation – when used to describe *one* experience that might range from the aesthetic aspects

in our ordinary experiences to eminently artistic forms of interaction – does not regard our immediate, unreflexive experiences, but rather a third phase of experiencing, where the results of a previous analytic, reflexive phase are absorbed and enjoyed in themselves.<sup>49</sup>

As already George Mead had understood after the publication of *Experience and Nature*, the idea of *consummatory experience* concerns the possibility of enjoying what we are doing without having to rush beyond it, in order to achieve a further purpose.<sup>50</sup> An experience can be described as consummatory when it succeeds in being complete, in coming to its fulfilment, in the sense that we do not limit ourselves to instrumentally pursuing a certain end, but enjoy even the means by which we reach it, and this fact produces a reinforcement or an enhancement of living. From this point of view, the idea of consummatory experience is very far from any form of teleological behaviour: for it requires us to pay attention to and take care of what we are doing so as to enjoy it in itself, without being wholly focused on the pursuit of a given end.

This point of view helps us appreciate what is peculiar in Dewey's conception of happiness, even when it is more or less understood in terms of communion, of the sharing of a common world, of the finding of individual identity in the contribution each person can provide: it

<sup>49</sup> See Mathur, D.C. 1998. *A Note on the Concept of “Consummatory Experience” in Dewey's Aesthetics*. In: Tiles, J.E. (ed.) *John Dewey: Critical Assessments, Volume III: Value, Conduct and Art*. cit., pp.367-373. See also Zeltner, P.M. 1975. *John Dewey's Aesthetic Philosophy*, Amsterdam: Gruner B.V., who takes into account Dewey's answer to Romanell's criticism (Romanell, P. 1949. “A Comment on Croce's and Dewey's Aesthetics”. In: *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 8/1949, pp.395-398; for Dewey's answer see Dewey, J. 1950. “Aesthetic Experience as a Primary Phase and as an Artistic Development”. In: *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 9/1950, pp.56-58. See too Kaminsky, J. 1957. “Dewey's Concept of an Experience”. In: *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 17/3, 1957, pp.316-330.

<sup>50</sup> See Mead, G.H. 1926. “The Nature of Aesthetic Experience”. cit.

<sup>48</sup> Dewey, J. 1988. *Experience and Nature*. cit., p.71.

refers not to any kind of Kantian normative ideal – or regulatory idea – but to the effective, consummatory enjoyment of this kind of state.

To conclude with a formula, from a Deweyan point of view a better life consists not just in a more rational, wiser or more virtuous life, but also in a more satisfying one, capable of enhancing our experiences at all levels. To quote Friedrich Schiller's *Letters*, which opened this essay:

Um aller Mißdeutungen vorzugeben, bemerke ich, daß, so oft hier von Freyheit die Rede ist, nicht diejenige gemeynt ist, die dem Menschen, als Intelligenz betrachtet, notwendig zukommt, und ihm weder gegeben noch genommen werden kann, sondern diejenige, welche sich auf seine gemischte Natur gründet.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Schiller, J.C.F. 1879. *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen*. cit. The quotation is from the note to Letter XIX.

**READING, INSTRUCTION, AND PLURALIST DEMOCRACY:  
THE CRITICAL PRAGMATISM OF CHARLES JOHNSON**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper offers a philosophical interpretation of the work of Charles Johnson, an award-winning African-American author of novels, short stories, critical reviews and philosophical essays. It highlights the pragmatist leanings that can be identified in his work by tracing a genealogy of black, cosmopolitan pragmatism from William James to W. E. B. DuBois to Alain Locke to Ralph Ellison to Charles Johnson. Johnson's unique views on reading, instruction through fiction and pluralist democracy, when fused together, result in what has been termed his "critical pragmatism." The paper concludes with a demonstration of such pragmatist themes in two short stories from Johnson's collection, SOULCATCHER.*

"...there is more engagement with philosophy—Western and Eastern—in my work than you will find anywhere in the history of black American literature."<sup>1</sup>

Charles Johnson

Charles Johnson is an award-winning American novelist, illustrator, reviewer, screen and teleplay writer, essayist, short fiction author, professor, literary scholar and philosopher—in short, a rare Renaissance man for our age. Among his four novels, *Middle Passage* won the 1990 National Book Award for Fiction, making Johnson the first African-American male to win the award since Ralph Ellison in 1953 for his *Invisible Man*. Johnson has, also, authored three collections of short stories, two books of cartoons, a scholarly work on aesthetics, a children's story, and a textbook for introductory philosophy. His work has been translated into eight languages, and has been the subject of a half dozen scholarly and critical studies. He was a 1998 MacArthur Fellow (genius award) and a 2002 recipient of an American Academy of Arts and Letters Award for Literature. Johnson holds a Ph.D. in philosophy from

Stony Brook University (New York), where he studied American and continental philosophy, and is the Pollock Professor for Excellence in English and Writing emeritus at the University of Washington in Seattle.

Readers of Charles Johnson have readily identified spiritual and idealistic leanings in his work. Such emphases may, at first glance, seem removed from the themes and concerns of pragmatism. For sure, philosophically astute scholars have analyzed in considerable detail the influences of Marxism, existentialism, phenomenology, the ancient Greeks and Buddhism on the thinking and writing of Johnson. But three recent black studies scholars—William Gleason, Linda Furgerson Selzer, and Gary Storhoff—have all argued convincingly that the philosophical tradition of American pragmatism, while present, has remained largely unexplored in Johnson's work. All three are literary specialists well versed in philosophy, and thereby appreciate the essential role philosophy, including pragmatism, plays in all of Johnson's writings, fiction and non-fiction. While all three have influenced the shaping of this paper, Gleason's exploration of what he calls Johnson's 'critical pragmatism' has had the greatest resonance with me and will be examined in some detail following brief citations from Selzer and Storhoff.

Selzer helpfully reminds us that continental philosophy, Eastern thought and pragmatism all gained new or renewed prominence in the post-war twentieth century academy "...specifically as alternatives to the entrenched dominance of analytic philosophy."<sup>2</sup> Moreover, such traditions enjoyed special importance to African-American philosophy students and scholars, all being philosophies "...whose insights seemed directly applicable to the economic, historical and psychological status of marginalized groups" (27). In the case of Johnson, Selzer contends that in phenomenology,

<sup>1</sup> William Nash, "A Conversation With Charles Johnson" in McWilliams, Jim, *Passing The Three Gates: Interviews With Charles Johnson*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004, p. 222

<sup>2</sup> Linda Furgerson Selzer, *Charles Johnson in Context*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009, p. 21. Page numbers for quotations from Selzer will be hereafter indicated in parentheses in the text following the quote.

Marxism and pragmatism he discovered ‘alternative epistemologies’ that provided “...a method for exploring the repressed subject position of African-Americans and a justification for practicing black philosophical fiction” (49). Taken together these philosophies merged in such a way as to enable Johnson to create his own, original contribution to a critical moment in the history of philosophy in America and to American philosophy more particularly. Accordingly, with regard to themes dear to pragmatism, Selzer directs readers to Johnson’s essay, “Philosophy and Black Fiction,” wherein he defines philosophical black fiction as “art that interrogates experience,” with the further claim that “philosophical hermeneutics and the exploration of meaning are native to all literary production.”<sup>3</sup>

Storhoff adds to an emerging portrait of Johnson’s pragmatism by pointing out that his view of history is fundamentally pragmatic in the sense that “Knowledge of the past is important primarily as a means toward a greater end: improving the health of the present. Johnson stresses the freedom and power of the present to use the past, recognizing that the past is always, like the nation itself, a continuous and evolving creation in the present moment.”<sup>4</sup> This insight applies to individuals as well.

Storhoff further characterizes Johnson’s vision as broadly ecological and melioristic, noting that American pragmatism is clearly one “...philosophical branch that becomes a thematic structure in Johnson’s work,” though “treated with subtlety and qualification” (16). Even further, he suggests a possible link with contemporary pragmatism, such as Cornel West’s

‘prophetic pragmatism,’ in which humanist ethics, democratic liberalism, and an Old Testament sense of justice are conjoined. But perhaps his most salient point resides in the contention that Johnson’s work adds to an “...American pragmatism that insists that all theoretical systems must begin with the actual, historically concrete, temporal experience of a person living through an ordinary life” (72). No wonder then that Johnson, the philosopher, became a writer of fiction.

I have thus far used the phrase ‘black philosophical pragmatism’ while my title refers to Johnson’s ‘critical pragmatism.’ What do these terms mean in the context of the present inquiry? In seeking an answer, we will be aided by the work of Princeton University scholar, William Gleason, and by brief, suggestive interpretations of some of Johnson’s critical reviews and two of his short stories. After summarizing Gleason’s basic argument and reflecting interpretively on two samples of Johnson’s short fiction, I will discuss further the terms in the title of this paper, drawing them together as a way of hopefully offering a persuasive case for Johnson as pragmatist.

In various of Johnson’s critical essays, book reviews and fictional works, such as his last novel, *Dreamer*, and the short story collection, *Soulcatcher*, Gleason finds his pragmatic vision emerging in its full complexity. Such historical fictions, he claims, “...advance Johnson’s pragmatic program for a contemporary politics of reading by imaginatively representing—often through explicit scenes of directed readings and practical instruction—the pluralist democracy he sees struggling to be born.”<sup>5</sup> Gleason, thereby, detects ways in which Johnson’s work resonates, for instance, with a particular strain of American pragmatism, “...cosmopolitan and

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Johnson, “Philosophy and Black Fiction,” in Byrd, Rudolph, ed., *I Call Myself An Artist: Writings By and About Charles Johnson*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999, pp. 80, 84.

<sup>4</sup> Gary Storhoff, *Understanding Charles Johnson*. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2004, p. 149. Page numbers for quotations from Storhoff will be hereafter indicated in parentheses in the text following the quote.

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<sup>5</sup> William Gleason, “‘Go There,’ The Critical Pragmatism of Charles Johnson,” in Connor, Marc C. and Nash, William R., eds., *Charles Johnson: The Novelist as Philosopher*. Jackson, MISS: University Press of Mississippi, 2007, p. 83. Page numbers for quotations from Gleason will be hereafter indicated in parentheses in the text following the quote.

pluralist in its leanings, that has had an ongoing significance for many black cultural workers” (83). In effect, he sees Johnson (over the past four plus decades) becoming increasingly committed to certain blueprints— suggestions for reading, thinking and living in contemporary America— which, in turn, represent what might be considered Johnson’s strategic interventions in vital historical and cultural debates that show surprising debts to a certain revised lineage in philosophical pragmatism. While Gleason does not claim that pragmatism is the only, or strongest, philosophical influence on Johnson’s work, this newly conceived lineage, placing him in an evolving strain of pragmatist concern and thought, amplifies our understanding of Johnson’s robust philosophical imagination. A brief look at this proposed line of development in pragmatist thought follows.

While a common shorthand version of the development of early pragmatism correctly draws a line from Emerson to James to Dewey, Gleason identifies another branch of the genealogical tree of particular importance in the context of African-American literary, cultural and philosophical history. This expanded lineage begins with James but extends to DuBois and Alain Locke. While noting important differences between these two figures (particularly in their studies of philosophy), Gleason claims that both embraced a central feature of James’s philosophical method, namely his ‘pragmatic pluralism.’ He then contrasts pragmatic pluralism with the better known earlier call for ‘cultural pluralism,’ a strategy of recognizing and preserving multiple and discrete ethnic groups in a celebration of what might be called identity logic. Gleason asserts that black philosophers like Locke followed James’s pragmatic pluralist lead and called for a deracialized and universalist approach to culture, perhaps best captured by the term, ‘cosmopolitanism.’ It is through “...the figure of the cosmopolitan...the person who belongs to the whole world---that African-American pragmatists of the early twentieth century projected their complex view of international human identity and

human creation, summed up in Locke’s credo that ‘culture has no color’ “ (84).

In critically interrogating ‘identity logic’, Gleason adds two additional figures to this expanded line of pragmatist evolution—Ralph Ellison and Charles Johnson. He appropriates a useful, though perhaps puzzling, phrase from scholar, Ross Posnock, namely, ‘antirace race men and race women,’ and applies it to both Ellison and Johnson, whom he characterizes as pluralist, democratic pragmatists. Such figures “...do not believe in essential racial identities (thus they are ‘antirace’) and yet...act in what they perceive as the best interests of the race, instead of sitting idly by” (85). Such literary artists vigorously assert the freedom of art from a binding racial representativeness while simultaneously rooting their work deeply in black history, experience and culture, seeking, if you will, a form of race uplift. This sort of pragmatist legacy, of course, resists the separatism (racial, cultural and philosophical) explicit, for example, in the Black Arts Movement of the 1960’s and 70’s, a movement to which the young Charles Johnson was initially attracted.

Overall I tend to concur with Gleason’s judgment that Johnson is arguably the best example of a contemporary black writer who belongs to and extends this important and influential branch of the pragmatist tradition. Put more concretely, Gleason identifies Johnson as “...the most salient contemporary practitioner of the cosmopolitan pragmatism articulated by DuBois, Locke and Ellison” (86). However, unlike other artist/scholars of his generation, Johnson’s participation in the pragmatic turn of the twentieth century reveals itself on several levels and in very public ways. Through his many critical essays, op-ed pieces, and book reviews for leading publications,<sup>6</sup> along with his award winning fiction, he

<sup>6</sup> Gleason champions Johnson’s critical essays and book reviews, in particular, as powerful loci for his philosophic and pragmatist concerns, claiming that his reviews “...

has positioned himself as a very public antirace race man. Given all these factors, Gleason concludes, "Johnson stands as the most important late-twentieth/early twenty-first century black practitioner of the Jamesian pragmatic pluralism of DuBois, Locke and Ellison. " Moreover, "Johnson is the inheritor, and also necessarily the updater, not only of their democratic cosmopolitanism, their suspicion of identity logic, and their sense of 'overlap as the condition of culture,' but also of their roles as public intellectuals" (87). In sum, Gleason proposes a genealogy of black, cosmopolitan pragmatism leading from James to Dubois to Locke to Ellison to Johnson. The most significant and recurring pragmatist themes, linking these figures together, appear then to be, 1) pragmatist pluralism, 2) a focus on relations and intersubjectivity, 3) democratic cosmopolitanism, 4) abiding suspicion of essentialist identity logic, and 5) exploration of the role of public intellectual.

Johnson's life experience and philosophical leanings align him with the social and political dimension of pragmatist thought, rather than strictly the metaphysics, epistemology or logic of the pragmatist tradition. As such, we note something distinctive in his work, namely, a complex relationship between writing and reading, instruction (non-didactic), democracy and prospects for

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evince a similar [to his fiction] interventional and instructional pragmatics"(88). In his very first review (1977) of Richard Wright's *American Hunger*, Johnson invokes William James in the first paragraph, proceeding to challenge both the segregatory impulse of much reviewing and solipsistic aesthetics of recent works of fiction. His main point in the review is that Wright is a deeply gifted 'archeologist of consciousness,' a 'dramatist of an open black consciousness.' As such he revitalizes our perceptions and values, our ways of seeing others and our world. In numerous other reviews, Johnson emphasizes the move to intersubjective communication as a pre-condition for change in the world. In a pragmatist spirit, he often returns to the themes of interconnection, the priority of relations over isolated things and beings, the communicative and pedagogic functions of language, and the role of interpretation as an opening to the other and the world.

social change. This returns us to the terms employed in the title of this paper. In brief, his fiction and non-fiction writings frequently offer an educational and democratic critique in which Johnson subtly guides his readers through the crucial questions of what, how and why to read. His goal is always exploration of ideas and liberating instructional insight rather than sheer dogmatism, as he seeks to provide active and practical directions to readers. He presupposes a basic and necessary relationship between good writing (literary art), responsible reading, and clear (critical) thinking for the health of a democratic society. As pragmatists like Dewey have insisted, democracy requires the capacity for, and practice of, critical reasoning if it is to resist the enemies of the democratic process itself. Johnson's 'aesthetic instructions' (e.g., writing in different styles, developing the wholeness of characters), therefore, are never strictly for the sake of aesthetics or culture in isolation, but rather for an invigorated democratic practice. His own very personal aesthetic stance is, thus, cast in a language recalling the cosmopolitan and universalist concerns identified earlier in James, Dubois, Locke and Ellison. Such a perspective entails that each of us as persons, as well as each society, is best understood in terms of what Johnson likes to call interdependent cultural mongrels (consider, for instance, his story, "Dr. King's Refrigerator"). A pointed example of this perspective is reflected in a somewhat reluctant Johnson gradually evolving from early criticism to a place wherein he fully appreciates and praises Ellison for his integrative, pluralist, democratic pragmatism.

Reading, instruction and pluralist democracy, as conceived and practiced by Johnson, are, when fused together, what Gleason describes as Johnson's 'critical pragmatism.' Johnson himself once stated. "I read for three reasons: to laugh, to cry, and to learn something."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Johnson, "A Symposium on Contemporary American Fiction," *Michigan Quarterly Review* (1987), p. 755.

In reference to what could be termed a contemporary politics of reading, he reminds us that reading (and writing, of course) can be a radical, ethical act of critique and catalyst for change. In this he echoes Camus or the Sartre of *What Is Literature?* If undertaken with critical evaluation, reading can and should be at times focused on social problems and directed toward social change. Indeed, authors can, through their art, offer practical instruction. Such instruction is implicit to fictions that teach. For Johnson, fiction or, better literary art, is never simply for entertainment or temporary distraction from life. Fiction must involve vital engagement with lived experience and interpretation, and, in the best examples, stimulates critical insight and breakthrough learning. Pluralist democracy, as noted earlier when articulating a plausible black pragmatist genealogy, is then for Johnson a cosmopolitan reality, or better yet, a prospect, struggling to be born or fully realized.

This complex, multi-layered relationship between reading, instruction and thought, and democracy is what yields, in its highly unique mixture, Johnson's 'critical pragmatism.' This particular sensibility is on display in numerous of Johnson's short stories, including those found in *Soulcatcher and Other Stories*.<sup>8</sup> Some brief, interpretive suggestions concerning two of the stories should help to illustrate Johnson's outlook on reading, instruction and democratic social change.

In "Poetry and Politics" artistic freedom is the cherished goal, while interwoven with racial and gender issues. In the narrative, Johnson stages a conversation between celebrated African-American poet, Phyllis Wheatley, and her mistress about Phyllis's latest poem, a rather poor attempt at protest art. In this scene, says Gleason, "Johnson dramatizes what are surely his own concerns about the perceived necessity for African-American artists to speak truth to power rather than to beauty"

(97). In truth, for Johnson there need not be an either-or choice. Speaking truth to power and beauty can and should occur simultaneously. The racial and aesthetic ambiguity of the narrative is captured in a final scene wherein the mistress reads Phyllis a letter from non-other than George Washington, who thanks and praises her for an earlier poem celebrating his virtues. He applauds her genius as a poet (not as a woman or African-American), while revealing that he resisted having the poem published for fear it would bring accusations of vanity upon him. For Phyllis the confounding lesson of the letter is highlighted when Washington signs off with an expression of his great respect, referring to himself as her obedient and humble servant. The word, 'servant,' causes Phyllis to ask her mistress, "This is a complicated time, isn't it?, a multi-layered question to say the least. So, what instruction are readers to take from the overt reversal of the racial and gender power dynamic that ends the story? What might it suggest about intellectual and artistic freedom that triumphs over stereotypes, hostility and socially structured role expectations? What might it imply about open-mindedness and respect for integrity in artistic production? What does it reveal about interconnection, dialogue, and democratic respect for diversity? The story provokes questions, but does not give firm or final answers.

In "The People Speak" Johnson creates a fictional newspaper article to reveal to his readers the unanimous vote taken by roughly three thousand black Philadelphians to reject a proposed African colonization plan promoted by prominent black leaders. In "Poetry and Politics" Phyllis Wheatley had resisted becoming a pamphleteer for the purpose of redressing injustice. In her thought, while such writings, including news articles, may stir people for a moment, in the long course of history they will be forgotten just as the injustices they assailed will be forgotten. At best, such items may be preserved as historical documents, but never carry the power of art or philosophical argument. Johnson himself

<sup>8</sup> Charles Johnson, *Soulcatcher and Other Stories: Twelve Powerful Tales About Slavery*. New York: Harcourt, 1998.

is a former journalist, and taking both short stories together one can envision a lively debate ensuing over the primacy of poetry or art over journalism and propaganda, or vice versa. Which form induces a growing public discussion and broad-reaching social change? What varied roles do each play in the life of democracy? Which brings instruction that carries an impact? When considering all the *Soulcatcher* stories, we witness Johnson's gradually intensifying embrace of Ellison's pragmatic pluralist aesthetics, accompanied by an evolving political vision requiring a measure of flexibility and growth over fixedness. As Gleason proposes, "...by dramatizing critical thinking and authorial choice...Johnson's virtuosic stories instantiate, at the level of form [and content], the complex decisions and debates necessary for a pluralist democracy to thrive"(99).

I would hope that what has been at least suggested here may provide some impetus for further examination of Johnson as perhaps the premiere inheritor of the Jamesian pragmatic pluralism practiced by key black intellectuals and artists in the twentieth century. Without question, Johnson's writing equally embraces politics, culture, philosophy and history. Given this synthesized, mongrel mixture of interests and concerns, we may well be left to wonder, following Gleason, whether his prime contribution to contemporary literary and philosophical discourse "...is his pragmatist--and quite political--interest in the enabling and inherently integrative processes of democracy, processes that for Johnson are best understood and assessed through acts of reading, thinking and critical interpretation" (99-100). In his deep and abiding care for the world—and changing, revitalizing the world via the agency of the writer/critic/philosopher--perhaps we can see glimmers of why Johnson adopted the role of 'critical pragmatist' in the first place.

## RORTY AND SHUSTERMAN ON POPULAR ART\*

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*ABSTRACT: Works of Richard Rorty and Richard Shusterman on art and aesthetic issues are usually categorized as pragmatist views, one of the basic characteristic of which is the refusal of a profound difference between works of art and products of popular culture. In this paper I examine and try to contest the arguments given by Rorty and Shusterman for this idea. The basic claim I shall argue for is that there is a functional difference between works of art and products of entertainment, the generic difference of which should not be blurred even if we acknowledge the existence of borderline cases.*

Denial of the difference between high culture and popular culture has been argued for variously in a series of theories, beginning with theories of pop-art, Cultural Studies, postmodern thinkers, and pragmatist aesthetics. In the paper it is shown that Shusterman's arguments against a distinction between high art and entertainment products are not conclusive and do not establish the impossibility of the distinction. I try to develop the distinction following Adorno and Arendt, taking the sharp critique of "culture industry" as a point of departure. In the footsteps of Arendt it can be claimed that the variety of popular culture can be understood better, if related to a need for amusement and entertainment. Arendt's position recognises the need for entertainment as part of the biological life process, and this need for entertainment must be basically distinguished from art as intellectual orientation or a specific pleasure with intellectual content.

Works of Richard Rorty and Richard Shusterman on art and aesthetic issues are usually categorized as

pragmatist views, one of the basic characteristic of which is the refusal of a profound difference between works of art and products of popular culture. In this paper, after locating the approach among some others formulated in a similar vein, I will examine and try to contest the arguments given by Rorty and Shusterman for this idea. The basic claim I shall argue for is that there is a functional difference between works of art and products of entertainment, the generic difference of which should not be blurred even if we acknowledge the existence of borderline cases. This is, in turn, not to say that I seek to give an essentialist account of artworks. It may sound like a paradox, but in what follows I seek to establish a substantial difference between art (high art) and entertainment (low/popular art) without defending a substantialist or essentialist concept of art. Against this latter inspiration Adorno himself could be cited: "The concept of art is located in a historically changing constellation of elements; it refuses definition."<sup>1</sup> Works of art constitute a field of human experience with an extreme individuality of its objects. It has often been remarked that the plurality of different branches of art itself might be regarded as a problem: "art and arts" – as Adorno entitled one of his essays. So I am not trying to give a unified sufficient definition of artworks, but will rather argue for discerning features that make artworks differ from entertainment products. What I am going to elaborate in works of art concerns a basic dimension inherent to them that could be and has been regarded as a clarification and enrichment of individual human life, be it in the form of artistic cognition or in the form of beauty.

Denial of the difference between high culture and popular culture has been argued for variously in a series of theories, beginning with theories of pop-art, Cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London – New York: Continuum, 2002), 2.

Studies, postmodern thinkers, and pragmatist aesthetics. More specifically, there are some who think that the distinction can be understood but gradually, and some who think that the distinction cannot even be drawn gradually, because it simply does not make any sense. The obvious flaw of the latter position is that it cannot do justice to manifest deep differences between, say, Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* and a soap opera. Some theoreticians of pop-art (Sonntag, Alloway, Chambers) declare that there is no difference between ordinary products, products of commercial culture and artworks. Since the 1960s scholars of the research program Cultural Studies (Stuart Hall, Paul Willis, Dick Hebdige) cast explicitly doubt on the tenability of a distinction of "high" and "low" culture, and they made considerable efforts to recognize and to upgrade everyday culture and the culture of different social strata. Numerous philosophers and thinkers of postmodernism (Lyotard, Jameson, Baudrillard, Huyssen) share the firm refusal of this distinction. For the other position holding the difference of high culture and popular culture to be merely a gradual one, pragmatist aesthetics (Richard Rorty, Richard Shusterman) can be taken as an example. Each of these conceptions either claims or suggests that there is no essential difference or no difference at all. In what follows I shall focus on the pragmatist version of this idea as elaborated by Rorty and Shusterman.

Turning specifically to Rorty's work, the first thing usually associated with him is probably not so much aesthetics, but the "linguistic turn".<sup>2</sup> Given that we take Rorty here as a representative of "pragmatist aesthetics", the

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth mentioning that the requirements articulated in the linguistic turn might be followed back at least to Aristotle's methodological formula *pollakhos legetai* ("we talk of ... in manifold ways"). The point of Aristotle's methodological requirement was the task at the beginning of an investigation that it should be preceded by the clarification of the ways we are talking about it.

pragmatism implied herein should be spelled out first. A certain tension emerges immediately, if one tries to rely on features generally attributed to pragmatism: pragmatism is held to be connected somehow to the primacy of practice as opposed to theory, and it is in this sense, for example, that we talk of a pragmatist theory of truth, according to which a proposition might be regarded as true, if it functions in practice. Now, the difficulty arises, if we consider that aesthetic experiences are inherent to contemplative or, in a broad sense, to theoretical situations. It is characteristic for such situations that one cannot really oppose "practical relevance" and "mere speculation" – an obviously misleading difference in connection with phenomena where there is only contemplation. The first sentences of Shusterman's *Pragmatist Aesthetics* address this tension, and develop an alternative understanding of "pragmatist aesthetics": with regard to aesthetic issues the adjective "pragmatist" can not only be taken to mean a priority of praxis over theory, but also the priority of aesthetic experience over artwork as John Dewey developed it.<sup>3</sup> Since Rorty has in fact not talked about aesthetic experience, Rorty and Shusterman could be taken here as different versions of a pragmatic understanding of art and culture.

As to theory of art, it should be remarked at the outset that the core of Rorty's work does not lie in aesthetics; it is not a philosophy of art he is famous for. This is, however, not to say that his relation to art is uninteresting or simplistic. To illustrate his interest in art, or at least in literature, it suffices to remember that during his intellectual development Rorty left his original field of research, i.e. philosophy, for something else – and at this point of my argument it might remain open

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (London: Blackwell, 1992).

whether this “something else” be literature, art, or literary studies. Accordingly, a reflection on art and literature seems to belong essentially to Rorty’s philosophical development. Under closer inspection, however, this impression needs further clarification, for Rorty’s reflections on art and literature must be seen in the light of his in-depth critique of philosophy, and the importance of and his interest in art and literature grow out of this critical approach. Philosophy must be modified or assimilated to something else, and this is in Rorty’s eyes, roughly speaking, art and literature. To put it differently, it is not Rorty’s primary interest to give an account of art and literature for themselves, but they constitute the field into which the critical modification of philosophy leads. The interesting question whether it is intended to be an enlargement or a correction cannot be examined in detail here<sup>4</sup>. In the present context it should be stressed that Rorty’s approach thus conceived is less sensitive from the outset to differences of branches of art, to diversity in levels of artworks, and to specialized intra-aesthetic questions in general. Let us see more closely what Rorty hopes to gain from art, and especially from literature.

In order to clarify this, the critical distance Rorty developed towards philosophy in his most well-known book *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* should be considered. As a central thesis of the book, Rorty claims that philosophy, since Plato and especially since Descartes and Kant, has been held captive by an image of the mind as a mirror of nature. And in connection with it, philosophy conceives of knowledge and language as accurately representing in thought the world

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<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that this figure of thought, i.e. a critical modification can even be extended to Rorty’s treatment of democratic tasks, including the idea of a “conversation of mankind” serving as an encompassing platform and motivation both for philosophy, literature, and art.

independent of mind. In this image, Rorty claims, philosophy attributed to itself the role of the foundational discipline for the rest of culture because of its special understanding of the fundamental problems about consciousness, knowledge, truth, and reality. As a general tendency, the book characterised this image as misleading and contingent, and drew thus the conclusion of its uselessness in present days. In fact, Rorty argued for a post-philosophical attitude that favours a pragmatic sensibility about knowledge focused not on whether we accurately represent the world but instead on what people do to successfully cope with the world. This approach seeks the freedom of description rather than truth, and renounces to find the single true vocabulary at the foundation of all vocabularies. As a consequence, the plurality of incommensurable ways of talking about ourselves and the world does not appear as a problem, and the role of the philosopher as judge of the rest of culture comes to be replaced by the public intellectual, informed dilettante, by “the polypragmatic, Socratic intermediary between various discourses”.<sup>5</sup> This role of the informed dilettante was attributed by Rorty to hermeneutic philosophy which he outlined primarily on the basis of Hans-Georg Gadamer’s *Truth and method*. It is less important in present context to examine Rorty’s interpretation of Gadamer’s hermeneutics; much more important is the mediatory function Rorty ascribes to hermeneutics. In his conception, hermeneutics is the proper reaction to the permanent incommensurability we find ourselves in. With regard to incommensurability,

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 317. This is the role Rorty himself intended to play. “Rorty claimed that this was the view held in common by Dewey, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger. However, his arguments were drawn primarily from analytic philosophers: from Wilfrid Sellars, Willard Van Orman Quine, and Donald Davidson” (David R. Hiley, “Rorty among the continentals”, in: Alan D. Schrift (ed.), *The history of continental philosophy*, vol. 6 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 405-6.

it could be shown that Rorty's relying on Gadamer is misleading. Being well aware of individuality and finitude, Gadamer develops an idea of translation that overcomes the simple declaration of incommensurability, as we find it in Rorty. For Gadamer, it is always possible to translate between languages, vocabularies, and cultures.

It is Rorty's "anti-Philosophy" that links his thought to art and literature.<sup>6</sup> And what Rorty hopes to get especially from literature and in general from art must be understood in terms of what philosophy fails to give. Furthermore, it was the political consequences of his anti-foundationalism that increasingly dominated his thinking. Having abandoned foundationalism, Rorty found no more central functions in philosophy as far as Western culture was concerned. He sought to follow instead the "adventure of the West" still to be found in Dickens, Kundera, and others. While repeating time to time the critique of traditional philosophy, his subsequent work was an evaluation of contingency and its political consequences, receiving inspiration from literary as much as philosophical sources. This interpretation of contingency was elaborated in the character of the *liberal ironist* central to *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*.

In a wider context, Rorty defines freedom as recognition of contingency, and consequently attributes to culture the task to eliminate, to therapy metaphysical needs desiring for fundamental justifications [KI 87?]. The central figure of this conception is the ironist representing the attitude Rorty thinks proper to problems of our world. He defines the ironist as follows:

"I use 'ironist' to name the sort of person who faces up to the contingency of his or her own most central beliefs and desires – someone sufficiently historicist and nominalist to have abandoned the ideal that those central beliefs and desires refer back to something beyond the reach of time and chance."<sup>7</sup>

The figure of the ironist recognizes the groundlessness of his final vocabulary, and claims, consequently, the groundlessness of any vocabulary. And an ironist was liberal when among those ungrounded beliefs and desires was the "hope that suffering will be diminished, that the humiliation of human beings by other human beings may cease".<sup>8</sup> Rorty develops a vision of culture for finite human beings without any "links to something Beyond."<sup>9</sup> As Espen Hammer puts it, "[d]espite his eclectic use of motifs from thinkers as different from one another as Nietzsche, Dewey, Wittgenstein, Davidson and Rawls, it is abundantly clear that Rorty was more concerned with his cultural vision than with the nitty-gitty of particular philosophical debates. In this regard he was, like several of his intellectual heroes, Nietzsche in particular, first and foremost a philosopher of modern culture."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), xv.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Democracy in Rorty's sense is best characterized by his description of Dewey's conception: "For both Whitman and Dewey, the terms "America" and "democracy" are shorthand for a new conception of what it is to be human – a conception which has no room for obedience to a nonhuman authority, and in which nothing save freely achieved consensus among human beings has any authority at all." (Richard Rorty, *Achieving our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998, 18).

<sup>9</sup> Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), xiii.

<sup>10</sup> See Espen Hammer, "Contingency, Disenchantment, and Nihilism. Rorty's Vision of Culture", in: Matthias Buschmeier/Espen Hammer (eds.), *Pragmatismus und Hermeneutik. Beiträge zu Richard Rortys Kulturpolitik* (Hamburg: Meiner 2011), 127.

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<sup>6</sup> Hiley, "Rorty among the continentals", 409.

It is within this conceptual framework that Rorty considers art and culture, and regards the difference of high culture and popular culture to be deceptive, since in his view it should be seen as merely gradual. Rorty holds literature, movie, and television to be the most relevant factors in moral education and moral life, because he thinks that novels and soap operas can much better describe and draw attention to social problems, discrimination, loneliness, and poverty than abstract philosophical treatises. It is even more important in democracies where "politics becomes a matter of sentimental calls for alleviation of suffering rather than moral calls to greatness."<sup>11</sup> Literature leads, therefore, to concrete questions concerning "what we can do so as to get along with one another, how we can arrange things so as to be comfortable with one another, how institutions can be changed so that everyone's right to be understood has a better chance of being gratified."<sup>12</sup> And so he concludes that it is not philosophers but poets and engineers who "produce startling new projects for achieving the greatest happiness of the greatest number."<sup>13</sup> Literature presents various descriptions and perspectives, and in this way it is the best defence against simplification. It should be underlined that in Rorty's argumentation a single branch of art, literature, plays a pre-eminent role, and what is more, a single genre, the novel gets a high estimation because of its multi-perspectivism, relying on Kundera's principle "L'esprit du roman est l'esprit de complexité". The fact that Rorty, it appears, has not paid any attention to music, or visual art, except literature and movies, seems to restrict his arguments to a considerable extent, since he simply generalizes what he hopes to get from

literature to art. Culture becomes the liberal placeholder of what has been the task of philosophy.<sup>14</sup>

Let us turn now to Richard Shusterman's position as elaborated in his *Pragmatist Aesthetics* on popular art. As he remarked elsewhere, he thinks that even terminology on this topic implies preferences: "While those sympathetic to popular art call it such, those who traditionally opposed it prefer to label it "mass art" – the term "mass" suggesting an undifferentiated (and possibly even subhuman) conglomerate rather than merely the idea of mass-media technology."<sup>15</sup> In his *Pragmatist Aesthetics* he is very explicit on refusing a sharp distinction between high and low art, but develops this idea as part of an over-all philosophical project and not only for its own sake. The ambitious project is the "emancipatory enlargement of the aesthetic" involving a re-conception of art "in more liberal terms, freeing it from its exalted cloister, where it is isolated from life and contrasted to more popular forms of cultural expression. Art, life, and popular culture all suffer from these entrenched divisions and from the consequently narrow identification of art with elite fine art. My defence of the aesthetic legitimacy of popular art and my account of ethics as an art of living both aim at a more expansive and democratic reconception of art."<sup>16</sup>

The aesthetic legitimacy, thus, is just an element of the argumentation, and I cannot deal here with this over-all structure of Shusterman's project. In explaining the

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Rorty, "Heidegger, Kundera, and Dickens", in: *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 81.

<sup>12</sup> Rorty, "Heidegger, Kundera, and Dickens," 78.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

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<sup>14</sup> "In Rorty's ideal culture, we see ourselves as profoundly alone in a wholly disenchanted world, more geared towards invention than discovery, without any authorities other than the ones we provisionally constitute as political and cultural animals in the widest sense." (Espen Hammer, "Contingency, Disenchantment, and Nihilism", 126.)

<sup>15</sup> Richard Shusterman, "Popular art", in Stephen Davies et al. (eds.). *A Companion to Aesthetics*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), 476.

<sup>16</sup> Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, xv.

project Shusterman also makes it clear that for this project John Dewey figures as the principal point of orientation, whereas Rorty would be much less a contribution to pragmatist aesthetics: even if there are “important contributions by contemporary pragmatists to certain aesthetic issues – for example, Rorty on the ethical role of literature, and Margolis and Fish on interpretation”, he insists on the necessity to develop pragmatist aesthetics at all.<sup>17</sup> As to the distinction between high art and popular art, Shusterman succinctly puts his view as follows:

“My Deweyan pragmatism makes me not only critical of the alienating esotericism and totalizing claims of high art, but acutely suspicious of any essential and unbridgeable divide between its products and those of popular culture. Moreover, history itself clearly shows us that the popular entertainment of one culture (e.g. Greek or even Elizabethan drama) can become the high classics of a subsequent age. Indeed, even within the very small cultural period, a given work can function either as popular or as high art depending on how it is interpreted and appropriated by its public.”<sup>18</sup>

This refusal goes, however, hand in hand with an image of high art which is highly problematic, since it focuses to a high extent on the allegedly conservative role in preserving social differences and hierarchies. Shusterman’s view on the conservative character of high art can be summarized in three counter-arguments: 1. The first way the tradition of high art promotes established and oppressive social orders lies in its “pious respect for the past, an adulatory nostalgia achieved through the mystifying beauty of past works of art. [...] Art thus provides an oppressive conservative establishment with a most powerful weapon to sustain existing privilege and domination, to affirm the status quo and the past which engendered it, despite all the

misery and injustice they contain.”<sup>19</sup> 2. A second argument against high art as an oppressive social evil is that it provides a “devastating strategy by which the socio-cultural elite can at once disguise and assert its proud claim to intrinsic superiority through privileged association with high art’s illustrious tradition.”<sup>20</sup> 3. Last but not least, high art is held by Shusterman to support “a wretched and iniquitous social reality by providing a substitute imaginary realm where our frustrated desires for a happier life and our just demands for a better society are displaced, sublimated, and gratified – but in imagination only. Progressive praxis is thus paralyzed through the hallucinatory bliss of what Marcuse calls art’s ‘real illusion.’”<sup>21</sup>

Shusterman unmistakably relies on the position developed by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who explains the difference of high culture and low culture in the light of differences in social position. According to his opinion, consumption of products of popular culture and that of high culture should not be regarded as correlative to its content, but as an expression of different social strata which communicate their social status through habits of consumption. It is the process of accumulating of field specific symbolic capital that is the main drive behind the consumption of cultural products, whereas the whole process exhibits mechanisms of preservation of deep social differences and borderlines. Bourdieu, however, does not really refuse the difference of high culture and popular culture, but explains the difference in an entirely functional way that corresponds to theories mentioned above. Contrary to Bourdieu’s description, Shusterman hopes to get new possibilities from popular culture, as it is clear from the programmatic passages quoted above from the introduction of *Pragmatist Aesthetics*.

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<sup>17</sup> Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, xvi. “Pragmatist aesthetics began with John Dewey – and almost ended there.” (ibid)

<sup>18</sup> Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, 169.

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<sup>19</sup> Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, 141.

<sup>20</sup> Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, 144.

<sup>21</sup> Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, 146.

Shusterman's illustration in favour of his argument is William Shakespeare who was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century America both high theatre and vaudeville. Shusterman claims that all features we find in high art can be seen in so-called mass culture products as well, and on the basis of this he tries to challenge the distinction between them. He wants to show on the case of rap and hip-hop that these "low" music directions meet criteria that were traditionally reserved for high art. Pop music contradicts, thus, all kind of distinctions between "high" and "low", and it especially obliterates the general misevaluation in the "culture industry". With the increasing estimation of popular works it becomes easier to attribute a social function to art (tolerance, plurality, and so forth).

Let me begin with the reference to Shakespeare where the objection made by Shusterman concerns the fragility of canons. This idea might be understood as follows: The claim that there is a categorical difference between amusement and high art provokes certain concerns about the possibility to judge whether something belongs to this or that category. One could legitimately ask what kind of criteria are at work here? Is there a list of products that could be categorized as artworks, whereas other products seem to be popular artworks, but being not art at all, categorized instead as amusement and entertainment? Are there canons that can help us to distinguish art from entertainment? In order to respond to this counter-argument let us specify the claim what is at stake here. Shusterman attacks a thesis that might be called the claim on rigid canons. Canons are, then, rigid in the sense that they should enable us to decide one for all whether something belongs to this or that category.

It might be useful to have a look at the example of Shakespeare analyzed in detail by Levine who wanted to establish the claim from the perspective of history of art that there is only an unstable and vague dividing line between high culture and popular culture. On a wide scale of examples from Shakespeare through jazz, opera to Max Brothers, Levine believes to be able to demonstrate the dynamic change and arbitrariness of dividing lines of this kind.<sup>22</sup> One might object, however, that his argument does not at all show the impossibility of the contrast. The re-qualification of products and achievements in entertainment into high culture always takes place retrospectively, and it is not at all very unstable. And even if there were borderline cases hard to decide, it would not show the impossibility of the distinction. Under closer inspection the borderline cases can be judged at least in terms of the intention of the author, since the pretension of the work or product is usually not very complicated to identify.

Furthermore, the alleged instability in classifying high art or mass culture is in overwhelming majority of the cases one-sided: we might see several times that products originally made for purposes of amusement become qualified as object of art appreciation – but for the opposite case there are no convincing examples. Artworks do not become products of entertainment industry in a way that they could lose their character of artwork, even if they might be or might become unexciting, boring artworks. What has been canonized can be sometimes re-evaluated, but it does not suffer the loss of its status of an artwork. This is bound up with the fact that in popular culture there are no classics in a comparable sense to high art. Even if their definitive list might be and, in fact, is open to debate and to historical

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<sup>22</sup> Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow. The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

change, classical artworks exhibit an intensity and depth of meaning in a way that they are often read, heard, and consumed again and again by consecutive generations. With regard to soap operas, pop music, graffiti and the like a similar idea cannot even be conceived of. There are some, for example Lüddeman, who think that popular culture has its classics, but the examples he gives – early songs of a band, first series of a soap opera, posters – show the weakness of this idea<sup>23</sup>. These cases are clearly not similar to classical works of art that we deal with again and again.

Contrary to this, I would argue that there are canons, but they are not as rigid as their opponents like to characterize them. Instead, we have *flexible canons*, the functions of which explain their flexibility. Canon is in Ancient Greek a word for rules and became well-known, when the Catholic Church designated the texts constituting the “true Bible” as canonical. The term’s bad reputation in the humanities comes first of all from the standard counter-argument highlighting instability as characteristic feature of canons. It is easy to realize that the core of the counter-argument relies on the alleged rigidity of canons: canons decide once and for all what belongs to it and what does not. By contrast, a more flexible understanding of culture could be attained, if detached from the idea of eternal validity. The classical scholar Manfred Fuhrmann suggests a definition of canons in this vein: they are mediating means whose function is to prepare a pre-selection of the huge amount of works in a certain field. In light of this function it is clear that canons cannot be but flexible.<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, the case of Shakespeare is not so simple, because he was not a typical producer of popular culture

in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, as Johann Sebastian Bach was not a typical liturgical musician either. To make the case Shusterman wants to, it should be shown that not only exceptional works but also average ones can be classified and re-classified as classics in later epochs. And it is, of course, not the case: not every script-writer had the talent of Shakespeare, not every organist had the genius of Johann Sebastian Bach. There is a general additional point to make here. Classifications function, so to speak, in a one-way modus. If a piece, a work ever was held to be worth reading or hearing, it generally does not lose this evaluation. In other words, cases of getting omitted from a canon are significantly rarer than the opposite, let alone the case of sudden intellectual and cultural changes when they easily explain radical changes in canons (e.g. the Christian re-figuration of classical literature).

It is important to realize that Shusterman’s arguments against a distinction between high art and entertainment products are far from being evident and do not succeed in establishing the impossibility of the distinction. In what follows I cannot but sketch without really entering into details a possible development of the distinction following Theodor W. Adorno and Hannah Arendt. Taking the sharp critique of “culture industry” given by Horkheimer and Adorno as a point of departure, it is clear that the description of *Dialectics of Enlightenment* gives clues to an approach sensitive to the differences of works of art and entertainment products. In the footsteps of Hannah Arendt it can be claimed, furthermore, that the variety of all that is categorized as mass culture or as popular culture can be understood better, if related to a need for amusement and entertainment. Arendt’s position is attractive, because it recognises, in contrast to the theory of culture industry, the need for entertainment and amusement, in so far as the need for leisure is held to belong to the biological life

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<sup>23</sup> Stefan Lüddemann, *Kultur. Eine Einführung* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2010) 99.

<sup>24</sup> Manfred Fuhrmann, *Bildung* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2002).

process. As part of the biological life process, entertainment is as much a must for each individual as food or health. and so on. This need for entertainment, in turn, must be basically distinguished from art as intellectual orientation or a specific pleasure with intellectual content. From this point of view, artworks and products of mass culture are rendered to different dimensions of human life, the former to the world and worldliness, and the latter to the biological life-process. The function of art might be clarified through the distinguished role of the artist, in so far as he is “the authentic producer of those objects which every civilization leaves behind as the quintessence and the lasting testimony of the spirit which animated it.”<sup>25</sup> The basic thesis suggests then, that it is possible and fruitful to make a difference between high culture and popular culture, not in the sense of a gradual difference, but as a generic difference, a difference in kind. Conversely, confusing high art with popular culture, endangers the role art might play in individual human life. Mass society, the common conviction of Adorno and Arendt says, makes culture and art to undergo an essential transformation in a negative sense, although they differ in explicating this negative effect.

If we consider first Adorno’s oeuvre, we find the idea of a double, dialectical character of art. On the one hand, art can be mass deception (*Massenbetrug*) and manipulation, wherewith it contributes to maintaining the existing order of late capitalism. To analyze and exhibit this stabilizing feature of mass culture was one of the main theoretical tasks of the chapter entitled “Culture industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. But on the other hand, autonomous artwork can be the only place of freedom

against the existing order (*das Bestehende*), an administrated world repressing, in his opinion, all spontaneity. This double character of art could be shown by an interpretation of his two major works *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (with Horkheimer) and the posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory*. Even though *Dialectic of Enlightenment* also contains a twofold description of art, it is rather *Aesthetic Theory* that offers an elaborated version of the idea of art as freedom in administrated society (*verwaltete Gesellschaft*). The term mass culture does not occur, to my knowledge, in the book, but the formula culture industry indicates such reservations that are usually formulated against mass culture. The art of mass society means a double process, partly a deprivation of culture, partly an intellectualization of entertainment, which end in a fusion of culture and art. It is essential for understanding the conception of culture industry that it does not try to give a neutral, objective description of artistic and cultural phenomena. The term and the project it is embedded in must be seen in its relation to the perspective of seeking for possibilities of social transformation.

Culture industry as the version of “Enlightenment” identical with mass deception is one of the main issues in Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s book. Enlightenment is not held to be a historical era or epoch, rather as a structure, sample of behaviour of reason striving to survive. Enlightenment is the attempt to dominate the threatening nature (inner and outer nature), but this attempt is doomed to failure, whence its “dialectic” nature comes. Horkheimer and Adorno hold to be “nature” everything not made by humans, including both outer nature (things, other persons) and inner nature (own desires, feelings), and a characteristic feature of nature thus conceived is, according to their opinion, its threatening effect. Enlightenment reveals reason’s

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<sup>25</sup> Hannah Arendt, “The crisis in culture”, in: *Between Past and Future. Six exercises in political thought* (New York: Viking Press, 1961), 201.

power-like nature, and this instrumental reason is responsible for the barbarism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Now one can say that, culture industry is Enlightenment in so far it gives an organized form of the deception of masses, and thereby it is at the same time a form of domination of nature, since Adorno and Horkheimer include in the scope of “nature” human beings as well. In a summary, Adorno makes a remark telling clearly that their previous drafts used the term “mass culture” instead of culture industry, and the substitution took place in order to exclude the interpretation of mass culture as contemporary variation of folk art. Consequently, it is appropriate to look for an analysis of mass culture in the theory of “culture industry”. Horkheimer and Adorno talk about a kind of industry in order to stress that products are made in a more or less planned manner for mass consumption and these products determine to a high degree this consumption by masses.

Despite the centrality of the issue, the chapter on culture industry is not very well elaborated. There is a more serious difficulty, in so far in a draft-sentence omitted later Horkheimer and Adorno promised to analyze “positive aspects of mass culture”, but they had not come to realize it. Culture industry means in the context of *Dialectics of Enlightenment* first of all one single system in the administrated world which controls free time and amusement. It is an “escape form everyday life,” but the same everyday life is presented as Paradise. The basic idea of Horkheimer and Adorno is to reveal the factory that presents schematic, easily understandable products as artworks, and it constitutes thus the deception of the masses. The “industrial” character is not meant literally, the point of the word is “standardization” and “uniformization” of products and rationalization of dissemination, but it does not want to

refer to the production process.<sup>26</sup> The authors of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* thought of the uniformity guaranteed by movie, radio, newspapers forming a system. This epoch of mass culture endangers the possibility of autonomous art through the influence of a global culture industry, for it excludes the emergence of something new. Instead of information and instruction culture industry makes up a huge deception of masses, where the deceptive character amounts to stopping and preventing real experiences, giving only disintegrating and infantile distraction and amusement (*Zerstreuung*). In the Preface, the authors define the meaning of enlightenment to the effect that it “consists primarily in the calculation of effects and in the technology of production and dissemination; the specific content of the ideology is exhausted in the idolization of the existing order and of the power by which the technology is controlled.”

The ambivalence of culture, correspondingly, consists in its twofold character. Culture, on the one hand, hides behind its appealing surface the social and economic difficulties, contradictions, and therein stabilizes the existing order. Culture, on the other hand, is an expression of undistorted life (*unbeschädigtes Leben*) and conveys the desire of a life liberated from practical requirements. Art articulates with it a surplus against the existing order. Autonomous artworks escape from social conformism; they do not say always the same, but something new. Thus they represent a kind of uniqueness, a singularity in a world of identity and uniformity. It is “contemporary listening which has regressed, arrested at the infantile stage. [... Listening subjects] listen automatically and dissociate what they hear, but precisely in this dissociation they develop certain capacities which accord less with the concepts of

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<sup>26</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften* 10/1, 339.

traditional aesthetics than with those of football and motoring. They are not childlike [...] But they are childish; their primitivism is not that of the underdeveloped, but that of the forcibly retarded.”<sup>27</sup>

In view of the fact that culture industry consists in soap operas, magazines, movie (western), pop music, it is instructive to consider Adorno’s most concrete example for culture industry, what he calls “musical fetishism”, because he analyzes much less other cases of mass culture, for example western movies. The new musical state is deeply characterized by the “liquidation of the individual”, and Adorno argues that pop music, especially jazz, follows the principles of culture industry, that is the principles of standardization, pseudo-individuality, and reification.

These considerations can be completed with his analysis of television what might suggest a refutation of the dichotomy between autonomous art and mass media. Adorno opens his study entitled “How to look at television?” with trying to cast some doubt on the dichotomy between autonomous art and mass media. Stressing that their relation is highly complex, he claims that distinctions between popular and elite art are a product of historical conditions and should not be exaggerated. I suggest as the interpretive strategy of my research that even if Adorno tempted to avoid emphasizing the difference, one could insist on it.

Turning to the posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory*, it is much more dedicated to what might be called high art, and mass culture appears to be rather a peripheral issue. It deserves, however, attention, because we find

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<sup>27</sup> Adorno, “On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening”. in: Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry. Selected essays on mass culture* (London: Routledge, 1991), 46-7.

here an elaborated account of artworks, and this elucidates the fundamental difference between artworks and products of culture industry. According to Adorno’s conviction, what he takes over from Benjamin, artworks “are the self-unconscious historiography of their epoch”<sup>28</sup>, and it establishes their philosophical significance. An artwork is, in addition, rational construction, in so much as it includes “(raw) material” – language, sounds, colours, forms, and so creation of artworks implies a forming instance, a kind of “rationality”. Adorno explicates it as a form of reason dominating nature. Furthermore, artworks have a puzzle-character in so far as they say something and hide it at the same time: “All artworks – and art altogether – are enigmas; since antiquity this has been an irritation to the theory of art.”<sup>29</sup> As to concrete examples and preferences, his references go clearly to classical modernity, As for preferences and examples, he heavily relies on classical modernity, his favourite authors are Schönberg, Kafka, Joyce, Proust, and Beckett. In his view, art is not a means to happiness, because that would be identical with the lying of culture industry. Instead, it has a revolutionary role, viz. to resist mass culture and culture industry. This resistance leads to the rehabilitation of ugly and unsayable, and the prize to pay for that is that art has no political effect, it does not take party. Despite this, Adorno thinks that the truth content of artworks has a political dimension by expressing social contradictions with their possible reconciliation.

A second level of *Aesthetic Theory* develops the idea of liberation of raw material in art. Artworks are in this sense the salvation of manifoldness and difference that disappears otherwise because of the dominating comportment of reason. Through this achievement,

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<sup>28</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 182.

<sup>29</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 120.

artworks become the most prominent examples for the salvation of the non-identical (*das Nichtidentische*) which is a central notion to Adorno's thinking. The non-identical is the heading of his complex theory about the violent character of conceptual understanding explicated in his other important later work *Negative Dialectics*.

Hannah Arendt has paid less attention to problems of culture and art than to questions of political theory, albeit she wrote numerous studies on writers, poets, and intellectuals. Her main field of inquiry lies in political philosophy. Nevertheless, in her essays on culture, Arendt argued for the distinction mentioned above, and put it in relation to mass society. Her position is attractive, because it recognises, in contrast to the theory of culture industry, the need for entertainment and amusement, in so far the need for leisure is held to belong to the biological life process. As part of the biological life process, entertainment is as much a must for each individual as food, health and so on. One could be tempted to doubt whether Horkheimer and Adorno really wanted to refuse the necessity of leisure; one could say they simply wanted to claim the ideological character of leisure time in capitalism, and it was this and only this fact that was the object of their critique. In any case, their fierce critique might easily be understood as refutation of popular culture's right to exist. Arendt's approach is more plausible, since it can avoid both mixing up high art and mass culture and refusing mass culture entirely.

The perspective where I would like to interpret her position is labelled "Hannah Arendt's political existentialism". This characterization intends to underline the fact that Arendt seeks to say something about meaning and role of politics in the life of individual human beings. Her perspective might be summarized by the question how the political fits into individual human

life. Therefore she strives to understand the meaning of political activity with regard to and on the basis of individual human life – an approach to political phenomena within the framework of a comparative description of human activities.

The sensitivity to problems of individual human life arises from her intellectual orientation, as it is clear from her biography. Hannah Arendt studied classics, philosophy, theology, and her most important academic influences were Martin Heidegger in Freiburg and Karl Jaspers in Heidelberg who was also supervisor of her PhD thesis *Der Liebesbegriff von Augustin*. She studied with the German masters of existentialism. It is little wonder, then, that Arendt's political philosophy is grounded basically on a conception of human life and existence. Normally, each political philosophy presupposes some ideas about the nature of human beings, on the base of which the tasks and possible means of politics could be specified. But in Hannah Arendt's thought, there is a closer connection between human existence and politics. On the one hand, she approaches political phenomena with the intention to understand their meaning in the context of human activities. On the other hand, she is convinced that human life is dependent on a public space in order to grasp itself in its individuality. A further step Arendt makes is the idea that this public space is inherently political. Politics is, thus, linked to the basic need of human existence to grasp itself. To live an individual human life inevitably contains the task of understanding oneself, and it is possible only under public conditions. In view of these assumptions of her theory, her proposal is not one to define the political tasks as distinct from others, but rather to search the meaning of public activities and the meaning of action within the context of human life.

It is interesting to note that Arendt's distinctions in human activities do not really help to elucidate the essential features of works of art. In *The Human Condition* she develops a "political anthropology", in which Arendt elaborates a trichotomy of activities: labor, work and action. These three activities constitute parts of "vita activa", Arendt's term for practical-political life. Originally the Latin translation of Aristotle's of "bios politikos" in the Middle Ages, "vita activa" in Arendt's use includes the ways we can be active. It means an important shift compared to Aristotle that her investigation does not include the activity of thinking, which figures as constitutive for the highest possibility in Aristotle's hierarchy of forms of life, for theoretical life.

Labor, work, and action correspond to three basic conditions under which life is given to human beings. The first of these basic dimensions of human life is the life process in a biological sense, and labor (*Arbeit*) serves exclusively to maintain this process, having no further end to fulfil. Secondly, it is the human world of durable objects and artefacts which corresponds to the activity that produces them, to work (*Herstellen*). Third, the plurality of human beings is a fundamental dimension that makes, in Arendt's view, both individuality and politics conceivable. It is a strong individuality, i.e. not merely numerical plurality of the same, but the manifoldness of essentially different beings, what appears in action (*Handeln*). Without individuality as implicated in plurality there could not be action as revelation or disclosure of the doer, and so Arendt can write: "Action alone is the exclusive prerogative of man; neither a beast nor a god is capable of it".<sup>30</sup> This passage shows immediately Arendt's idiosyncratic use of the term "action" which is much

narrower than ordinary usage, since in ordinary use "action" includes both "labor" and "work".

Arendt's interest for art stems from her being a passionate consumer of literature and artworks. She managed, for example, the translation of Hermann Broch's *Death of Vergil* into English, and edited a collection of Broch's essays, making the Austrian novelist known in the US. Nonetheless, theoretical questions of art and aesthetics are not in the foreground of her thinking as compared to political issues. Mass society has for Arendt the distinctive feature in the disappearance of strata where those who are opposed to society and its overall requirements could retreat: "There is, however, an important difference between the earlier stages of society and mass society with respect to the situation of the individual. As long as society itself was restricted to certain classes of the population, the individual's chances for survival against its pressures were rather good; they lay in the simultaneous presence within the population of other non-society strata into which the individual could escape... A good part of the despair of individuals under the conditions of mass society is due to the fact that these avenues of escape are now closed because society has incorporated all strata of the population."<sup>31</sup> Arendt's use of „society“ highlights primarily a set of anonymous expectations that might endanger the living of my own, authentic life. In this idea she follows partly Heidegger's analysis of the „they“ (das Man) as elaborated in *Being and Time*. In *The Human Condition* the „Social“ is the sphere between public and private sphere governed by conventionality.

The status of culture in mass society, then, is conditioned by the fact that mass society "wants not culture but entertainment, and the wares offered by the

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<sup>30</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 22-23.

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<sup>31</sup> Arendt, "The crisis in culture", 200.

entertainment industry are indeed consumed by society just like any other consumer goods.”<sup>32</sup> Accordingly, culture in mass society is analysed by Arendt in terms of the opposition of culture and entertainment, where they differ categorically. Entertainment is different from art in kind, and so they are not the inferior and the superior realization of the same. As a consequence, the Arendtean approach does not enface the problem of separating high (sophisticated) art and pop art. In her view, mass culture is not art at all, products of mass culture are basically consumer goods that help resting. From this point of view, artworks and products of mass culture are rendered to different dimensions of human life, the former to the world and worldliness, and the latter to the biological life-process.

The function of art might be clarified through the distinguished role of the artist, in so far as he is “the authentic producer of those objects which every civilization leaves behind as the quintessence and the lasting testimony of the spirit which animated it.”<sup>33</sup> Arendt shares a common conviction with Benjamin and Adorno, according to which the essence of a historical epoch is to be grasped through its artworks. This idea has also something to do with the Arendtean conception of “world”, to which works of art constitute an essential contribution. Artists produce durable objects, and the multiplicity of these durable objects make up the world Arendt’s sense. In her interpretation, “world” is neither the totality of facts, nor that of objects; it is rather the context, the complex net of meaning we live in as the framework of our specific human life. Artificial objects last longer than individual life processes, and so this more durable structure of artefacts is the context what gives a home, a human place for individual life.

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<sup>32</sup> Arendt, “The crisis in culture”, 205.

<sup>33</sup> Arendt, “The crisis in culture”, 201.

Artefacts in general have a task to fulfil, they are tools for certain purposes. In contrast to that, artworks have no immediate utility, they do not satisfy obvious needs or accomplish functions. This has to do also with the fact that they are radically individual, irreplaceable. For this reason artworks are not „used”, they are rather kept away from contexts of action and use. Arendt claims, therefore, that works of art belong to the most durable things and objects; they are the most worldly things.

It might be objected that there is no definition of art in Arendt’s work. I suggest to take this as a consequence of the high individuality of artworks that makes a general definition very difficult. Arendt draws attention to the difficulty that what can be given as general definition says nothing. This individuality is attested, on the other hand, by troubles when interpreting an artwork: usual, ordinary language does often not suffice, and task of the critic, therefore, is exactly to find a linguistic articulation of the individual features of the artwork in question. It is worth to mention in this context that according to Benjamin’s idea works of art are in terms of their individuality not part of history.

Entertainment, on the other hand, is explained by Arendt in terms of the needs of biological life process, in so far as the products in question serve this life process, “even though they may not be as necessary for this life as bread and meat. They serve, as the phrase is, to while away time, and the vacant time which is whiled away is not leisure time, strictly speaking time, that is, in which we are free from all cares and activities necessitated by the life process and therefore free for the world and its culture it is rather left-over time, which still is biological in nature, left over after labor and sleep have received their due.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Arendt, “The crisis in culture”, 205.

Arendt's approach offers important conceptual means to treat some difficulties, even if there remain shortcomings to be reflected. First, she elaborates a conceptual solution for separating high art and mass culture to the effect that there is no continuum, no unity of the two. Artworks and products of mass culture are only seemingly similar. Second, Arendt is capable both to recognize mass culture in its own right, and to assess its threat for high art. The main problem she notices is that entertainment industry uses up, trivializes real artworks as raw material, and so a real encounter with artworks becomes much more difficult. As to the shortcoming of Arendt's approach, it does not contain a comprehensive analysis of aesthetic pleasure, appreciation of art works. In spite of frequent hints at Kant, her interpretation of art remains in this respect Hegelian, i.e. the intellectual content of artworks comes to the fore. A sign of this approach might be the fact that Arendt had scarcely paid attention to music.

There appear to be some conclusions to be drawn from Arendt's approach. First, not to differentiate between high culture and pop culture is simply to confuse intellectual orientation and entertainment. This opposition should be, however, refined and elaborated. Second, with the help of this distinction the objection can be met that artworks serve often as a mean of distinguishing ourselves from other classes and from the crowd that are generally regarded as inferior. Snobism in various forms can be an illustration of such behaviour, and it was the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu who developed a theory based on this idea: different consume of different cultural products reproduce social differences. Using Arendt's arguments it might be made clear that snobism is a deficient, inappropriate attitude, which, by contrast, presupposes a normal attitude. This normal attitude of consuming art is the basic counter-

argument to Bourdieu as well. It might, of course, be admitted that the appreciation of artworks is an activity with certain preconditions – free time, some money etc. – that are not distributed equally, but it seems not to be convincing, as Bourdieu suggests, that differences in social status are intentionally mirrored in various art consume.

A similar objection emphasizes that art consume could have in different times goals lying to a high extent outside of pure art. For example, opera performances served as meeting point for centuries, or the music of Bach was embedded in liturgy. What all such cases show, however, is that there could be an external occasion for artists to create great artworks; but it does not follow that these works remained in the scope of the original situation. One can argue that even if created with such a motivation, real works of art supersede the original social or religious framework. On the other hand, only great works survive this kind of functionality, whence the overwhelming majority of Bach's contemporary composers had remained unknown.

The lesson to draw from Adorno and Arendt, then, is that there are basically different approaches and tasks which should not be confused, even if the existence of disputable cases might be admitted. Despite their different views of popular culture, both Adorno and Arendt hold this position. The difference lies in the evaluation of what popular culture is capable of. For Adorno, it is sheer mean of repression and legitimization of the existing order, while for Arendt entertainment industry satisfies a need (resting, amusement [*Ausschalten*]) emerging from the biological life process, therefore it makes no sense to attack it. The opposition between entertainment and amusement on the one hand, and intellectual orientation and artistic pleasure

on the other is theoretically fruitful, because it is usually not difficult to decide which one was the intention of the author. The objection that there are many examples for serious artworks that were at the same time products for purposes of amusement is not a real one. In this vein, it is often said that Shakespeare wanted to write popular plays and Bach liturgy music. To answer this really frequent objection it suffices to remind that even if they coincide, there are here two distinct achievements which make up a lucky mixture. But it is not essential to them to be intertwined, and in fact, they are usually not linked together.

A further difference of art and entertainment can be highlighted, if one works up the thesis Adorno and Arendt with regard to the relation of art and the domain of self-evident. Artworks have the effect that they illuminate the self-evident as self-evident. Art is capable of this, because it has the character of the non-evident. The more or less radical innovation, or at least originality we demand from artworks is connected to this point. Art, thus, means a sort of self-reflexion of human life lived in the framework of the self-evident. Amusement and entertainment, on the other hand, figure in the domain of the self-evident and of the routine-like.

Adorno and Arendt can be seen as sharing a perspective of catastrophe in describing their age. Adorno's famous saying that a poem after Auschwitz is barbarian depicts his time from the point of view of a catastrophe. The same holds true for Arendt as to her political thought: in her opinion, the concentration camps signify a dramatic break in European culture – a conviction that is also present in the essays of Hungarian Nobel laureate Imre Kertész. Arendt's reservation that mass culture might use up artworks relies on some anxiety because of high culture. In view of recent decades such a fear can even be reinforced, since reading-based culture with an

affinity to complex, sophisticated works loose apparently room and begin to function in closed circles. This kind of new barbarism is perhaps an exaggeration, and perhaps classical philology is right in saying that classic works can afford not to be read for some hundred years. Similar optimism can be found in Adorno when he writes: "Great works wait."<sup>35</sup>

From a theoretical perspective, the task to be done is first of all a refinement and elaboration of the concept of entertainment. Adorno had not delivered an acceptable interpretation of free time, and Arendt's proposal on meaning and character of amusement have to be clarified and carried on. It should be at the same time combined with a discussion of those theories that tend to doubt the distinction between high and popular culture. It is instructive at this point to have a glance at these positions. As a preliminary remark, it is appropriate to note that historical research has made clear that it was only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when wider parts of the population gained free time to an extent that the question how to fill this free time could be formulated at all. Gerhard Schulze's *Erlebnisgesellschaft* describes in detail this process with a special focus on leisure time activities. To some extent, this is the time when the problem of a popular culture, i.e. cultural products for a larger audience, could raise.

To sum up, let me summarize what I was about to say by way of contrast: my proposal to follow Adorno in understanding popular culture as entertainment goes partly against the position of Richard Shusterman's – and of many others – by refusing that popular cultural products are artworks at all. Instead of a huge continuum of products including Joyce's *Ulysses* and the soap opera *Two and a Half Men*, I propose to have two

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<sup>35</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 67.

by and large different sets of artefacts perhaps with some controversial pieces. On the other hand, my suggestion to follow Hannah Arendt in rendering entertainment products to the needs of biological life process helps to overcome the unfruitful hostility Adorno and Horkheimer had against “culture industry”, and this is an idea in line with Richard Shusterman’s attempt to understand popular culture in a positive way.

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## JUDGMENT AND ART

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**ABSTRACT:** *Our understanding of art, from the nature of artistic utterance to the traits of aesthetic experience to the range of art's capacities, rests to a considerable degree on our understanding of experience. To be more precise, it rests on among other things our conception of the active, we may say manipulative, dimension of experience. In this paper we explore a way of conceiving of the manipulative side of experience through a theory of judgment that was originally articulated by Justus Buchler, an American philosopher who wrote in the middle decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Through the theory's categorization of assertive, exhibitiv, and active judgment we are able to come to more satisfactory terms with the nature of artistic query, with art's cognitive capacity, and with what differentiates the way a work of art makes a case from standard forms of argument and inquiry. The latter point is illustrated through a consideration of film.*

One of the directions in which pragmatist aesthetics has gone in recent years has been to focus on the broad context of aesthetic experience. John McDermott at Texas A&M University is a good example of a contemporary philosopher of experience and art who has made much of John Dewey's concept of the aesthetic dimension of experience, and more specifically of the aesthetic dimension of experience in urban environments.<sup>1</sup> Another direction in which pragmatist aesthetics has developed in rich and valuable ways is its emphasis on the body, primarily through Richard Shusterman's somaesthetics, but also in Mark Johnson's explorations of embodiment.<sup>2</sup> I would like to add

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<sup>1</sup> John J. McDermott, *The Drama of Possibility: Experience as Philosophy of Culture*, Douglas R. Anderson, ed., New York: Fordham University Press, 2007. See especially "Nature Nostalgia and the City: An American Dilemma", pp 167 – 184, "Glass without Feet: Dimensions of Urban Aesthetics", pp 204 - 218, "To Be Human Is to Humanize: A Radically Empirical Aesthetic", pp 345 – 371, and "The Aesthetic Drama of the Ordinary", pp 390 – 402.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Shusterman, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008; Mark L. Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

another dimension to pragmatist aesthetics by emphasizing the importance to it of judgment and the implications of our conception of judgment for a range of aspects of art and aesthetics. For our purposes today we will talk a bit about the cognitive and related dimensions of art. By so doing we expand the range of pragmatist aesthetics to encompass the American naturalism in and through which it developed in the first two thirds of the Twentieth Century.<sup>3</sup>

The first order of business is to clarify what we mean by the term "judgment", a concept the details of which we draw from Justus Buchler.<sup>4</sup> First, it can seem extremely odd to say that a theory of judgment adds something to aesthetics when aesthetics as a branch of philosophical inquiry was practically invented in the context of a theory of judgment – Kant's of course. In our case, though, we mean something rather different by the word "judgment" than did Kant. In Kant's usage, judgment is a mental activity through which, we may say, experience and knowledge of all kinds arises. In our case, though we will relate judgment to experience and knowledge, we do not understand it as a mental or any sort of transcendental activity of which experience and knowledge are results. Experience and knowledge do not arise from and through judgment in our approach; rather judgment is a constitutive element or moment in experience, a human function that gives experience much of its meaning and significance, and that is a significant aspect of knowledge, emotions, and other phenomena.

We are working with a relational, constitutive understanding of experience that clearly has its roots in classical pragmatism. For James, Dewey, Mead,

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<sup>3</sup> An overview of American naturalism is available in John Ryder, ed., *American Philosophic Naturalism in the Twentieth Century*, Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1994.

<sup>4</sup> The theory of judgment that is developed here has its origins in the work of Justus Buchler. See especially his *Toward a General theory of Human Judgment*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1951 and *Nature and Judgment*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1955.

McDermott, Shusterman, and many of the rest of us who would identify ourselves as pragmatist philosophers, experience is an important category and one that pragmatism cannot do without. For those whom we might reasonably describe as neo-pragmatists, most directly Richard Rorty and those who follow his lead, the concept of experience is unnecessary and in fact a traditional metaphysical excess of classical pragmatism that we would all be better off without. For now suffice it to say that I identify more with the former than the latter approach, and therefore I will assume that a specific and adequately formulated and ramified understanding of experience matters very much.

We have indicated that “judgment” as we are here using the term differs from Kant’s and from other traditional uses of it, specifically in ways that make it appropriate within a relational conception of experience more or less like that of pragmatism. Judgment in our usage is our interaction with our environment such that products of various kinds result; or to put it differently, judgment is our experience in so far as we produce. Experience in our sense is the mutually constitutive, relational interaction between a person and the environment, the surroundings, and that interaction in very general terms involves both action and reaction, activity and passivity, manipulation and assimilation. In some respects we absorb features of our environment, a dimension of experience that the traditional empiricists saw but overemphasized, and in other respects we craft our experience, a dimension that Kant saw but misconstrued as a largely mental process. Judgment as we understand it here is the mutually constitutive process that constitutes an individual’s experience *in so far as* it issues in products.

To judge, then, is to produce, and we do so in three general ways: assertively, exhibitively, and actively. When Kant spoke about judgment I suspect that he had in mind something like what we here mean by assertive judgment. We judge assertively when we make a truth claim in a standard sense of the term. Assertive

judgment tends to be propositional, and our assertive judgments tend to express propositions about a state of affairs, and about which we can typically say they are true or false in this or that respect.

Though there is no necessary connection, assertive judgments tend to be linguistic. I say that there is no necessary connection because not all linguistic judgments are assertive and not all assertive judgments must be linguistic, but assertive judgments tend to be linguistic, and for the most part linguistic judgments tend to be assertive. Descriptions, for example, are typically assertive judgments, as are philosophical analyses, as are treatises in history, sociology, or literary criticism. They consist of propositions that assert something about a subject matter, and to which we can generally assign truth-value. Philosophers have understood that such propositions need not be linguistic because we have for a long time recognized the propositional character of logical statements and mathematical utterances, to give two examples of non-linguistic propositions. Both typically assert, and are to that extent assertive judgments.

We have been mistaken, however, in allowing assertive, propositional judgment to stand in for the human function of judgment as a whole. It has been a mistake because as we shall see in a moment there are other forms of judgment that are not assertive and are not propositional. Moreover, by recognizing only one form of judgment we have forced ourselves into an inadequate understanding of cognition and truth, among other things, which in turn has distorted our understanding of aesthetics and art.

The second mode in which people judge is the exhibitive. If the assertive mode is that sort of judgment in which we organize natural material to assert propositional truths about things, then the exhibitive is that mode of judgment in which we organize natural material to show something about the world. We said that the human activity most typically associated with assertive

judgment is the linguistic, and we may similarly say that the human activity most typically associated with exhibitiv judgment is the visual and performing arts. We typically assert linguistically, and we typically exhibit in painting, drawing, sculpture, installations, film, and performances of various kinds. But as in the relation between assertive judgment and language, judgment in the visual or performing arts is neither necessary nor sufficient for exhibitiv judgment. We may judge exhibitively through language, examples of which are poetry and literature generally, and we may through the visual or performing arts judge assertively, as in for example an overtly political poster that through a visual image asserts a clear political proposition. But still, the visual and performing arts are paradigmatic instances of exhibitiv judgment in the way that linguistic utterances are the paradigmatic instances of assertive judgment.

Because of this relation between exhibitiv judgment and the arts, the ability to identify the exhibitiv mode of judgment that our general theory of judgment makes possible will take us a long way toward a more satisfactory understanding of aesthetics, aesthetic theory, and art, as we will see further on. We will, for example, be able to correct a long-standing philosophical mistake of associating knowledge with propositions and therefore not with art. A faulty understanding of judgment has played havoc with our epistemology, with our aesthetic theories, and with our understanding of how art does what it does. Our conception of judgment will help us correct some of these traditional deficiencies.

Before we go on to develop these points, however, we do need to introduce the third mode of judgment, which is the active. One of the ways we produce is in our actions themselves. To walk down the street, to turn in one direction or another, to cook dinner, to shoot a basket or kick a goal, to watch others do those things, to attend a concert or film – these are all ways in which we interact with our environment, and they result in products. They do not involve assertions, nor do they

exhibit or show anything. Nevertheless they are a way that we select from the possibilities and actualities presented to us, a way that we manipulate our environment and produce our experience. They are, in other words, active judgments.

Often enough a judgment may function in more than one mode. A dance, for example, is an active judgment, but it is also a manipulation of elements of our environment that exhibits something. We frequently call such a product an expression of the dancer or choreographer's intentions of one kind or another, but what is exhibited in such a case need not be an expression, or anyway not only an expression in that artists may do something more or other than express in their art. In any case, a dance is an active judgment that is also exhibitiv. To offer a different example, sometimes a linguistic utterance can be an assertive and an active judgment. Consider, for example, a man who wants to express the depth of his feelings to his lover. He may tell her that she is the most beautiful woman he has ever seen, and when he says this he is both stating how she appears to him and he is proclaiming his love for her; he is in such a case judging in two modes, the assertive and the active. A judgment may also judge assertively and exhibitively at the same time. We mentioned earlier the example of a political poster, or perhaps an even clearer example would be a painting with an explicit message. *Guernica*, for example is quite evidently an exhibitiv judgment in its unique and distinctive selection of elements of experience and their arrangement on a canvas, and at the same time it is equally clearly an assertion about the horrors of war.

There are several conceptual advantages of this theory of judgment. One of them is that it helps us to understand better the ways in which experience is productive. Kant had shown one way, but his understanding limited the creative capacity of judgment to transcendental conditions of experience, and to mental processes. But the ways we assimilate, and more importantly manipulate, the complexes of our

environment in experience are more numerous and varied than that. Our judgments are not necessarily mental processes, as we have seen; they are not necessarily conscious; they are not necessarily cognitive. The novelty in nature, and the role of people in generating that novelty in experience, is far more diverse and varied than Kant and most others have realized, and the theory of judgment is an effort to illustrate and understand that fact about our experience.

Another conceptual advantage of the theory of judgment, and one particularly relevant for us, is that it enables us to attain a more suitable conception of art and its various capacities, specifically the two dimensions of art on which I would like to focus: art's cognitive dimension and the way art, particularly art with a narrative character, makes its point. To see what I mean about judgment and art's cognitive dimension we need to look at some of the ways philosophers, at least those in Anglo-American analytic traditions, have tended to understand knowledge and its relation to art. First, the tendency in Anglo-American epistemology has been to treat knowledge as a matter of beliefs that meet certain conditions, for example that they be true and justified, in one version. But if knowledge is a matter of true and justified beliefs, then it is also a matter of propositions. Knowledge, in other words, tends to be understood as a matter of propositions, specifically propositions that assert beliefs that, in this version, are true and justified. There are other versions, for example Dewey's warranted assertability as a definition of knowledge, but the limitations are similar. If knowledge is to be a function of beliefs or assertability, then only those judgments that assert propositions can have a cognitive capacity. One extreme version of this approach is in some branches of so-called 'naturalist' epistemology, for which only the propositions of the natural sciences can be a genuine source of knowledge.

The problem this sort of epistemology creates for art is obvious, and I have made the point elsewhere. If knowledge is a matter of propositions, and if art is for

the most part not a matter of propositions, then art cannot reasonably be thought to have a cognitive dimension. Clearly, though, for artists themselves there is no question that art has to do, often in unspecified ways, with knowledge and with truth. So there is a serious problem here. Artists and art historians and critics frequently refer to the element of truth in works of art, and they equally commonly speak as if works of art are capable of revealing something about a subject matter, which is to say that they are capable of generating knowledge. Either artists, art critics, and art historians are deluded about the nature of the work they produce and upon which they comment, or there is some non-trivial and non-metaphorical meaning of knowledge and truth that can be applied to the arts.

In the spirit of generosity, and until we have good reason to think otherwise, let us assume that artists and those who comment on art are not delusional when they speak of knowledge and truth in relation to art, which is to say that knowledge and truth can sensibly be ascribed to art. Let us also grant that on the whole works of art do not consist of assertive propositions. The colors and forms in a typical Kandinsky do not assert anything, though they are rich in meaning; the meaning, simply, does not derive from propositional assertions. Similarly, an effort by Henry James, or James Joyce, or Virginia Woolf, to capture the flow of inner experience is not an exercise in propositions or assertions, however full of meaning it may be. We shall say the same of a Schubert Impromptu, or a Kurosawa film, or Beckett play. Art, let us grant, is not propositional and assertive, yet any of its forms can be cognitive and even veridical.

If these assumptions are reasonable then an epistemology that requires knowledge and truth to derive from propositional assertions is deeply flawed. We should note that this point is not new, and in fact traditions in Continental philosophy have been well aware of this for some time. Most importantly, I would say, is the hermeneutical tradition in general, and Gadamer specifically. Gadamer went a great distance in

helping us to understand both knowledge and art so that their relation became clear and comprehensible. In this respect our pragmatic naturalist account of judgment, knowledge, and art is fully in a Gadamerian spirit, and intended to complement his contributions. This is also not a new point, in that the American philosopher Richard Bernstein made this observation long ago.<sup>5</sup>

The upshot at this point is that an epistemology that allows us to speak meaningfully about knowledge and truth in relation to art is called for, and our theory of judgment enables us to provide it. First, knowledge as we are all aware is not only “knowledge that” something is the case. There is also “knowledge how” and, as Shusterman and others have pointed out, there is also “interpretive knowledge” and “knowledge through”. The latter three are particularly important for us because they indicate that knowledge is not so much a matter of belief or believing, at least in many cases, but of enabling and making.<sup>6</sup>

William James had talked about “truth” as happening to an idea, and truth happens to an idea when it becomes able to do something, or when it enables us to do something. James scandalized much of the intellectual world at the turn of the twentieth century when he first used this locution, but in many respects he observed something profoundly important about truth, and by implication knowledge. Leaving aside the question of how to justify his conception in relation to propositional knowledge and truth, the idea that truth happens is very nicely applicable to knowledge and truth that are not propositional, which is to say to art. Shusterman has said

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<sup>5</sup> Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983. See especially Part Three, From Hermeneutics to Praxis.

<sup>6</sup> See Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 1992, and *Performing Lives*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000; Buchler uses the expression “knowledge through” to refer to poetic knowledge. See Justus Buchler, *The Main of Light*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1974. See pages 150 ff.

that interpretive knowledge is a matter of evoking in us a “meaningful response”, and this is a very nice way of describing how knowledge and truth happen in and through art. The query that exhibitive judgment undertakes is a manipulation of elements of a medium such that their arrangement brings into focus something new, something we had not seen or heard, and therefore not realized, before.

The reason Malevich’s *Black Square* shook the Russian *avant garde* to the degree that it did is that those who saw it, in the context in which it was produced and experienced, learned something from it. They learned, among other things, about the purposes and possibilities of art, about the weight of history on their own artistic processes and judgments, and it pointed them in new directions. This is as good an example as we could want of the generation of a meaningful response, and it is in this response that the cognitive power of the *Black Square* and its truth lie. This is knowledge in and through art, and we are able to understand how it can be an instance of knowledge because we can see how the form of query undertaken through the manipulation of formal visual elements constitutes exhibitive judgment; moreover we can see how exhibitive judgment generates products that are capable of provoking a meaningful response because we can now understand how those judgments function in and constitute a dimension of experience.

Illustrations of this point can be multiplied many times through all the arts. Music, dance, and film are as capable of evoking knowledge and of being truthful as are painting and the visual arts generally. The same is true of poetry, fiction, and drama. Because philosophers have too often been trapped by a propositional epistemology that assumes that only assertions can convey knowledge and truth, they have had a good deal of trouble with all the arts. Some have been willing to ascribe the possibility of knowledge to literature because it alone among the arts is linguistic, though this still leaves such philosophers unable to account for

knowledge and truth in non-linguistic art works. Others have assumed that despite the fact that literature consists of linguistic utterances, because the context is fictional the linguistic propositions must in a literal sense be false.

The extent of the confusion in such cases as these is mind-boggling. The initial confusion comes from thinking that only linguistic utterances can be cognitive and can convey truth, while the second confusion comes from thinking that all linguistic utterances are propositional assertions and therefore are subject to the same truth conditions. With respect to the first, once we have a broader theory of judgment that allows us to understand that in experience we produce meaningfully not only in and through assertions but also through exhibitiv and active judgments, we are no longer tempted to think that only linguistic utterances can be cognitive, and by implication we are no longer inclined to limit knowledge and truth in art to literature. If exhibitiv and active judgments are as capable of generating knowledge as are assertive judgments, then we are free to understand how all the arts may engage with knowledge and truth.

With respect to the second confusion, we would say that all utterances in a work of literary fiction are literally false only if we feel compelled to say that all linguistic utterances are assertions that refer to some state of affairs, and that literal truth may reside in linguistic utterances made only in non-fictional contexts. And presumably we would say that literal truth may reside in linguistic utterances made only in non-fictional contexts only if we thought that knowledge and truth may be conveyed only by assertions that refer to non-fictional states of affairs. But pretty much all of this is wrong, or so stultifying that to accept it forces us to ignore much of the experience we often have in our engagement with works of art and artistic processes, which is operationally equivalent to being wrong. First, as the theory of judgment helps us to understand, not all linguistic utterances are assertions – some of them are exhibitiv judgments and some are active judgments – and

therefore not all linguistic utterances refer. Second, knowledge and truth, as we have been attempting to demonstrate, are not exclusively, or perhaps even primarily, about reference, belief, or propositional assertions. There is simply no reason to accept the idea that knowledge and truth may be conveyed only by assertions that refer to non-fictional states of affairs because knowledge and truth do not require assertions, reference, or states of affairs. In that case, there is no good reason to say that the linguistic utterances that constitute a work of fiction are literally false.

Any good poet, novelist, or playwright may engage the truth in his or her work and therefore be a source of knowledge, and we can be confident in saying this because our conceptions of knowledge and truth are couched in a theory of judgment that does not require us to limit knowledge to assertion nor truth to non-fictional contexts. Furthermore, we may extend our understanding of knowledge and truth in the arts well beyond literary art to accommodate all the arts because we have grounded our understanding of knowledge and truth in a theory of judgment that does justice to the richness of our experience.

Before closing I would like to turn briefly to a related issue, one that is suggested when we say, as we sometimes do, that a work of art may 'argue' for a certain idea or point. There is a temptation to use this locution once we are confident that art may be cognitive, but I think it is a misleading way to speak and so we ought not to talk about art as offering arguments. One way to think about this is to say that argument is a form of judgment that is characteristic of inquiry, but that it is a mistake to say of art that in its cognitive capacity it is engaging in inquiry. It would be more appropriate, following Buchler again, to say that art is or can be a form not of inquiry but of query, which is to say that it explores a subject matter but that it does so differently than the typical forms of inquiry, for example science or those disciplines based in rational

investigation.<sup>7</sup> Art queries through the methods that define its medium, and those methods differ from the standard forms of inquiry. A painting, or a play, or a dance, or a novel, or a film, does not assemble propositions in some sort of logical relations typical of an argument and of inquiry. It judges in different ways. But because it is nevertheless query, we may reasonably say that art, and here we are thinking primarily though not exclusively of narrative art, can make a case for an idea or a point of view. But if it is not inquiry, how does this work?

We can illustrate the point through a consideration of film. Because it is temporal, linguistic, and visual, film more than most other forms of art, together with literature and theater, can be said to 'make a case' for an idea, or a point of view, or a proposition or set of propositions. Presumably this is what someone would mean by saying that a film can 'argue'. I will take it to be non-controversial to say that a film can make a case for something, in the general sense that a film maker may intend that a viewer come away from a film more convinced of a specific idea or proposition as a result of having seen the film.

The question we would like to ask here is whether, because a film can make a case in the sense of rendering an idea or proposition more plausible or even compelling, it is reasonable for us to say that a film argues for that case. As it happens I had the occasion recently to see *Westside Story* again, so we will use that as a case in point. What I will say here applies to the film, but it would equally well apply to the musical when staged; I will speak little about technical aspects of film making unique to it, for example the editing process, though I think that such technical features of the film maker's art may be absorbed into the analysis I propose. And the fact that what we will say applies equally well to

the stage version of the musical should not be a surprise because the same question of argument can come up in relation to the stage.

*Westside Story* can be understood to make a case. Specifically, the case it makes is for a rejection of racist stereotypes of ethnic groups and sociological stereotypes of youth gangs; it also makes a case for greater attention to be paid to the social and economic problems of cities. The setting in this case is a certain neighborhood of Manhattan in the 1950s, but the case is probably generalizable to other places and times. I should like to say that though it makes its case cleverly and compellingly, it does not argue for its case. Surely it does not argue in a literal sense of advancing propositions in logical relations to one another, but I want to say that we risk too much even if we talk about it as arguing in a metaphorical sense. The only thing 'argument' in this case can mean as metaphor is 'making a case', and the latter locution risks much less confusion than the former.

How does the film make its case? First, the aesthetic elements are of the highest caliber, and thus compel our attention. The music, choreography, and book are all brilliant, with some debt to Shakespeare of course, all of which lends credence to the exhibit product that is the film's 'case'. The various dimensions of the film's case are offered in a range of ways. The roughness of the streets in this part of Manhattan are clear in their visual representation, an effect made possible by editing decisions and camera angles; the music and choreography embody in turn both the jagged edges of street life and the elegance embedded in ethnicity, in family life and in the community that comes from the gangs; a certain silliness of standard sociological and psychological accounts of such gang life is overtly articulated in the music, lyrics, and choreography of the song *Gee, Office Krupke*, which manages to ridicule the police, the courts, psychoanalysis, social work, and the prison system all at once; the police are summarily dismissed in the person of the unsavory detective

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<sup>7</sup> The understanding of query and inquiry described and utilized here is developed in Buchler, *Nature and Judgment*, op. cit., and Justus Buchler, *The Concept of Method*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1961.

Schrank; in *America* the Puerto Rican characters contrapuntally convey an economic and a social perspective, as the young women sing of the economic opportunities they have in America while the young men sing of the racism they all face; and in *Cool* we can sense the anger the Jets and their girlfriends feel not only at having lost their leader but at the desperate nature of their lives, an anger conveyed vividly through the acting, the music, the lyrics, the choreography, and the camera angles. And in the midst of all this is the tragedy of the doomed love affair of Tony and Maria, an affair made impossible by forces well beyond the control of any of the film's characters.

The force of the case that *Westside Story* makes is due in part to the masterly way it is exhibited. It does not argue; it offers, it portrays, it exhibits, and it does so clearly and relentlessly. The film makes no attempt to convey the logical relations among the elements of its case, specifically racism, urbanization, economic opportunity and inequality, not to mention love. For that we need the analyses and arguments of sociology and economics and philosophy, though through what it conveys the film makes us wonder whether any of those activities are capable of coming to terms with the problems. The power of the film, and the strength of its case, derives not from argument in any sense, literal or metaphorical, but precisely from its distinctive aesthetic traits, which is to say the exhibitiv force of its elements.

It presumably goes without saying, though I am saying it anyway, that a good deal more work can be done to elaborate all this more thoroughly and to provide even stronger rationale and justification. The theory of judgment itself needs to be more fully ramified, as does its place in experience and a general theory of the human process, not to mention in the broader context of nature, which is itself the ultimate context of our lives. More also needs to be done to work out the various senses of knowledge with which we are working. It is easy enough to talk quickly about "interpretative knowledge" and "knowledge through" as broadening our

sense of what can legitimately count as knowledge, but in the end we need to develop those ideas more than they have been developed to date. The same must be said of our conception of truth, for which in the end we must be able to articulate a number of meanings and senses. When I speak of the truth of the claim that the sun is shining I must mean something different by the word "truth" than when I speak of the truth available to us through Malevich's *Black Square*. We would not be the first to suggest that the term "truth" is and should be a rather flexible one. When a religious mystic refers to experiencing a profound truth, for example, he or she must also mean something different than the truth of the proposition that the sun is shining. "Truth" must indeed be flexible, but to remain significant it cannot be infinitely flexible. It remains our task to sort all this out.<sup>8</sup>

All that said, however, I have been attempting to make a case here for a theory of judgment that has a consistent conceptual home within the pragmatic naturalist understanding of nature, experience, and the human process; that does justice to the richness of our experience; that accounts for the many ways in which our experience is creative and introduces novelty into nature; that enables a more adequate understanding of knowledge and truth; and that allows us to make sense of aesthetic experience and the ways art may generate knowledge and insight.

<sup>8</sup> Some of this has been more fully developed in John Ryder, *The Things in Heaven and Earth: An Essay in Pragmatic Naturalism*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2013. See especially Chapter Seven, Art and Knowledge.

**POLITICS AND THE AESTHETICS OF EXISTENCE  
IN THE AMERICAN ANARCHIST TRADITION**

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**ABSTRACT:** *John Dewey's and Michel Foucault's efforts to extend aesthetics to practices of living and to speak of the artistry of life, are now well-known, but well before Foucault and Dewey, in the American anarchist tradition, beginning at least with the Transcendentalists, there has been a deep and extensive strain within American philosophy that speaks of the good life as an artistic achievement in which one takes delight. This essay identifies Henry David Thoreau as the start of this American philosophical tradition, comparing Thoreau and Foucault, who draw from similar classical sources, and then traces those traditions through anarchists of the Progressive Era, Emma Goldman and Robert Henri. Goldman, like Foucault, was influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche in this regard, and as a friend of Dewey may have been an important influence on his aesthetics.*

In his last works, *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*, volumes 2 and 3 of *The History of Sexuality*,<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault takes up the provocative question, Is it possible to rethink ethics without appeal to the rule of reason, whether it be utilitarian or deontological? He finds an affirmative answer to that question through his rich genealogy of Western sexual ethics and recovery of an ancient ethical tradition entailing the “aesthetics of existence,” or “art of living”—the “elaboration of one’s own life as a personal work of art”<sup>2</sup>—centered around the notion of “care of the self.” Such ethics are distinct from more familiar forms of Western morality: the latter are prescriptive, rule-based, and universal, while the former are invitational, non-formal, and personal. The significance of the distinction between these two types of ethics is that an aesthetic of existence begins with an invitation to think of one’s life as one’s primary work of art and to delight in one’s own life as an artistic

achievement, and hence it is a matter strictly of personal choice and freedom, while the codified ethics characterizing Christianity and modernity are matters of universal obligation.

Crispin Sartwell shows that aesthetics of existence and notions of the “art of living” are central to a wide range of world spiritual traditions—Buddhist, Taoist, Hindu, Native American, African, African American, and American pragmatist.<sup>3</sup> Richard Shusterman has developed this theme in his “somaesthetics,” drawing especially from the thought of John Dewey. My aim here is to show that, well before Foucault and Dewey, in the American anarchist tradition, beginning at least with the Transcendentalists, there has been a deep and extensive strain within American philosophy that speaks of the good life as an artistic achievement in which one takes delight.

Henry David Thoreau, drawing from many of the same classical sources as does Foucault, developed an ethic rooted in an aesthetic of existence, an artistry of living, especially in *Walden*<sup>4</sup> and *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, terms such as “art of living” and “art of life” appear frequently throughout his corpus. For example, in the latter work he warns, “But unless we do more than simply learn the trade of our time, we are but apprentices, and not yet masters of the art of life.”<sup>6</sup> More frequently, though, Thoreau speaks of poetry to make essentially the same point. For example, “The true poem,” he writes, “is not that which the public read. There is always a poem not printed on paper, coincident with the production of this, stereotyped in the poet’s life. It is *what he has become through his work*.”<sup>7</sup> Continuing, he claims,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Use of Pleasure*, vol. 2 of *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1985), and *The Care of the Self*, vol. 3 of *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1966-84)* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989), p. 311.

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<sup>3</sup> *The Art of Living: Aesthetics of the Ordinary in World Spiritual Traditions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> *The Variorum Walden and the Variorum Civil Disobedience* (New York: Washington Square Books, 1968).

<sup>5</sup> (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 290. Emphasis in the original.

Not how is the idea expressed in stone, or on canvas or paper, is the question, but how far it has obtained form and expression in the life of the artist [or philosopher]. His true work [viz., his/her life] will not stand in any princes gallery [nor on any library shelf].

My life has been the poem I would have writ,  
But I could not both live and utter it.<sup>8</sup>

The art of living entails, for Thoreau, erasure of the line between one's life and one's works: the true work of art is what the artist becomes through his or her creative activity. Sometimes, though, the lived art work, lived poem, or lived philosophy conflicts with the production of artistic, poetic, or philosophical works, and the true artist, poet, or philosopher will have the integrity and courage to give priority to the former over the latter.

Let us delineate several specific continuities and contrasts between Thoreau's notions of an "art of living" and Foucault's account of the ancients.

First, Foucault indicates that the ancient notion of an aesthetic of existence pertains primarily to a "style" of living, which encompasses a broad range of activities, rather than any specifiable set of activities themselves. Thus, such an aesthetic is manifest in, for example, how one educates oneself, athletic and military training, political life, and household economy (*oikonomia*), and in antiquity it is often spoken of, he contends, in the context of agricultural management, for example, in Xenophon<sup>9</sup> and Plutarch.<sup>10</sup> For Thoreau, too, "art" and "poetry" pertain broadly to all activities carried out creatively, deliberately, and freely: "all employments," he claims, "may seem noble and poetic to the eyes of men, if pursued with sufficient buoyancy and freedom."<sup>11</sup> Like Foucault, it is the *style* in which an action occurs, rather than the action itself, that is characterized as "artful" or "poetic." So, too, Thoreau

speaks of crafts and political and household activities as "poetic." Agriculture provides, for him, an especially rich arena for an artistry of life, as he compares the plowed fields of the New England farmers to the masterpieces of Homer, Chaucer, and Shakespeare.<sup>12</sup>

Second, Foucault notes that the care of self, central to antiquity's notion of artful living, entails periodic interruptions in one's ordinary activities for the purpose, among other things, of "contemplating a life reduced to its essentials, to rediscover the basic principles of a rational conduct."<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Thoreau's primary purpose in going to the woods at Walden Pond, and central to the life-poem he would create there, is to reduce life to its essentials, not merely as a matter of contemplation, though, but as a matter of experimental praxis:

I went to the woods because I wanted to live deliberately, to front only *the essential facts of life*, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; ... I wanted to live deep and suck all the marrow of life, ... to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and if it proved to me mean, then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; and if it were sublime, to know it by experience ....<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, for Thoreau, and by contrast to Foucault's recovery of the ancients, talk about the art of living is essentially tied to its experimental practice.

<sup>12</sup> "You shall see rude and sturdy, experienced and wise men, keeping their castles, or teaming up their summer's wood, or chopping alone in the woods, men fuller of talk and rare adventure in the sun and wind and rain, than a chestnut is of meat; who were out not only in '75 and 1812, but have been out every day of their lives; greater men than Homer, or Chaucer, or Shakespeare, only they never got time to say so; they never took to the way of writing. Look at their fields, and imagine what they might write, if ever they should put pen to paper. Or what have they not written on the face of the earth already, clearing, and burning, and scratching, and harrowing, and ploughing, and subsoiling, in and in, out and out, and over and over, again and again, erasing what they had already written for want of parchment." *Week*, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> *Care of the Self*, pp. 50-51.

<sup>14</sup> *Walden*, p. 67. Emphasis added.

<sup>8</sup> *Week*, p. 290.

<sup>9</sup> Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics," p. 243.

<sup>10</sup> *Apophthegmata laconica*, 217a, as cited in Foucault, *Care of the Self*, p. 44.

<sup>11</sup> Thoreau, *Week*, pp. 173-74.

Third, as Foucault notes, it is common to view the period starting in the third century B.C.E., and marking the decline of the city-states, as a time of “a general withdrawal from political life,” and he quotes J. Ferguson’s *Moral Values in the Ancient World* as evidence: with “the collapse of the city-state ... people felt themselves in the grip of world powers which they could not control or even affect.” As a result, Ferguson claims, “The philosophies of the Hellenistic Age, for all their nobility, were essentially philosophies of escape.”<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Thoreau, in his move to Walden Pond, is commonly characterized as escaping from social/political life and responsibilities.

Such characterizations in both instances are wrong. The practice of care of the self, Foucault notes, is simultaneously personal and social: it both constitutes “a retreat within oneself” (Marcus Aurelius)<sup>16</sup> and intensified relations to oneself,<sup>17</sup> on the one hand, and engenders “an intensification of social relations”<sup>18</sup> and affirmation of “the need to fulfill one’s obligations to mankind,”<sup>19</sup> on the other. Care of the self heightens the sense of one’s own mortality and of one’s susceptibility to illness, both physical and psychical, and thus augments one’s sense of dependence upon others, to assist in one’s own care, and one’s feelings of obligation to do likewise for others:

on the basis of this rapprochement (practical and theoretical) between medicine and ethics, there is the inducement to acknowledge oneself as being ill or threatened by illness. The practice of the self implies that one should form the image of oneself ... as one who suffers from certain ills and who needs to have them treated, either by oneself or by someone who has the necessary competence. Everyone must discover that he is in a state of need, that he needs to receive medication and assistance [from others].<sup>20</sup>

Thoreau does not seem to discover any such “state of need” for treatment at Walden Pond, nor does his experience there seem to augment his sense of dependence upon others. On the contrary, his experiment at Walden Pond is borne of an already profound feeling for his own mortality, as engendered by the recent death of his brother, and, as his stated reason for living there (quoted above) suggests, it seems to heighten his sense of self-reliance and independence from others. It does, however, also intensify his social/political sensibilities. From the beginning a strong social obligation charges his experiment: caring better for himself, means, for Thoreau, like the ancients, not abdicating his social and political responsibilities, as some popular characterizations of him suggest, but making himself a “better neighbor,” and his experience at Walden Pond heightens his sense of social obligation, as his famous acts of civil disobedience, participation in the underground railroad, and unpopular pleas on behalf of John Brown all indicate.

Fourth, the intensification of one’s social relations, entailed in the care of one’s self and in becoming a better neighbor, means, for both ancient practitioners of the art of living and Thoreau, a radical rethinking of what one’s social obligations are and of what it means to be a good neighbor: the latter requires, for both the ancients and Thoreau, sometimes the transgression of conventional norms and established law. Plato’s Socrates, whom Foucault credits with the earliest expression of an ethic of “care of the self” in the dialogue *Alcibiades*, repeatedly suggests that care of oneself often means the rejection of customary standards and norms: as Foucault reminds us, “in the *Apology* it is clearly as a master of the care of the self that Socrates presents himself to his judges. The god has sent him to remind men that they need to concern themselves not with their riches, not with their honor, but with themselves and with their souls.”<sup>21</sup> Like

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<sup>15</sup> *Care of the Self*, p. 81.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

Socrates, Thoreau is a gadfly, stinging his neighbors and alighting upon the state: he justifies what seem to be overly harsh criticisms, to the point of rudeness, even when a guest in others' homes, by claiming that he merely wants "to wake my neighbor up," and he, like Socrates, refuses to identify "justice" with the laws of the state and hence believes, too, that sometimes the only proper place for a just person is jail. For both, the art of living and its care of the self occasionally require one to forego rewards from the state and to endure punishments administered by it—all for the sake of what is intuited as higher obligations to one's neighbors than laws and conventional norms can specify.

Fifth and finally, both Foucault and Thoreau are greatly troubled by the tendency for aesthetics of existence to become codified into externally imposed obligations and hence betray the freedom from which they were borne. As much as he seems taken by the ancient practices, Foucault claims not to admire those who advance them. When asked in an interview, "What do you think of them [the ancients]?" he responds,

Not very much. They were stymied right away by what seems to me to be the point of contradiction of ancient morality: between on the one hand this obstinate search for a certain style of existence and, on the other, the effort to make it common to everyone ....<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, this is the very point of Foucault's genealogy of ethics: certain prohibitions, e.g., against certain sexual practices, originate as constraints freely chosen as necessary to accomplish the style of living, the art of existence, that one desires for oneself but then quickly become codified, universalized, and matters of imposition, obligation, and even law.

Ralph Waldo Emerson already observed the tendency of free, artistic expression to devolve into tyranny:

Each age ... must write its own books .... Yet arises a grave mischief. The sacredness which attaches to the act of creation, the act of thought, is transferred to the record. The poet chanting was felt to be a divine man: henceforth the chant is divine also. The writer was a just and wise spirit: henceforward it is settled the book is perfect; as love of the hero corrupts into worship of his statue. Instantly the book becomes noxious: the guide is a tyrant.<sup>23</sup>

So, too, Thoreau is profoundly troubled that his and others' free and living poems quickly become codified doctrines, to be followed mechanically and imposed upon others: "some old poet's imagination is imposed on us as adamantine everlasting truth, and God's own word!"<sup>24</sup> Indeed, his very reason for leaving Walden Pond is his concern that the deliberate practices he has cultivated there are quickly becoming mindless routines and that others are following his footsteps formulaically:

It is remarkable how easily and insensibly we fall into a particular route and make a beaten track for ourselves. I had not lived there a week before my feet wore a path from my door to the pondside; and though it is five or six years since I trod it, it is still quite distinct. It is true, I fear that others may have fallen into it, and helped to keep it open. The surface of the earth is soft and impressible by the feet of men; and so with the paths which the mind travels. How worn and dusty, then, must be the highways of the world, how deep the ruts of tradition and conformity!<sup>25</sup>

For all these similarities between Foucault's retrieval of ancient practices of artful living and Thoreau's own notion of poetic existence, we must not overlook at least one major difference, which alone perhaps overshadows all the resemblances noted above: the latter is anchored in a natural law metaphysics of the Transcendentalist Oversoul. "Nature," Thoreau claims, "is a greater and more perfect art [than that of humans], and [the] art of God ...."<sup>26</sup> The cosmic Oversoul is the ultimate source of all artistry, for Thoreau. Hence, the "poetic life" is a microcosm manifesting the great poetry of Being, and the "freedom" expressed in one's life-poem is that of

<sup>23</sup> "American Scholar," p. 67.

<sup>24</sup> *Week*, p. 55.

<sup>25</sup> *Walden*, p. 244.

<sup>26</sup> *Week*, p. 270.

<sup>22</sup> *Foucault Live*, p. 319.

creatively living in accord with the harmony, the laws, of Nature. Epistemology thus grounds ethics, as we generally find in modernity: one must first in some sense know Nature, throughout which the voice of the Oversoul reverberates, before one can author one's life-poem in harmony with Her. Foucault, of course, will have none of this Transcendentalist romanticism: artful living, in its highest form, is the expression of radically ungrounded freedom. By Foucault's assessment, Thoreau would thus exemplify, despite his efforts to the contrary, the drift in aesthetics of existence toward universalization, prescriptiveness, and ultimately, rigid, enforced codification. The poetry of the Oversoul admits of infinite expression in human life-poems: no one life-poem can ever exhaust it. It nonetheless marks the difference between acceptable and unacceptable, authentic and inauthentic arts of living, and hence still lends itself to the power of prescription, law, and subjugation.

Thoreau, though, is perhaps only the start of an American tradition concerned with the "art of Living," which, as it develops, loses those foundationalist qualities that we find in his version of it. The "art of living" is central to the anarchist movement at the turn-of-the-century, a badly neglected aspect of the so-called "classical period" in American philosophy and one for which Thoreau is a primary influence, in all its variations. The notion is found, for example, in the individualistic anarchisms of Benjamin Tucker and Lysander Spooner but is more highly and significantly developed in the anarcho-syndicalism of Emma Goldman and the generation of artists that she befriended and influenced. As a Russian Jewish immigrant, Goldman brought with her the central sources of European anarchism, viz., Bakunin, Proudhon, Kropotkin, Freud, but especially Nietzsche, for whom she is the first American translator and the first to cultivate an American following. Shortly after her arrival in America, she is introduced, through the anarchists and intellectuals who gathered at Justus Schwab's East Side inn in New York City, to English and

American writers such as Whitman, Emerson, Hawthorne, Spencer, Mill, Jefferson, and especially Thoreau, whom she eagerly synthesizes with her own evolving anarchist philosophy.

Goldman's idea of artful living is perhaps most clearly articulated in "Art in Life," a 1909 lecture, presented often especially to working-class audiences. There she claims, "life in all its variety and fullness is art, the highest art."<sup>27</sup> It is Nietzsche who, ironically and in turn, heavily influenced by Emerson,<sup>28</sup> frees her notion of artful living from metaphysical foundations and leads her to distinguish it from merely "beautiful living." The latter is an effort to construct one's life in accord with some preconceived principles or fixed ideal, such as "beauty" or "Nature." It is supported by metaphysical crutches and borne of *ressentiment* and weakness, of cowardice to live life purely out of one's own deliberate freedom, creativity, and will. Thus, the Transcendentalists, such as Thoreau, as much as she admires them, practice merely beautiful living and fall short, by Goldman's standards, of truly artful living.<sup>29</sup>

Goldman significantly influenced artists of her generation working in a variety of media, helping to found the Francisco Ferrer Center in New York City. For example, she worked with and published, in her journal, *Mother Earth*, early pieces by writers such as Hart Crane, Wallace Stevens, Mike Gold, and Theodore Dreiser, one of her closest personal friends. She is especially interested in drama as an art form with special power, in her judgment, for social/political transformation, and she creates, at the Ferrer Center, The Free Theater, out

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<sup>27</sup> Goldman, *Living My Life*, 2 vols. (New York: Dover, 1970), I, 463-64.

<sup>28</sup> George J. Stack, *Nietzsche and Emerson: An Elective Affinity* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992).

<sup>29</sup> Lynne M. Adrian, "Emma Goldman and the Spirit of Artful Living: Philosophy and Politics in the Classical American Period," in *Frontiers in American Philosophy*, ed. Robert W. Burch and Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr., Vol. 1 (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1992), pp. 194-95.

of which grows, in 1916, the Provincetown Players, including Floyd Dell, Hutchins Hapwood, William Zorach, Stella Balantine (Goldman's niece), and, most famously, Eugene O'Neill. As a drama critic, Goldman was one of the first to identify O'Neill's importance, and she presented lecture courses on him in both America and England.

Through all of the above, and more, Goldman cultivates the idea of artful living as a central theme for early twentieth-century American thought, but it is perhaps Robert Henri, founder of the so-called "Ashcan School" of painters, whom she most profoundly infects among practicing artists. He identifies himself as an "anarchist" from the 1890s until his death in 1929, and he, too, is one of Goldman's closest friends. He regularly attends her lectures on art and drama, carries on with her long discussions on aesthetics, and paints her portrait, and largely through the art courses that Goldman enlists him to teach at the Ferrer Center, he becomes what art historians widely consider the single-most significant influence upon a whole generation of American painters, including Arthur B. Davies, organizer of the Armory Show in 1913.

Henri's *The Art Spirit* clearly bears Goldman's fingerprints. In it he writes, "I am not interested in art as a means of making a living, but I am interested in art as a means of living a life. It is the most important of all studies, and all studies are tributary to it."<sup>30</sup> The painting, or the poem or the play, is "merely the trace left by the artistic process of living" and hence is no more artistically significant "than a well-made table, a freely educated child, or a labor union improving the ability of many to live wholly."<sup>31</sup>

The important point here is that Goldman's notion of artful living carries forward an American tradition of

aesthetics of existence, comparable to the ancient tradition recovered by Foucault, and she, unlike Thoreau but like Foucault, also under the influence of Nietzsche, avoids grounding such a notion metaphysically and epistemologically.

The American tradition of artful living continues in the aesthetics of John Dewey. Dewey and Goldman are close personal friends, exchange philosophies, especially on education and art, and hold each other's ideas in high regard. Dewey publicly defends Goldman against press attacks as early as 1901, describes her as "a romantically idealistic person with a highly attractive personality,"<sup>32</sup> and supports her in the founding of the American Civil Liberties Union. Following the Russian Revolution, Goldman is deported, along with hundreds of other American radicals, and Dewey, in 1934, cosponsors her for a visa to return to America and gives the welcome-home dinner address for her in New York. Given these close personal ties, it is reasonable to speculate, as at least one commentator does, about Goldman's influence on Dewey's aesthetics<sup>33</sup> and to see it in such passages of *Art as Experience* as the following: "the intelligent mechanic engaged in his job, interested in doing well and finding satisfaction in his handiwork, caring for the materials and tools with genuine affection is artistically engaged."<sup>34</sup> Indeed, like Thoreau, Goldman, and Henri, Dewey is interested not so much in art that is confined to the museum or performance hall as he is in the aesthetics of everyday living, in the cultivation of practices that enable one to "live well," and that means to engage one's environment with self-conscious purpose and intelligence.

<sup>32</sup> As quoted by Richard Drinnon, *Rebel in Paradise: A Biography of Emma Goldman* (New York: Bantam, 1973), p. 106.

<sup>33</sup> Adrian, p. 198.

<sup>34</sup> *Art as Experience* (1934), *The Later Works*, vol. 10, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), p. 11.

<sup>30</sup> *The Art Spirit*, compiled by Margery Ryerson (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1923), p. 158.

<sup>31</sup> Adrian, p. 192.

American philosophy, its anarchist tradition in particular, as exemplified by such figures as Thoreau, Goldman, and Henri, thus provides those interested in the notions of an “artistry of life” and “care of the self,” such as Foucault recovers from the ancients in his last writings, with rich resources. Moreover, the aesthetics of existence, or “arts of living,” provide another example of how American philosophy developed important philosophical themes well in advance of the continent: it is a theme that has been central to American thought at least since Thoreau, and many of the features found in Foucault’s presentation of such an ethic, as recovered from the ancients, are found already in various places in the American anarchist tradition. Those interested in aesthetics of existence and artistry of living and followers of Foucault who have been intrigued by his provocative recovery of the ancient moral tradition of “*techne tou bio*,” “care of the self,” would do well to study carefully texts of the American anarchist tradition.

## **II. THE SELF IN PRAGMATISM**

**PRAGMATISM AND MORAL GROWTH:  
WILLIAM JAMES AND THE QUESTION OF VIVISECTION**

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*ABSTRACT: This paper is an examination of the process of moral growth as it appears in the thought of William James. While he has a clear sense of the possibilities of moral growth on the social level and of the role of moral prophets, he does not seem to have much appreciation for moral growth on the individual level. In this paper, his views on vivisection serve as the context for considering the relation between the individual and social aspects of moral growth.*

„Der Pragmatismus komme zwar aus Amerika, aber, Gott sei Dank, hat die Bewegung noch nicht das ganze Land in Besitz genommen. Der Pragmatismus ist eine Krankheit hervorgegangen aus der Sucht etwas Neues und ganz Originelles zu schaffen. Was aber wahr daran ist, ist nicht neu und was neu ist, ist falsch.“

Paul Carus

At the Third World Congress of Philosophy in Heidelberg in 1908, Paul Carus commented that "Pragmatism does indeed come from America; but, thank God, the movement has not yet conquered the entire land." He continued in that vein that Pragmatism is "an illness that has resulted from the search to create something completely new and original." From his point of view, however, "[w]hat is true in Pragmatism . . . is not new; and what is new is false."<sup>1</sup> In this passage, Carus offers us a number of themes by means of which we can approach the topic of Pragmatism and moral growth. The first, of course, is America and novelty. Pragmatism is seen as a unique American export, the product of a recent, largely Jamesian, movement. (Carus seems to have had a more favorable view of Peirce.<sup>2</sup>) Secondly,

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<sup>1</sup> Carus offered his comment as part of a discussion after papers by F.C.S. Schiller and Arthur Campbell Armstrong.

<sup>2</sup> Carus: "It is interesting to note that, since Pragmatism has become so popular and has grown into a powerful movement under James's leadership, the inventor of the name, Charles S. Peirce has had second thoughts. Although he is the father of this philosophy, he is no longer willing to recognize his own child. Thus he no longer calls himself a Pragmatist, but rather a

Carus suggests that the only values present in this Pragmatic movement are those that do not originate with it. A third theme is the clear implication that anything of value — for example, moral growth — should be pursued somewhere else.

Pragmatism as a general term suggests to some — perhaps to Carus — a kind of opportunism, and opportunism was, and remains, a legitimate meaning of the broader term. (Consider the familiar notion of a 'pragmatic' politician.) More positively, Pragmatism means a kind of intellectuality long central to the American way of thinking, one that emphasizes the importance of action, of getting the task done, of the practical rather than the ceremonial. According to Benjamin Franklin, Americans are more concerned with how a person acts than with that person's pedigree. In America, he wrote in 1784, "People do not enquire concerning a Stranger, What IS he? but What can he DO?"<sup>3</sup> Pragmatism as a philosophical approach represented the introduction of this perspective on action and knowledge into the hallowed halls of academia.

Various versions of philosophical Pragmatism have been introduced over the years. Arthur Lovejoy counted thirteen by 1908,<sup>4</sup> and a contemporary counting would appear impossible. The most important version of Pragmatism, I would argue, was the one developed by John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, Jane Addams, and others in Chicago around the turn of the twentieth-century.<sup>5</sup> The Pragmatism with the greatest initial

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Pragmaticist, to indicate his different viewpoint." ["Es ist interessant zu bemerken, dass, seit der Pragmatismus so populär geworden und zu einer mächtigen Bewegung unter der Führung von James gewachsen ist, der Erfinder des Namens, Charles S. Peirce [sic] stutzig geworden ist. Er ist der Vater dieser Philosophie, aber er will nicht mehr sein eigenes Kind anerkennen. Er nennt sich deshalb nicht mehr einen Pragmatisten, sondern einen Pragmatizisten, um anzudeuten, dass er einen anderen Geist in sich hat." (737)]

<sup>3</sup> Franklin, Information to Those Who Would Remove to America, 977.

<sup>4</sup> Lovejoy, "The Thirteen Pragmatisms."

<sup>5</sup> See James's 1904 appreciation of the Chicago School:

impact, however, was James's — although it was, and has remained, the most controversial. For some, it was the unfortunate commingling of Peirce's scientific insights and James's religiosity; for others, James's Pragmatism provided a bridge between Peirce's insights and Dewey's social interests. From the latter perspective, even if we consider James as in some sense an individualistic philosopher,<sup>6</sup> we may still find insights in his work for dealing with the problems of society.

## II

In many places in his thought, James emphasized the importance of individuals. This is especially true in his discussions of the powerful role that individuals play in the process of social change.<sup>7</sup> While acknowledging the contradictory Spencerian view that social changes are "irrespective of persons, and independent of individual control ... due to the environment, to the circumstances, the physical geography, the ancestral conditions, the increasing experience of outer relations," James still maintains that social changes over generations are the result of "the accumulated influences of individuals, of their examples, their initiatives, and their decisions" (WB 164). He continues that "the relation of the visible environment to the great man is in the main exactly what it is to the 'variation' in the Darwinian philosophy." The environment, in other words, "adopts or rejects, preserves or destroys" individuals; but it does not make them what they are. When the environment adopts the great man and preserves his influence, it is in turn "modified by his influence in an entirely original and peculiar way" (WB 170).

Such an individual — "whether he be an importation from without like [Robert] Clive in India or [Louis] Agassiz here, or whether he spring from the soil like

Mahomet or Franklin" — is the factor of change who modifies, to a greater or lesser extent, the future of the society. James continues that the mutations that take place over time in societies are primarily due "directly or indirectly" to the work of "individuals whose genius was so adapted to the receptivities of the moment, or whose accidental position of authority was so critical" that they were able to function as "ferments, initiators of movements, setters of precedent or fashion, centres of corruption, or destroyers of other persons." Others, in other situations to which their particular gifts were more appropriate, "would have led society in another direction" (WB 170). We can consider here his point that, while the development of some moral system was inevitable in the West, the fact that the one that developed was Christian makes a great difference because it offered no particular protections to non-human animals. Speaking from outside of this system, James writes, "[w]hat animal, domestic or wild, will call it a matter of no moment that scarce a word of sympathy with brutes should have survived from the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth?" (WB 194).

In any particular instance of social change, James reminds us of the importance of both factors. On the one side, there is the individual who derives "his peculiar gifts from the play of physiological and infra-social forces, but bearing all the power of initiative and origination in his hands." On the other side, there is "the social environment, with its power of adopting or rejecting both him and his gifts." Without the operation of both factors change will not occur. "The community stagnates without the impulse of the individual. The impulse dies away without the sympathy of the community" (WB 174). Still, there remains a certain ballistic aspect to James's position. The individual moral thinker proceeds in a quasi-predetermined direction to either success or failure. The public, by its process of selection, is the deciding factor. As a result, while there may be moral growth at the social level, for James there would seem to be none at the individual level.

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EP 102-106; cf. Correspondence 10:232-233, 321-325, 327-328, 336.

<sup>6</sup> See my essay: "William James and the Ethics of Fulfillment"

<sup>7</sup> See my essay: "Systems of Justice and the Role of the Moral Prophet."

If this seems to be an extreme — even mistaken — position, we need to consider how James believes moral ideas grow, beginning with his understanding of their origin. For him, the answer is to be found in the individual consciousness of the moral thinker. James begins in good empiricist fashion by noting that "[association with many remote pleasures will unquestionably make a thing significant of goodness in our minds." At the same time, he continues, it is impossible to account for "all our sentiments and preferences in this simple way." The empiricists' "associations of coexistence and succession" cannot fully explain how our "secondary affections" arrange our impulses and the environmental influences to produce the directions of our lives. He urges us to consider a vast array of human behaviors: "Take the love of drunkenness; take bashfulness, the terror of high places, the tendency to sea-sickness, to faint at the sight of blood, the susceptibility to musical sounds; take the emotion of the comical, the passion for poetry, for mathematics, or for metaphysics." Attributing these diverse behaviors to "incidental complications to our cerebral structure," James further suggests that "a vast number of our moral perceptions also are certainly of this secondary and brain-born kind" (WB 143). As examples, we can add here the strong personal insights, driven by a hunger and thirst for greater justice, of the early American Abolitionists and of the current advocates for the homeless. "Rightness is not *mere* usualness, wrongness not *mere* oddity," he notes. When it comes to what he calls "[t]he most characteristically and peculiarly moral judgments that a man is ever called on to make," he writes that they represent "unprecedented cases and lonely emergencies, where no popular rhetorical maxims can avail, and the hidden oracle alone can speak" (PP 2:1265; cf. 1235).

James maintains that when individuals respond to particular problems it is their personality that makes for their unique responses. He is especially interested in the role of the moral prophet. "Individuals of genius show

the way and set the patterns, which common people then adopt and follow" (ECR 109). The solution to any problem will appear in "one brain, and no other, because the instability of that brain is such as to tip and upset itself in just that particular direction." Here he is pointing to "the personal tone of each mind, which makes it more alive to certain classes of experience than others, more attentive to certain impressions, more open to certain reasons"; and he emphasizes that this personal uniqueness is, as we have seen, the result of the unknown forces within the nervous system that make the brain function one way rather than another. This person's unique contribution and those of others, then enter into the process of social selection. "The products of the mind with the determined aesthetic bent," for example, "please or displease the community." If individuals are more inclined toward Wordsworth and follow him, they will "grow unsentimental and serene." If, on the contrary, they follow Schopenhauer, they will learn "the true luxury of woe." In the long run, moreover, whatever attitude dominates "becomes a ferment in the community, and alters its tone" (WB 186-187).

As an aside, we might consider here James's unfortunate prejudice in favor of the educated class at a time in America when only a small fraction of the population had access to higher education. He notes that it is the individual members of the educated class, not the working class, to whom we should look for whatever progressive social change is to be anticipated. America's college-bred represent, in their capacity as "the only permanent presence that corresponds to the aristocracy in older countries" (ECR 110), a force to recognize and rally support for great men who would act as great leaders. He further notes that "[t]he best claim we can make for the higher education," he writes, is that "it should enable us to *know a good man when we see him*" (ECR 108).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. ECR 105-106; Correspondence; cf. 9:41, 362; 11:270

Returning to our main theme, we recall that James offered a mostly negative evaluation of institutions. Institutions, for their part, are habitual social responses that tend to promote or stymie individuals' ability to effect social change, and at the same time to foster or prevent the flourishing of individuals. He writes, for example, that, when responses to human wants are formalized into institutions, the institutions themselves tend to hamper "the natural gratification" of those very wants. Whether the institution be legal or religious, educational or medical, he believes that too often "such institutions frustrate the spiritual purpose to which they were appointed to minister" (ERM 77). Rather than advancing justice or holiness, learning or health, such institutions tend rather to advance institutional values like stability and conformity. "Every great institution is perforce a means of corruption — whatever good it may also do," he writes to one correspondent. "Only in the free personal relation is full ideality to be found" (*Correspondence*, 9:41). To another, he writes "[t]he bigger the unit you deal with, the hollower, the more brutal, the more mendacious is the life displayed" (*Correspondence*, 8:546). James was a strong individualist who remained ever suspicious of social organizations, of interaction and cooperation to reach shared goals. Still, he did address some topics of public concern that he wanted to be rectified.

### III

James engaged himself with such topics as heterodox medical practice, the care of the mentally ill, labor issues, and the lynching problem, although we find in his writings almost no extended discussion of specific social issues except for the 1910 essay "The Moral Equivalent of War" (ERM 162-173; cf. 120-123). As a man of the nineteenth-century, he further did not seem to be greatly troubled by issues of race, class, and gender. His focus was elsewhere, on issues of personal fulfillment. As we have just seen, the greatest evil for him was the crushing of individuals by institutions. Even so, it would

seem to be valuable to piece together his discussions of another issue of public concern, with a focus on his understanding of the process of moral advance. That issue was vivisection.

James was a leading figure in the dissemination of the early results of experimental physiology and psychology, including research on animals. The very similarities that made comparative studies worthwhile, however, also made them matters of ethical concern. He writes of the importance of sentience to our thinking about moral questions. In an insentient world, he notes, there could be no "status" for good or evil because no "physical fact, considered simply as a physical fact" can be better than any other (WB 145). In a world of conscious beings, however, in a world of pleasure and pain, right and wrong do play a central role. There is for James no "good or right except so far as some consciousness feels it to be good or thinks it to be right" (WB 147). Thus, all claims of sentient beings are to be taken seriously: 'right' and 'wrong' refer to the satisfaction or non-satisfaction of the demands of sentient beings. As a result, he rejects any situation in which one human should suffer for the benefit of others — even a situation in which millions would benefit "on the one simple condition that a certain lost soul on the far-off edge of things should lead a life of lonely torture" (WB 144). But how did he feel about animals suffering for human good? There was no doubt that the animals that were popular research subjects, like dogs and rabbits, felt pain; and there were many anti-vivisectionists who complained about the wanton cruelty of the laboratories. James initially felt himself to be in the middle.

As a young professor of physiology in 1875, James writes that that entire science is "based, immediately or remotely, upon vivisectional evidence." While he admits that vivisection had so far offered only "minute" therapeutic advances, he believed that, because of its potential for future scientific contributions, it should be allowed to continue. He writes that "the vivisectional

results of to-day, which are liable to be corrected to-morrow, will be corrected by the vivisections of to-morrow and by nothing else." As a result, he continues, "[t]o taboo vivisection is then the same thing as to give up seeking after a knowledge of physiology." He thus regards it "a painful duty" to continue with vivisection. At the same time, however, he wants all to admit "without higgling about more or less, that, in principle, vivisection admits of cruelty." He urges us to consider, for example, "[a] dog strapped on a board and howling at his executioners, or, still worse, poisoned by curare, which leaves him paralyzed but sentient." This conscious subject find himself "literally in a sort of hell" that he can neither understand nor change. The dog can see "no redeeming ray in the whole business." In the world of scientific research, however, "in a world beyond the ken of his poor, benighted brain, his sufferings are having their effect — truth, and perhaps future human ease, are being bought by them." Thus our little martyr has taken on a role "infinitely superior to any which prosperous canine life admits of, and, if his dark mind could be enlightened, and if he were a heroic dog, he would religiously acquiesce in his own sacrifice" (ECR 11-12).

To consider a second scenario, James admits that "a rabbit's pain differs *toto coelo* from human pain, in that the moral element, the element of subjective *horror*, is absent." Still, this does not eliminate the question of cruelty. The question we need to ask is: "Do we give them all the pain that they are susceptible of suffering, be that much or little? If so, we are cruel; and there is no doubt that vivisection is often obliged to go to this extreme." Based upon his earlier ethical assumption that inflicting pain is wrong, expanded here to maintain that "[n]othing is more calculated to deaden the moral sensibility of students than familiarity with blood shed for trifling ends," he proposes that it is our duty "to restrict the amount of *useless* vivisection." As far as making the determination of usefulness, however, he would leave that question "solely with the investigator himself." Further, he believes that any broad prohibition

would simply fail to be adopted in a society that is so dead to animal pain that it "boils millions of lobsters alive every year to add a charm to its suppers." Throughout the essay, James's commitment is to advancing medical research, and therefore to continuing vivisection. "It is better," he writes, "for many quadrupeds to perish unjustly than for a whole scientific body to be degraded" (ECR 10-13; cf. 18-19; WB 47).

Nearly three decades later, in 1903, James returns to the subject of vivisection; but by this time his view has shifted. He now writes to a correspondent that even if we grant that "inflicted suffering may be right," we need to think more deeply about the question of "*whose, how much, when, where*, etc." From his point of view, "[a]bsolutely irresponsible power to inflict pain on animals for human ends cannot well be entrusted to Tom, Dick, & Harry." On the contrary, in spite of his ongoing doubts about institutions he maintains that "*in principle* vivisection should be made responsible to some tribunal for what they do." Further, James believes that "[t]hey ought to welcome such responsibility" (*Correspondence*, 10:303-304). A few years later he continues that he recognizes the claims of "the various medical and scientific defenders of vivisection," who protest that "it is *no one's business* what happens to an animal, so long as the individual who is handling it can plead that to increase science is his aim." In response, however, he maintains that this position "flatly contradict[s] the best conscience of our time," maintaining that "[t]he rights of the helpless, even though they be brutes, must be protected by those who have superior power." James contends that over the decades, while society has progressed in its interpretation of our moral obligations toward these animals, the physiologists have failed to adopt any "corporate responsibility" or "code of vivisectional ethics for laboratories to post up and enforce" (ECR 191-192). Further, they have proposed no legislation themselves. At about the same time, James comments to a correspondent about the inadequate rhetoric of the

vivisectionists. "Instead of frankly admitting," he writes, "that experiments on live animals are an atrocious necessity, and confessing the duty of the utmost economy of misery & brutality," he notes that the proponents of vivisection focus rather on those aspects of the anti-vivisectionist argument that are "manifestly weak and preposterous," thus leaving the false impression that "a laboratory is a sort of garden of Eden" (*Correspondence*, 12:249).<sup>9</sup> As a result, it has become necessary for outsiders to step in and protect the animals from gratuitous cruelty in the laboratories. Of course, James regrets the graceless agitation of the anti-vivisection movement, "with all its expensiveness, idiocy, bad temper, untruth, and vexatiousness"; in this regard, he views this movement negatively, as he views all social movements. Still, this blundering social movement had been necessary to drive home "to the careless or callous individual experimenter the fact that the sufferings of his animals are somebody else's business as well as his own" (ECR 192). The lesson had been learned and social changes were necessary.

Over the years, there had thus been moral growth on the topic of vivisection. What James calls 'the best conscience of our time' had improved over earlier views, and society had learned to think differently. I do not believe, however, that this change was simply the result of vivisectionists being outvoted by their opponents. Rather, I think that people in general — James included — grew in their moral intuitions. He had a strongly individualistic view; but, over time and with experience, he managed to grow in his sense that useless cruelty to laboratory animals had to be stopped. This interpretation, however, seems to be less in accord with the ballistic understanding of moral thinking that we encountered above, and more in accord with the understanding of the Chicago School that individuals and society grow by means of the educational possibilities of cooperative living.

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Correspondence*, 12:259-260, 435-437.

## RORTY'S AND SHUSTERMAN'S NOTION OF THE SELF\*

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**ABSTRACT:** *We live in the age of narrative philosophy. This is especially important pertaining to the notion of the self, since it is a result of our personal narratives, in which the combination of self-esteem and self-identity plays a decisive role. After a general survey of these topics, I will show Rorty's particular application of the narrative identity theory both on the individual and the social level. In the second main part I will summarize Shusterman's criticism on Rorty's notion of the self and his own description of that which is rather an internarrative identity theory.*

### Introduction

If we speak about Rorty's philosophy in the context of identity and self-esteem, it is worth taking a glance at the psychological connections first. Not only psychologists but also John Rawls, evaluate self-esteem highly. Most psychologists and psychotherapists agree that *self-esteem means the most fundamental relation to the essence of our self*. It is not identical with self-concept, self-confidence, self-assurance, but it is a much deeper, mostly non-discursive and a very personal relation to our existence.

According to Maarit Johnson of the Psychology Institute of Stockholm University, who has been studying self-esteem for quite a long time, there are two main sources of self-esteem, an external and an internal one. The theory of external roots goes back to William James's (1842-1910) psychology (especially his *Principles of Psychology*, 1890) where he claims that everything that can be seen as part of me (my competencies, my appearance, my family, my wealth) may be regarded as the source of my self-esteem (see Johnson, 2008, 16). The theory of the internal roots of self-esteem goes back to George Herbert Mead's (1863-1931) views (especially *Mind, Self and Society*, 1934). He claims that individual self-esteem is created by the reflective judgements of the beloved others, which are passively accepted. Here

Mead emphasized, first of all, unconditional maternal care and love. As Johnson notes, the consequences of these original theoretical roots are present in newer theories of self-esteem (through the traditional psychodynamic and socio-psychological schools to the modern social and cognitive theories (see Johnson, 2008, 18-25), but they highlight other (mostly genetic and environmental) factors as well. Johnson underscores the dynamic view of self-esteem functioning. She emphasizes that both the internal and the external factors influence the development of our self-esteem, and she creates a dynamic matrix, which is a combination of high and low external and internal classifications of self-esteem, which results in four different human types of self-esteem.<sup>1</sup>

Before we combine the views on self-esteem with the views of identity, we obviously must define identity. What is identity, with regard to the self? I consider the most persuasive definition regarding self-identity, that it is *authenticity in the sense of the overlapping of our words and actions. The more my words and actions overlap, the more authentic I become*. Heidegger's theory of the authentic and inauthentic mode of Dasein's being can be mentioned here as the ultimate existential-ontological basis of this concept of authenticity.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The matrix is: high external-high internal self-esteem = *happy achiever*; high external-low internal self-esteem = *compulsive achiever*; low external-high internal self-esteem = *pleasure-lover*; low external-low internal self-esteem = *the needy* (Johnson 42-44.).

<sup>2</sup> If we take a quick glance at the philosophical background, then I am persuaded that it would be really difficult to offer a better general philosophical basis of self-identity than the one offered by Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Heidegger contends that *Da-sein's* fundamental existential structure is being-in-the-world, and it has two fundamental modes of being: the inauthentic and the authentic mode of being. In his opinion, everybody lives primordially in the former one, but everybody is able to become an authentic *Da-sein* if she understands that her life is basically a *Sein zum Tode* (*being toward death*). I do not want to delve into the

If we combine now the views on self-esteem with the views on self-identity, it is possible to create a more general thesis about the relationship between these two. *I argue that there is a mutual relationship between self-identity and self-esteem. They can strengthen each other if their mutual feedback is mostly positive, but they may also weaken each other if they give permanently negative feedback to each other.*

### Richard Rorty

As it is well-known, Richard Rorty (1931-2007) is the founder of neopragmatism, and his philosophy can be characterized as an antimetaphysical, antiessentialist, antifoundational, pan-relationist, historical constructivism. In his opinion everything is a social construction, and all awareness is a linguistic affair (see PSH 48). The main pillars of human life (language, self and community) are contingent. We cannot recognize any final reality, we may only *describe* our radically timely and historical that is permanently changing world. Every human interpretation of our world is a narrative that cannot be universal, only general. Narratives, or in Rorty's words, "vocabularies," are essentially Wittgensteinian language games, which can be used (at a minimum) on three different levels: (a) as a wordplay; (b) as a form of life; and (c) as a culture. Rorty uses all three meanings (i.e., his vocabularies are *not* dictionaries) and claims that we live in the age of narrative philosophy, where, describing our situations, plans, actions, etc. we create not only ourselves, but also our society.

Accepting this short general survey of his philosophy, let us focus on selfhood. Rorty showed in his book, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (1989) these three things: what happens if we give up the idea of a philosophical "single vision"; what happens if we do not

want to combine the private and the public; and what kind of liberal utopia we could build from a liberal ironist point of view.<sup>3</sup> In the second chapter of his *Contingency* book (after and before the chapters on the contingency of language and community, respectively) Rorty speaks about the contingency of selfhood. For the most part, Rorty sets out narrative identity theory, but the seeds of *internarrative* identity theory are to be found here as well, since he speaks of a multiple self. This latter view was worked out by Ajit K. Maan (*Internarrative Identity: Placing the Self*, 1997), and can be found much more in Shusterman's self-conception, as I will discuss shortly.

It is also important to note that Rorty admired Rawls's theory. I am persuaded that Rorty learned about the philosophical importance of self-esteem from Rawls' main book, *A Theory of Justice*<sup>4</sup> (1971), and Rorty claims and defends it very consciously on the level of both the individual and the society.

<sup>3</sup> According to Rorty, *liberal* means the people who „think that cruelty is the worst thing we do.“ An *ironist* is a person who, with Rorty's words „faces up to the contingency of his or her own most central beliefs and desires – someone sufficiently historicist and nominalist to have abandoned the idea that those central beliefs and desires refer back to something beyond the reach of time and chance.“ (CIS xv.)

<sup>4</sup> „We may define self-respect (or self-esteem) as having two aspects. *First of all... it includes a person's sense of his own value*, his secure conviction that his conception of the good, his plan of life, is worth carrying out. *And second, self-respect implies a confidence in one's ability*, so far as it is in one's power, to fulfil one's intentions. When we feel that our plans are of little value, we cannot pursue them with pleasure or take delight in their execution. Nor plagued by failure and self-doubt can we continue in our endeavors. *It is clear then why self-respect is a primary good. Without it nothing may seem worth doing, or if some things have value for us, we lack the will to strive for them.* All desire and activity becomes empty and vain, and we sink into apathy and cynicism. Therefore the parties in the original position would wish to avoid at almost any cost the social conditions that undermine self-respect. The fact that justice as fairness gives more support to self-esteem than other principles is a strong reason for them to adopt it.“ (Rawls, 1972, 440 – Emphases by A. K.)

details of Heidegger's existential analytic here, but it is worth emphasizing its main features in the time of the prozak culture and that of „interesting authenticity theories“.

In the first case, that is, on the *individual* level, Rorty regards the self as the *center of narrative gravity*, as self-creation by self-description. Just as Wittgenstein and Davidson showed the contingency of language, Nietzsche and Freud did the same regarding the self, according to Rorty. On the basis of their thoughts, Rorty rejects the traditional, metaphysically founded idea of a common human nature. He is an anti-dualist philosopher and cannot accept the soul-body (mind-body) distinction. In his opinion, our human life, that is our understanding-interpreting being, is always a linguistic one, and language is considered a human creation. Our language-games, our vocabularies, and our contextual truths are not found but rather made. We, as finite and historical beings, are only able to create narratives not only about the world, but also about the self.<sup>5</sup> According to Rorty, we create ourselves (both our self-identity and self-esteem, because they are in mutual relationship) by telling our own stories, by re-describing our own narratives, but this story-telling is influenced very much by the contingent events of our lives. Freud showed us this contingent characteristic rather than Nietzsche, Rorty says.

When Rorty gave an interview for Joshua Knobe in 1995, he revealed the background of his concept of the self saying that:

"I think that Davidson's approach to intentionality, meaning, belief, truth and so on goes together with Dennett's stuff about the intentional stance, and I think, once you see the intentional stance, the attribution of beliefs and desires to organisms or machines as a way of handling the organisms and machines and knowing what they will do next, it is very difficult to think of the self in the way in which what

<sup>5</sup> "(But) if we could ever become reconciled to the idea that most of reality is indifferent to our descriptions of it, and that the human self is created by the use of a vocabulary rather than being adequately or inadequately expressed in a vocabulary, then we should at last have assimilated what was true in the Romantic idea that truth is made rather than found. What is true about this claim is just that *languages* are made rather than found, and that truth is a property of linguistic entities, of sentences." (CIS 7)

Dennett calls "the picture of the Cartesian theater" requires you to think of the self. I think Dennett has a brilliant chapter in *Consciousness Explained* – Chapter 13 on "The Self as Center of Narrative Gravity" – and I think that view of the self is nicely integrated with the rest of Dennett's system and thus *a fortiori* with Davidson's system." (Knobe, 1995, 9)<sup>6</sup>

If we look at Rorty's view of the self from the point of view of self-esteem, it is obvious that self-creation is the most important dimension of his concept of the self. In his opinion self-creation is the best way of realizing the highest form of self-identity and self-esteem, which is manifested in the so called "strong poet". Who is the „strong poet"? The strong poet is the creator of a new vocabulary, as distinct from the scientist or philosopher in the traditional sense. In Rorty's interpretation, it does not mean only the actual poets and writers, but also the other types of artists, great scientists who invent new descriptions of the world, political thinkers who changed the world through their new descriptions (but not through their dictatorship or army). As Rorty says: "someone like Galileo, Yeats, or Hegel (a 'poet' in my wide sense of the term – the sense of 'one who makes things new')" (CIS 12-13). Not everybody will become a strong poet but the *possibility* is given for every human being, especially in a democratic society. The more liberal and democratic a society is, the greater the possibility of becoming a strong poet.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Dennett summarizes his views at the end of Chapter 13 this way: "Now if you were a soul, a pearl of immaterial substance, we could 'explain' your potential immortality only by postulating it as an inexplicable property, an ineliminable *virtus dormitiva* of soul-stuff. And if you were a pearl of material substance, some spectacularly special group of atoms in your brain, your mortality would depend on the physical forces holding them together (we might ask the physicist what the 'half-life' of a self is). If you think of yourself as a center of narrative gravity, on the other hand, your existence depends on the persistence of that narrative (rather like the *Thousands and One Arabian Nights*, but all a single tale), which could theoretically survive indefinitely any switches of medium, be teleported as readily (in principle) as the evening news, and stored indefinitely as sheer information." (Dennett, 430)

As I have already mentioned, in Rorty's opinion, just as Wittgenstein and Davidson have shown the contingency of language, so have Nietzsche and Freud done the same for the self. As we know, self-creation is Nietzsche's main goal, and it is manifested first of all in his perspectivism. What is this self-creation? It is a permanent overcoming of ourselves in a moral and interpretative sense. Remember Nietzsche's famous claim, "Werde was du bist! (Become who you are!)," and we may see that self-creation is always a permanent becoming\_for Nietzsche. Even Zarathustra's whole intention, which is basically Nietzsche's intention, is also devoted to this purpose. The Overman, taken strictly in a moral sense, can also be regarded as one manifestation of this purpose. By giving permanently new interpretations of our self, we re-create our self, because the self consists only in our desires, beliefs and knowledge. Both Nietzsche and Rorty understand this permanent linguistic self-creation as a therapy, that is, as healing ourselves from the sickness of old views, especially from Platonism and Christianity. Rorty, however, does not want to use the concept of the "Overman," because it is still a residuum of metaphysics.<sup>7</sup>

Pre-Nietzschean philosophers said that the particular contingencies of individual lives are not important, and it is only the mistake of poets to speak about accidental appearance rather than essential reality. Contrary to this view Rorty emphasizes that Nietzsche

...*"saw self-knowledge as self-creation. The process of coming to know oneself, confronting one's contingency, tracking one's cause home, is*

*identical with the process of inventing a new language – that is, of thinking up some new metaphors. For any literal description of one's individuality, which is to say any use of an inherited language-game for this purpose, will necessarily fail. One will not have traced that idiosyncrasy home but will merely have managed to see it as not idiosyncratic after all, as a specimen reiterating a type, a copy or replica of something which has already been identified. To fail as a poet – and thus, for Nietzsche, to fail as a human being – is to accept somebody else's description of oneself, to execute a previously prepared program, to write, at most, elegant variations on previously written poems. So the only way to trace home the causes of one's being as one is would be to tell a story about one's causes in a new language."* (CIS 27-28, my emphases)

According to Rorty, Nietzsche suspected that *only poets* can truly appreciate contingency. The rest of us are doomed to remain philosophers, to insist that there is really only one true lading-list, one true description of the human situation, one universal context of our lives. Nietzsche believed that we are doomed to spend our conscious lives trying to escape from contingency rather than, like the strong poet, acknowledging and appropriating contingency (see CIS 28). Nietzsche thought that the important boundary to cross is not the one separating time from atemporal truth, but rather the one that divides the old from the new. In Rorty's opinion:

*"He thinks a human life triumphant just insofar as it escapes from inherited descriptions of the contingencies of its existence and finds new descriptions. This is the difference between the will to truth and the will to self-overcoming. It is the difference between thinking of redemption as making contact with something larger and more enduring than oneself, and redemption as Nietzsche describes it: "recreating all 'it was' into a 'thus I willed it'."* (CIS 29)

Despite of all this, Rorty prefers Freud to Nietzsche in some sense. He writes that the feature that makes Freud more useful and more plausible than Nietzsche is that Freud does not relegate the vast majority of humanity to the status of dying animals. Freud's description of unconscious fantasy shows us, Rorty says, "how to see

<sup>7</sup> In Rorty's interpretation Nietzsche merely "hoped that once we realized that Plato's 'true world' was just a fable, we would seek consolation, at the moment of death, not in having transcended the animal condition but in being that peculiar sort of dying animal who, by describing himself in his own terms, had created himself. More exactly, he would have created the only part of himself that mattered by constructing his own mind. To create one's mind is to create one's own language, rather than to let the length of one's mind be set by the language other human beings have left behind." (CIS 27)

every human life as a poem – or, more exactly, every human life not so racked by pain as to be unable to learn a language nor so immersed in toil as to have no leisure in which to generate a self-description.” (CIS 35-36) For Freud, nobody is boring through and through, for there is no such thing as a boring unconscious.

At the same time, it is obvious that not every human being can be considered a *strong poet* (who is “only” the highest peak of self-creation for Rorty, that is that of self-identity and self-esteem), because the *strong poet* is a very rare phenomenon.<sup>8</sup> Even she or he cannot live without other people, without the socio-historical context:

“Shifting from the written poem to the life-as-poem, one may say that there can be no fully Nietzschean lives, lives which are pure action rather than reaction – no lives which are not largely parasitical on an un-redescribed past and dependent on the charity of as yet unborn generations. There is no stronger claim even the strongest poet can make than the one Keats made – that he “would be among the English poets,” construing “among them” in a Bloomian way as “in the midst of them,” future poets living out of Keats’s pockets as he lived out of those of his precursors.” (CIS 42)<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> “Autonomy is not something which all human beings have within them and which society can release by ceasing to repress them. It is something which certain particular human beings hope to attain by self-creation, and which a few actually do.” (CIS 65)

<sup>9</sup> Rorty goes on to say here that analogously, “there is no stronger claim which even the superman (Overman – A. K.) can make than that his differences from the past, inevitably minor and marginal as they are, will nevertheless be carried over into the future – that his metaphoric re-descriptions of small parts of the past will be among the future’s stock of literal truths” (CIS 42). – At the end of this chapter Rorty draws his conclusions: “But if we avoid Nietzsche’s inverted Platonism – his suggestion that a life of self-creation can be as complete and as autonomous as Plato thought a life of contemplation might be – then *we shall be content to think of any human life as the always incomplete, yet sometimes heroic, reweaving of such a web.* We shall see the conscious need of the strong poet to *demonstrate* that he is not a copy or replica as merely a special form of an unconscious need everyone has: the need to come to terms with the blind impress which chance has given him, to make a self for himself by re-describing that impress in terms which are, if only marginally, his own.”

In the second case, that is on the *social* level Rorty speaks more clearly about the relationship between identity and self-esteem. Right at the beginning of his book, *Achieving Our Country* (1998), Rorty’s upbeat is the following train of thought:

*“National pride is to countries what self-respect is to individuals: a necessary condition for self-improvement. Too much national pride can produce bellicosity and imperialism, just as excessive self-respect can produce arrogance. But just as too little self-respect makes it difficult for a person to display moral courage, so insufficient national pride makes energetic and effective debate about national policy unlikely. Emotional involvement with one’s country – feelings of intense shame or of glowing pride aroused by various parts of its history, and by various present-day national policies – is necessary if political deliberation is to be imaginative and productive. Such deliberation will probably not occur unless pride outweighs shame.”* (AOC 3 – Emphases by A. K.)

Democracy has meant, first of all, human freedom and social justice, for Rorty. Both the idea of *freedom* and the idea of *social justice* were supported by him also at the end of the 20th century, in his book, *Achieving Our Country*, which may be regarded as his political testament (see AOC 45). In this book Rorty analyzed the history of the American Left. He distinguished the traditional, reformist Left from the new, cultural or academic Left. It is true that he acknowledged the latter’s positive results (e. g., the “closure” of the Vietnam War), but he regarded as the really progressive social and political movement considering the future of his country, the reformist Left, which was advanced by Dewey also.

We have to emphasize that social-democratic, reformist left-wingism is an organic part of Rorty’s liberalism. It is not a surprise of course, as the American concept of “liberal” means almost the same as “social-democrat” in Europe. In *Achieving Our Country* we can also find a suggestion for the essential question of our epoch: how

(CIS 43 – Emphases by A. K.) *These sentences contain also the metaphysical consequences!*

can a non-democratic society become a democratic one?

In Rorty's opinion, the solution for this acute problem is the common power of the interlocked top-down and bottom-up social initiatives, which reinforce each other (contrary to the Marxist solution which prefers only the bottom-up initiatives). (Cf. AOC 53-54)<sup>10</sup>

Rorty's opinions about self-identity and self-esteem are not accidental. We can find almost identical approaches in his different articles. I am persuaded that one of the best examples is his article titled „The Unpatriotic Academy,” where he says:

“Like every other country, ours has a lot to be proud of and a lot to be ashamed of. *But a nation cannot reform itself unless it takes pride in itself – unless it has an identity, rejoices in it, reflects upon it and tries to live up to it...* There is no contradiction between such identification and shame at the greed, the intolerance and the indifference to suffering that is widespread in the United States. *On the contrary, you can feel shame over your country's behaviour only to the extent to which you feel it is your country. If we fail in such identification, we fail in national hope. If we fail in national hope, we shall no longer even try to change our ways.*” (PSH 253-254 – Emphases by A. K.)

However, Rorty himself did not want to create a detailed political philosophy, for in his opinion it is not the philosopher's task. In a liberal democracy, it is much more the task of decent men and women, who “sit down around tables, argue things out and arrive at a reasonable consensus” (PSH 112). It is not the philosopher's task, for he or she creates theories on the most general level, contrary to the political scientists and politicians. There is a need in this field to harmonize more effectively the different and independent interests, views, and it must be done neither by philosophers, nor political scientists, but rather by politicians and by the people themselves.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Bujalos István offers a really detailed interpretation of *Achieving Our Country* in his article, „Rorty a baloldaliságról”. (In: *Filozófia a globalizáció árnyékában: Richard Rorty*. Ed. by Nyíró Miklós. Budapest: L'Harmattan – Magyar Filozófiai Társaság, 2010, 81-93.)

<sup>11</sup> All this is in conscious consistency with his interpretation of philosophy as cultural politics (Cf. PCP).

### Richard Shusterman

Shusterman (1949-) is also a neopragmatist thinker. Shusterman became a pragmatist on the basis of Rorty's influence, after an analytic period, and they were also friends. They share several important philosophical views: anti-essentialism, pan-relationism and pragmatist meliorism. However, their philosophies differ mostly in connection with (a) appreciation of experience; (b) problems of the public-private shift and (c) the meaning of cultural politics. Speaking about “experience,” Rorty regarded it as some kind of residuum of traditional metaphysics, while Shusterman returns to Dewey's standpoint and, rightly criticizing Rorty, revives the role of experience in his somaesthetics, which is Shusterman's main pragmatist project.

Despite their differences, Rorty and Shusterman were also close regarding their concepts of the self. They both claimed that the self is thoroughly contingent, and they agreed that we live in the epoch of narrative philosophy. In addition, they both regarded self-identity and self-esteem highly important. What is more, Shusterman not only accepted Rorty's later philosophical tendency when he *aestheticized the ethical*, but also agreed with the

It is worth emphasizing here that the first paper („Cultural Politics and the Question of the Existence of God”) of Rorty's posthumous volume of his *Philosophical Papers*, which has almost the same title as the volume itself, *Philosophy As Cultural Politics* also strengthens his above mentioned views. Let us think about this title: *Philosophy As Cultural Politics!* Rorty shows already with his title that politics is the most important thing for him *in the public sphere*, but not in the private one. He handles every philosophy as a special type of politics. With this standpoint („philosophy as cultural politics”) Rorty *not only* draws the consequences of the latest development of European philosophy (early Heideggerian phenomenology, Gadamerian hermeneutics, late Wittgensteinian and Derridian approaches, etc.); he *not only* makes philosophy a kind of politics; he *not only* emphasizes that every human feature is a social construction, *but* he also directly connects philosophy and politics to morality. Social welfare and democracy, that is *social good* will be namely the *highest moral good, the main goal of philosophy understood as cultural politics* this way in the public sphere!

essence of Rorty's standpoint in his article, "Postmodern Ethics and the Art of Living" (PA 236-261). Shusterman's critique aims at some other characteristics of Rorty's aestheticized ethics.

Shusterman says first that "Rorty gives us... too narrow a picture of what constitutes aesthetically satisfying life and self-creation. For even when the ideal of the endlessly changing ironist is supplemented by the ideal of the strong poet..., the possibilities of aesthetic life remain too limited." (PA, 250) He immediately offers two other aesthetic forms of life: "a life devoted to the enjoyment of beauty" and a life, which "itself is an art". (PA 250 and 251.)

– Second, Shusterman says: "Just as one need not to be a rootless ironist to live the aesthetic life, so one need not take the path of the strong poet to create oneself aesthetically." (PA 253)

– Third, Shusterman says: "As Rorty's notion of the strong poet conflates artistic creation with innovative uniqueness, it similarly confuses between autonomy and original self-definition, freedom and uniqueness." (PA 254)

– What is more, fourthly, according to Shusterman, this is an elitist comprehension of autonomy and aesthetic life, and it cannot be offered to everybody. (See PA 255-257)

- In addition, fifthly, Rorty's aestheticized, elitist ethics is confined to the realm of the private ethics, and he absolutely excludes from that the impulses of the public *ethos*. (See PA 255-257)

– Plus this view of Rorty is realized in the framework of a "reductive linguistic essentialism," which harmonizes well with Rorty's radical textualism, but it is unacceptable if we speak about the central role of experience. (See PA 258)

In contrast, then, Shusterman revived Dewey's aesthetics in developing his somaesthetics and restored (rightly in my view) the central role of *experience*. This resulted in a new aesthetic view of ethics and the self as well. Shusterman, while developing aestheticized ethics within his somaesthetics, keeps the importance both of *authenticity* and *integrity of the self*, as the essence of self-identity. This approach is, nevertheless, not a monolithic unity, but *a unity of differences*, or as Hegel puts it, an "identity of identity and non-identity." This is in nice harmony with the classical definition of *beauty*, which was grasped by the Greeks as *unity in variety*. (See PA 252-254. – Emphases by A. K.) In Shusterman's words:

„The self-unity needed to speak meaningfully of self-enrichment and perfection is, however, something pragmatically and often painfully forged or constructed, rather than foundationally given. It surely involves developmental change and multiplicity, as all narrative unity must, and it can display conflict in its unity, just as interesting narratives do." (PA 249)

This kind of self-identity of the self is able to embrace even cultural shifts of postmodern style of living. Such lived unity "can even accommodate a self of multiple narratives, as long as these can be made somehow to hang together as a higher unity from the right narrative perspective, one which makes the self more compellingly rich and powerful as an aesthetic character." (PA 253)

Shusterman offers a personal application of this notion of the self in his philosophical essay which is strongly saturated with autobiographical content, „Next Year in Jerusalem? Jewish Identity and the Myth of Return" (PP 179-195):

„If the self is constituted by narrative and there is no one true narrative, then there is no one true self. This does not mean that any self-narrative is as good as any other; some are clearly better not only for explaining past action but for projectively fashioning better selves. Moreover, on the primitive logical level, a single self must

be presupposed as the referent needed to talk at all about self-narrative (and especially divergent self-narratives)... [But, the] substantive integrity of the self, the coherent fullness of a life, cannot be guaranteed by the referential identity of logic; it remains a task for the art of living. With respect to my Jewish question, such integrity remains problematic *and I experience myself as a rather multiple self*. To put it crudely, *there is an Israeli self (with an American background or penumbra)* whose Jewish identity is strongly and clearly defined through Israeli national culture. *But there is also a (recently reclaimed) American self (with an Israeli shadow)*, whose Jewish identity is mostly neglected, expressed only indirectly through its Israeli background when that occasionally gets foregrounded in my American life" (PP 185-186. – Emphases by A. K.).

Although the narrative identity and authenticity of the self is very important for Shusterman, he (as with most of us) is obviously looking for not only his self-identity, but also *the best ways to improve and enhance his self-identity*. „Who am I? Am I an American Jew or a Jewish American?" – asks Shusterman (PP 185-186), and he gives a postmodern answer, which ensures a unity of differences:

„*Golah* is central to Jewish identity partly because *aliyah* is, since it gives *aliyah* its precondition and point. If Jewish identity is best realized through *aliyah* and if self-realization is not performed by a single act but by a whole life of activity, then an intriguing possibility arises: a life of continued Jewish self-expression and self-realization through cycles of *yeridah* and *aliyah*, departure and return to Israel. (...) Its circular structure provides for flexibility and openness that are helpful in dealing with life's contingencies. Rather than making *aliyah* "a once and for all" affair (where any temporary turning back means a despicable fall), *recognition of the cyclical movement of departure and return enables us to integrate the periods of Israeli and golah living that fate may thrust on us, to weave them into a coherent narrative of continued Jewish commitment*" (PP 192-193. – Emphases by A. K.).

One of our American colleagues, Michael Ring emphasized in his lecture in Wrocław in 2012, entitled „The Aesthetic Cosmopolitan From a Neo-Pragmatist Perspective: Themes and Challenges in Shusterman," the dangers of aesthetic cosmopolitanism. Shusterman,

however, recognizes the danger of rootlessness and alienation, and he succeeds in overcoming it, when he underlines the importance of narrative integrity and authenticity, or in other words the importance of self-identity. Shusterman refuses namely the "Rortian non-self of incompatible 'quasi selves'," which does not have any "disciplined integrity" (PA 257), and he emphasizes especially the social determination of the self (cf. PA 255-257). It means that aesthetic life is *not identical*, for Shusterman, with aesthetic cosmopolitanism and does *not* imply any kind of rootless, absolute relativism, but rather a postmodern manifoldness and richness of experiences. Nevertheless, the view *does not mean* any boundless and idiosyncratic freakishness, but implies such an integrity of the self, such a unity of differences as goes together with exclusion of non-consistent elements. This results in the integrity of the self-identity.<sup>12</sup>

In this way, Shusterman emphasizes that a multiple self dwells in us, that is more than one self. Our actual re-totalization always decides provisionally for one of our selves, and these provisional unities of our self are always the results of new experiences, which are the negative experiences as Gadamer says; that is we gain them at the meeting points of cultures, sub-cultures, different forms of life.

*However, this is already the essence of Internarrative Identity Theory!* Internarrative Identity Theory says that we do not have only one unified self, but *we have multiple and embodied selves*. Ajit K. Maan emphasizes in her book (*Internarrative Identity: Placing the Self*) that sameness is body, the locus of the memories of home and ancestry and selfhood is self-representation. Identity is created "by *narratively mediating the sameness of their embodied selves and memories with the agency of self-representation*." (Maan 81. – Emphases by A. K.). It

<sup>12</sup> "Aesthetic unity is, in fact, easier achieved by ignoring some features, sacrificing potential richness precisely to insure unity against the threat of confusion through congeries of contingency." PP 195.

is not linear; it contains multiple beginnings; it emphasizes places and ancestral home.

In Maan's construction, the multiplicity of places and consequent multiplicity of voices are not to be negated, conquered, or marginalized, but these elements of our life are built in the emergence of our embodied selves.

### Conclusions

One can live, of course, a whole life without an essential change of his or her self in a smaller, mostly exclusive community, even today (especially if a person does not have a flexible self). However, the greater and more dynamic a community is (e. g., not a village, but a big city or wide net of creative friends, etc.), the less "chance" the individual has to live such a life, one which goes without changing his or her self. In addition, the internarrative identity theory will be valid in the case of more and more people today, due to the inevitable process of globalization. We can regard Shusterman's life as such an example, but we can easily find such example, I think, also among us and close at hand. Some of us also live such a life, in which we have to re-totalize our self very often in order to choose from our multiple self development possibilities.

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## SELF-CONSTRUCTION AND SELF-AWARENESS: WHICH ONE COMES FIRST?

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**ABSTRACT:** *On the background of George H. Mead's philosophy of subjectivity, the paper tries to constructively question the classical pragmatist idea that self and self-awareness are products of social interaction all the way down. This critique is based predominantly on some contemporary interpretations of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology of self-awareness (Dan Zahavi, Evan Thompson). The paper tries to argue that Mead's notion of the self as an emergent event out of the process of symbolic interaction conceptually presupposes a level of primitive bodily self-awareness which cannot be a product of such interaction but makes it possible in the first place. Simultaneously with pointing to the necessity of taking this elementary self-awareness into consideration, the paper shows what it might consist in. Subsequently, it points to several places in Mead's own texts where he seems to be contemplating the possibility of the existence of such primitive self-awareness but never fully develops it. In the final step, the paper enumerates and refutes the most obvious possible critiques of the proposed position.*

### Introduction

Except for William James, for pragmatic thinkers, the human selfhood and self-awareness are outcomes of inference. As Charles S. Peirce's texts show, pragmatism itself originated and, to a considerable extent, gained its very intellectual momentum from a rebellion against the Cartesian idea of the human selfhood as something with which we can be directly acquainted prior to interaction with our social environment (see *CP*, 5.225-237). John Dewey's (1922) theory of selfhood unfolds along similar lines, with a greater emphasis on the role of communication and cooperative action. Also for Dewey, the self is something that we can meaningfully talk about no sooner than within the matrix of social relationships between human conspecifics. Dewey, however, took over his theory of communication and selfhood from George H. Mead – a thinker, who (despite the fact of never having published a single philosophical monograph) introduced the most complete and systematic pragmatist theory of the self. For Mead, the

beginnings of selfhood are to be traced back to the process of gestural communication within which two or more organisms adjustively react to each other's movements by means of what he called "taking the attitude of the other". In this rendition, selfhood (in the most basic sense of self-awareness) appears on stage when one organism, performing certain bodily movement, can anticipate the adjustive response of another organism within a social act. Hence, also in Mead's perspective, selfhood is a product of inference.

The following text is going to challenge the straightforward pragmatist (and neo-pragmatist) view, according to which the self is a product of social interaction all the way down. More precisely, it is going to argue that social construction of the self requires a level of non-derived, affective self-awareness which makes the emergence of the cognitive (reflective) side of the self possible. Being fully aware of the fact that by doing so, one is treading on a very thin ice, it should be stated right at the outset that the intention behind the argument, which is going to be proposed below, is not to negate the idea of the self as a product of social interaction. Rather, on the example of Mead's theory of the self, the paper will endeavor to demonstrate that the notion of socially constituted selfhood, even in Mead's case, requires another level – a primitive level of non-inferential and non-thematic self-awareness which is *not* a product of social interaction or any kind of inference.

The paper is going to proceed as follows. First, it is going to briefly introduce Mead's theory of the emergence of symbolic communication and selfhood and, thus, put in place the conceptual framework which is going to be needed for further discussion. This will be done in the form of a discussion with one of the most innovative papers on Mead's concept of the self and taking the attitude of the other which have appeared in the recent years (Booth, 2013). In the second step, a critique of Mead's concept of the self will be introduced. This critique will be based predominantly on some contemporary readings of Edmund Husserl's

phenomenology of self-awareness (Dan Zahavi, Evan Thompson). In other words, it will be demonstrated that Mead's notion of the self as an event emergent out of the process of symbolic interaction conceptually presupposes a level of primitive self-awareness which cannot be a product of such interaction but, in fact, enables its existence in the first place. Simultaneously with pointing to the necessity of taking this elementary self-awareness into serious consideration, the paper will show what it might consist in. Subsequently, it will point to several passages in Mead's own texts where he seems to be contemplating the possibility of the existence of such primitive self-awareness but never fully develops it. In the final step, the paper enumerates and refutes the most obvious possible critiques of the proposed position.

#### The embodied self

The crucial role which the body plays in the constitution of human selfhood was recognized already by Peirce. According to his view, we do not possess anything which could be called intuitive self-consciousness since all our knowledge is a product of inference. In the case of human selfhood, children become gradually aware of themselves due to the growing awareness of the role played by their bodies in the process of affecting their physical and social environments (CP 5.231-233). Mead, for whom the place of human consciousness in nature was the central theme at least till around 1921, took a more naturalistic stance in this regard and began to think of human selfhood as a late evolutionary phenomenon which appeared as a response of the human body to the growing need of organizing its social relations with others. In the authorized biography of her father, Jane M. Dewey writes the following about Mead's approach to the study of human mind:

The psychologists and philosophers who, up to that time, had recognized any connection between psychological phenomena and the human body had found the physical basis of

mind in the brain alone or at most in the nervous system isolated from the whole organism, and thus from the relations of the organism to its environment. Mead, on the contrary, started from the idea of the organism acting and reacting in an environment; in this view the nervous system, brain included, is an organ for regulating the relations of the organism as a whole with objective conditions of life. (Dewey in Schilpp 1939, p. 25-26)

The Darwinian and Spencerian heuristic picture of an organism regulating its bodily relations with the environment was the leading idea of behaviorism of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Hence, there is no wonder that in *The Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, Mead claims that one of the two main intellectual sources of pragmatism is to be found precisely in the behaviorist<sup>1</sup> doctrine (see 1936, p. 351). Mead's social psychology (labeled as 'social behaviorism' by Charles W. Morris<sup>2</sup>) is, to a critical extent, based on his theory of action understanding, as we could call it nowadays. Mind and self, which, for that matter, should better be called – mindedness<sup>3</sup> and selfhood, are not static objects or things in our heads that make us intelligent and socialized beings but much rather should be viewed as

<sup>1</sup> At this point, it ought to be pointed out that in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, almost all American psychologists would refer to themselves as 'behaviorists.' We, thus, have to distinguish between for instance Mead's and Watson's version of behaviorism. In short, for Mead, behaviorism signified a *methodological* (as opposed to, for instance, an ontological) stance, according to which psychologists should be examining mental phenomena from an external point of view, i.e., from the standpoint of observable bodily activities of the examined subjects in social groups. Mead was highly critical of Watson's approach which seems to completely deny that certain inner dimensions of experience could become an object of scientific inquiry (for Mead such 'inner' items were attitudes, see below). For closer examination of the relations between Mead's and Watson's version of behaviorism, see: Baldwin (1986/2002, p. 46-48), Joas (1985, pp. 65-66), Mead (1934/1967, pp. 2-8), Waal (2002, pp. 10-15).

<sup>2</sup> See Morris in Mead (1934/1967, p. xvi).

<sup>3</sup> Although Mead himself refers to the bodies which are capable of taking the attitude of the other as having a 'mind', it would have been more accurate for him to refer to them as 'minded'. 'Mindedness' (being a property or skill), as opposed to 'mind', seems to bear significantly less substantialist a burden.

specific *skills* that are achieved by bodies which can systematically make sense of the actions of others and cooperate with them in a certain manner in the course of social interaction. Mead would undoubtedly agree with Richard Rorty (1979) when he wrote: "If the body had been easier to understand, no one would have thought that we had a mind" (p. 239). Mind ought to be explained from the perspective of bodily action, not the other way around. From the very first article in which he expressed his conviction about close interrelatedness between symbolic thinking and mindedness, Mead (1904) emphasized the motor and bodily dimension of social interaction: "Articulation, as a muscular process, is explained in the same way that movements of the face, of the hands, of the whole body are accounted for under the influence of emotional tension. Instead, therefore, of having to assume unknown or exceptional conditions as the antecedents of the origin of speech, we can find the conditions, present in our own movements" (p. 380). According to Mead, action understanding, as well as the most sophisticated forms of social interaction are not primarily intellectual, but above all bodily and motor processes.<sup>4</sup>

Elaborating on the above-mentioned premises, Mead developed a thoroughgoing theory of development of the human self. Although he took over the embodiment principle from the work of thinkers like Charles Darwin and Wilhelm Wundt, he remained more true to them than any of the former two.<sup>5</sup> Also for that reason we can undoubtedly agree with Kelvin J. Booth's (2013)

contention that "Mead may have been the first to advance an embodied theory of social mind" (p. 137). Booth finds two fundamental concepts of Mead's theory of action understanding which are fully embodied, namely attitudes and gestures. Attitudes are neurologically realized bodily dispositions encoding perceived objects in terms of possible reactions toward them. "Living is sense-making" as Evan Thompson (2007, p. 158) aptly put it. Attitudes are, for Mead, teleological (i.e., goal-directed) items by means of which organisms with complex central nervous systems make sense of their worlds. When I decide to do something, for instance, when I place my palms on a piano keyboard in order to start playing the first tones of the particularly demanding Ferenc Liszt's *La Campanella*, my entire bodily attitude and fingers already subtly anticipate the set of movements that has to be performed in order to play the initial tones. Since the earlier phases of the particular act already presupposes its later phases, the attitude enables a temporally stretched and coordinated bodily action aiming at a particular goal. It is actually the goal that directs and controls the entire act since its very beginning till the successful completion (or consummation, as Mead would call it).

In Mead's work, gestures and attitudes have the same definition, both are specified as incipient bodily movements whose initial phases already contain an information about their consummatory phase. On several occasions, Mead even uses these two terms interchangeably (e.g. 1910/1964, pp. 124, 136; 1934/1967, p. 43). The difference between attitudes and gestures does not lie in their own structure but in the context in which they are situated. Whereas attitudes, in the proper sense of the word, attune the organic body to the world of inanimate physical objects, gestures are attitudes to which certain class of physical objects, other living bodies, adjustively react. Gestures are, thus, attitudes situated in a social context. There would be no gestures in a world inhabited just by one (no matter how sophisticated) organism.

<sup>4</sup> For the analysis of this heuristic outlook of Mead's and its impact on contemporary sciences of the mind, see Franks (2010, pp. 90-91).

<sup>5</sup> Mead's theory of symbolic communication, and consequently also his theory of the self was crucially influenced by Darwin's theory of emotions and Wundt's anthropological theory of gestures. However, as Hans Joas demonstrates in great detail, both these theories of interaction tacitly presuppose mentalist and intentionalist vocabulary which they intend to explain. Mead was able to diagnose those errors and correct them in his own embodied theory of gestures. See Joas (1985, pp. 101-104).

Gestures and attitudes, similarly to another key pragmatist term – habit, are neither purely physical, nor mental; they belong to the realm of behavior, or sense-making bodily action in the world, from which all our analyses must commence. Being well aware of this, Mead took precisely the concept of ‘gesture’, which he, at the same time, deemed to be the most primitive item of social interaction, to be the starting point of his theory of action understanding (and thus also of his social psychology and philosophy of language). Since gestures are attitudes, which necessarily contain information about their consummatory phase; gestures inform other participants about what a particular actor is ‘up to’ in the social act. For the purposes of our discussion here, Booth (2013) underlines a very important point. Namely, Mead’s usage of the word gesture is different from the ordinary understanding of that term, which conceives of gestures as intentionally guided discrete bodily movements. Any movement can become a gesture insofar as it is responded to by another organism. It is not important whether an organism makes a movement with an awareness of it being subsequently reacted to or not. It is the response of the other that makes a certain bodily act a gesture, not the actor’s own intention.

The lack of awareness that my movement is going to instigate a certain response on the side of the other is precisely what distinguishes ‘conversation of gestures’ on the one hand, and ‘conversation of significant gestures’ or symbols (Mead, 1934/1967, pp. 42-50). In the case of conversation of gestures – which Mead had a liking to present on the background of his (by now well-known) example of a dog-fight – each dog’s movement is responded to by an adjustive motor response on the side of the other without awareness of any of the dogs that it is their own bodily movement that is the cause of the other’s response in the first place (Mead, 1934/1967, 42-43). In other words, in the conversation of gestures, the acting body does not respond to its own movement, it is fully immersed in the perception of its social

environment and reacts to it without awareness of its own position within the social act. There is no distinction between subject and object, the mutually responding bodies form “a single dynamic system. Instead of a conversation, we could liken this relationship to a dance where partners are continually adjusting to each other’s movements” (Booth, 2013, p. 140). Conversation of gestures is not a process where the partakers take turns – it is one continuum which more resembles Dewey’s late term of ‘transaction’ (1949), i.e., a continuous process of doing and undergoing which lacks any hard-and-fast boundaries between one and the other.

The conversation of gestures takes up a form of such a dynamic continuum because none of the acting bodies is capable of realizing what sort of response its movement is going to bring about from the other. Once we move a step further in Mead’s theory of action understanding, we move to the level of significant communication. The conversation of gestures becomes significant in the moment when the bodies participating in the social act become aware of the sort of response that their movement is going to call out in the other. Mead named this capacity ‘taking the attitude of the other’. An organism takes the attitude of the other as soon as it is aware of the *meaning* of its own movements within a social act, that is to say, as soon as it calls out in itself the same sort of response its bodily movement is going to call out in the other (Mead, 1934/1967, p. 76). In that moment, a gesture becomes significant because it bears functionally identical meaning for both participants of the social act.<sup>6</sup> The moment when an organism is capable of deploying the ability of taking the attitude of the other is, at the same time, a moment of emergence of mindedness, which, in turn is the initial phase of selfhood.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For the distinction between functional and existential identity of meaning in Mead, see Miller (1973a, pp. 12-17; 1973b, pp. 89-96).

<sup>7</sup> It is important to distinguish between the concept of ‘mind’ and ‘self’ in Mead’s writings. For instance, in the

**What takes the attitude of the other?**

The crucial role which the concept of taking the attitude of the other plays in Mead's entire project astonishingly contrasts with vagueness of its detailed definition. In his texts, Mead seems to simply presuppose this ability by human beings without explaining what this process specifically looks like. Moreover, as Booth (2013) remarks, neither does he "provide an adequate explanation as to why humans have this ability to take the position of the other toward our own gestures while other animals do not" (p. 141). On several occasions, Mead attempted to explain the process of taking the attitude of the other in more detail. However, these accounts remain unsatisfactory as to the question of how this human ability should lead to self-awareness. For instance, in his important paper "The Genesis of Self and Social Control" (1925) Mead states that the infant is particularly sensitive to the relation between its own social stimuli and the responses of others toward them. The ability to correlate one's own gestures with the responses of others, however, does not explain how this dyadic relation could lead to the child's self-stimulation, necessarily implied in the concept of taking the attitude of the other. In a similar manner, also calling out the memory images of the child's initially instinctive responses toward the gestures of others (Mead,

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paper "Social-Psychological Externalism and the Coupling/Constitution Fallacy" (2013), Tom Burke and Stephen W. Everett mistakenly contend that "Selves predate minds. Selfhood predates mentality" (p. 114). Such a rendition, however, does not accord with what we can find in Mead's writings. Mind, according to Mead, is the ability to take the attitude of the other and operate with significant symbols, e.g., in the form of holding an internal conversation of significant symbols. Self always presupposes the mind as its earliest phase (e.g. Mead, 1924-1925/1964, p. 278) and only appears later as the individual internalizes the social process as a whole. We can agree with Filipe da Silva's (2007) contention that "the unity of mind is a part of ... the larger unity of the self: the internalization of the conversation of significant gestures which is the mind leaves out many aspects of the pattern of social interactions reflected in the structure of the self" (p. 47). Self, therefore, cannot predate the mind.

1912/1964, p. 137) does not explain why we become an object to ourselves in the first place. As Booth (2013) shows in sufficient detail, also Mead's explanations of taking the attitude of the other, which are based on inhibition are not entirely satisfactory (p. 142). The incompleteness of Mead's concept of taking the attitude of the other has become a subject of numerous inspiring analyses (e.g., Joas, 1985; Cook, 1993; Gergen, 1999; Grant, 2004; Gillespie, 2005). None of them, however, posed the question which—from the perspective advocated in this paper—logically predates taking the attitude of the other; namely – what is it about our bodily experience that enables us to realize that it is *our* gestures towards which others respond? In the remainder of this paper, it will be argued that the awareness of the specific kind of ownership of gestures, towards which others respond, cannot come from the outside but must be a result of passive and pre-reflective bodily self-awareness, which is fully embodied and which, in turn, is the condition of possibility of the very process of taking the attitude of the other.

In his endeavors to come up with a complete and coherent conceptual landscape of the development of selfhood, Mead grappled with theories of self-consciousness based on imitation on multiple occasions (Mead 1909/1964; 1982, pp. 65-72; 1934/1967, pp. 51-61, etc.). I will not go into the issue of imitation with respect to the main claim of this paper for two reasons: i) this problem has been dealt with in sufficient length and precision elsewhere (see Joas, 1985, pp. 115-117; Cook, 1993, p. 84-92; Madzia, 2013, pp. 204-211); ii) and perhaps more importantly, the problem of the role of imitation in taking the attitude of the other is logically independent of the question whether the process of taking the attitude of the other could be preceded by some sort of self-awareness. Before a more comprehensive analysis of the problem of self-awareness is proposed, we will now, shortly, concentrate on Booth's account of the origin of taking the attitude of the other, based on what he calls 'mimesis'.

According to Booth (2013), taking the attitude of the other is a composite human ability resulting out of human inborn tendency of 'getting in synch' with others (mimesis). Mimesis, in Booth's rendition, consists of human tendency of *repetition* (an individual's re-enactment of her own previous action), *declarative pointing* (mutual enactment where bodies undergo similar experiences by directing their attention toward a common object), and *imitation* (bodies being synchronized with each other in simultaneous activity). The reason humans have developed mimesis (and, hence, also the ability to take the attitude of the other) is the lack of structure of the human neocortex, logically resulting in the lack of structure of the infant's behavior. Humans are, therefore, always ready to take over behavioral patterns of others and it is via the desire of mimesis that this process takes place. Further, Booth makes a distinction between subject-body (the body we are) and object-body (the body we have) and claims that it is the subject body that takes the attitude of the other. Subject-body, according to Booth, is a felt bodily unity from which things in the world are perceived and engaged. Object-body, on the other hand, is our own body perceived as one of the worldly objects. Booth likens his understanding of subject-body to Shaun Gallagher's (1986; 2005) body-schema which is a system of sensori-motor capacities that function without awareness or the necessity of perceptual monitoring. Body-schema is a system of habits and abilities that attune us to the world. According to Booth, it is precisely the subject-body or body schema that takes the attitude of the other. By means of our desire of getting in synch with others, our subject-body takes over their attitudes and gradually builds an object-body which is the content of our self-conscious reflective experience.

Booth's solution to the problem of the emergence of self-awareness is surprisingly Peircean. Booth contends that our own bodies become an object to ourselves (more precisely – to our subject-bodies) via the human desire to pay attention to the same things others pay

attention to. Hence our self-awareness is a product of inference:

One of the things that the adult is attending is the child herself. But adults are not just paying attention to the child's object-body; they are attending something else—the child as a center of experience. Thus, the child as a subject-body mimetically learns to pay attention to herself, to objectify herself through the attention of others. The child not only objectifies her own body but also her center of experience. In so doing, this center of experience actually becomes a self... (Booth, 2013, p. 145)

There are two problems to Booth's, otherwise very interesting, overall account. First of all, if he likens his concept of subject-body to Gallagher's body schema, it is difficult to see how a motor system of capacities, abilities and habits which just constrains movement and operates entirely on a sub-personal and non-conscious level, could 'attend' to anything (see Gallagher, 1986, p. 549; 2005, p. 17-24). Body-schema is not the sort of process that even marginally enters perceptual awareness; it is, by definition, just a sensorimotor organization of the body. Hence, if Booth compares the subject-body (as a 'felt' unity that attends to things in the environment), to body-schema, there is a danger of inconsistency in this key term of his.

Second, and probably more importantly, we can ask, how exactly self-awareness is to emerge as a result of joint attention. Here, again, it seems that the only way for something to become an object of joint attention, it 'always already' has to be placed in the perceptual field of both partakers in the act. That being said, only an object-body can possibly become an object of joint attention. How do we proceed from there and infer to subject-body? Booth (2013) is aware of this difficulty and claims, that adults refer not only to the object-body but primarily "to the child as a center of experience" (p. 145), in other words, to its subject-body. However, how can anyone refer to the subject-body from the third-person perspective if it is defined as bodily 'felt' unity? If we define the subject-body in this way, than the only

manner of meaningfully referring to it is from the first-person perspective. It seems, then, that also Booth's account must presuppose a certain level of, however minimalistic, self-awareness from the outset – in order to get it off the ground. In what follows, it will be demonstrated that Mead's own account is subject to a similar deficiency. Subsequently, it will be shown that this deficiency can be relatively easily eliminated by admitting the existence of a pre-reflective bodily self-awareness which Mead himself might have been at times considering.

According to Mead's theory of action understanding, gestures become significant once the individual making them is aware of the sort of motor response they are going to elicit in the other. In other words, we become an object to ourselves once we become aware of the meaning (response of the other) toward our own movements. However, how do we become aware of the fact that it is *our* gestures that is the cause of this response in the first place? Mead never thematized this issue properly. If I need to correlate my gestures with the response of the other (necessary condition for taking the attitude of the other), then I first need to be aware of those bodily movements as 'my own'. In other words, I need to be aware that it is *me* and *my movement*, which instigated the adaptive motor response in the other. My motor action toward the other (a gesture) can become an object of my attention only on the condition, that it is given in my experience as 'my own', that is – if I am able to perceive myself as the source of this movement. This is something animals obviously lack, as we can observe in the dog-fight example.

Logically speaking, in order to perceive my bodily movements as being the cause of the adaptive behavior of others, I first have to set myself as a bodily unity over against the environment. The gist of the presented argument is, thus, the following: *not the capability of taking the attitude of the other but a specific feeling of body-ownership is the necessary starting point of human*

*reflectivity and (probably) the main physiological property, which distinguishes human beings from other animals.* I propose to call this property the **primal self-awareness**, which is an affective, non-relational and non-intentional feature of the human body, which is not a product of inference (and, hence, also not a product of social interaction). The primal self-awareness does not possess a subject-object structure, it is not-object directed, it is a feeling of being a bodily unity, of being the source of movement – in other words, a feeling of being an agent. Mead described non-human animals which lack self-awareness in the following way:

The individual organism does not set itself as a whole over against its environment; it does not as a whole become an object to itself (and hence is not self-conscious)... On the contrary, it responds to parts or separate aspects of itself, and regards them, not as parts or aspects of itself at all, but simply as parts or aspects of its environment in general. (1934/1967, p. 172)

Booth has called this state of the animal mind, as the state of "qualitative immediacy" in which: "Animal mind throws itself into animated relationships with the things of its world with no distance between itself and other things" (2011). From the phenomenological point of view, the animal consciousness is radically open to the world – it is constantly fully consumed by what is going on in the environment without the reference to its own position in it as a distinct entity. The situation of qualitative immediacy, in which animals lack the awareness of their own movements as causes of the movements of others, is precisely the situation of the conversation of gestures. Mead was skeptical about the possibility that animals, on the present level of evolution, ever reach the level of taking the attitude of the other (e.g., 1924-1925/1964, p. 139; 1934/1967, pp. 92-93). He was convinced that animals lack self-awareness because they cannot take the attitude of the other. Doesn't it, nonetheless, make more sense to claim that it is, rather, the other way around? In other words, it is not the case that animals lack self-awareness (in the sense of being able to set themselves, as a unity, over

against the environment) because they cannot take the attitude of the other. They do not take the attitude of the other, because they cannot set themselves, as a unity, over against the environment. Animals are not aware that it is *them* and *their* bodily gestures towards which others react and, therefore, they are steadily fully consumed just by what others do without being aware of their bodies which they treat as a part of the environment.

How can an awareness of ourselves come from the outside? Cook (1993) speculates that, according to Mead, it is through correlating our movements with the memory images of the responses of others toward them (p. 88). On this basis, so the story goes, we gradually build awareness of ourselves as a distinct entity in the social group. This probably is a sound articulation of Mead's position. It is, however, insufficient for it does not explain on what basis we come to individuate our own movements as something toward which others respond. Zahavi (2003) makes this point quite clearly, when he writes: "If the reflecting experience is to encounter something as itself, if it is to recognize or identify something different as itself, it needs a prior acquaintance with itself" (p. 159). We cannot correlate our movements with the responses of others unless we are already pre-reflectively aware that it is *our* movements others respond to. Hence, before taking the attitude of the other, there necessarily must be a non-inferential awareness of body-ownership, an awareness of being the source of action, in other words – there must be primal self-awareness. Mead neglected this point, which makes his theory of the self incomplete.

Let us unpack the notion of primal self-awareness a little bit further. Namely, let us address the question, to what extent does the introduction of the concept of primal self-awareness undermine Mead's own theory of the self? As a matter of fact, this concept is not meant to undermine Mead's position altogether, but rather supplement it, for it is a precondition of the human

ability to take the attitude of the other. As noted above, the primal self-awareness does not possess a dyadic structure, it is not a subject-object relation (therefore, it also isn't intentional), it is not directed at anything. Rather, it is an affective state of the body, which must be (logically as well as temporally) presupposed before taking the attitude of the other (and, hence, becoming an object to oneself) takes place. Primal self-awareness is not a reflective property because reflectivity presupposes it.

In his quest against inwardness, Mead seems to have greatly neglected the affective basis of the self. In turn, this neglect has two quite unwelcome consequences: i) his concept of the self is overly intellectualist (reflection-based): "Self-consciousness rather than affective experience ... provides the core and primary structure of the self, which is thus a cognitive rather than an emotional phenomenon" (Mead, 1934/1967, p. 173).<sup>8</sup> ii) Because of this intellectualist flavor, it fails to establish a balanced relation between non-reflective and reflective dimensions of human experience. In other words, we can agree with Mead that the propositional, contentful level of the self is entirely a product of reflective inference. Nonetheless, if he had intended to stay true to the pragmatist *principle of continuity*,<sup>9</sup> Mead would have been better advised to take into account that the reflective (contentful) level of selfhood is an emergent outcome of a process of social interaction between individuals with certain unique affective properties that

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<sup>8</sup> See also Miller (1973a, p. 156).

<sup>9</sup> Mark Johnson (2007, p. 122-123) describes this principle, which both Mead and Dewey endorsed, in terms of two main characteristics: i) higher-lower continuity is a twofold thesis that so called "higher" organisms are not the result of some additional ontological kind emerging in the history of the world, and also that our higher cognitive capacities (such as reason, will or empathy) are not distinct in nature from the lower ones (perception, emotion etc.); ii) inner-outer continuity, on the other hand, is the denial that what is "inner" (the mental) needs ontological principles for its explanation different from those used to explain the outer (the physical).

make reflection possible. As this paper is trying to argue, the primal self-awareness might be a necessary part of such a story.<sup>10</sup>

Unless an individual is able to recognize that it is *her* movement that is being responded to, the process of taking the attitude of the other does not take place. As has been demonstrated, this sort of awareness cannot consistently be claimed to come from the outside (i.e., to be a product of social interaction). On the contrary, it is a condition of possibility of significant social interaction and of every inference to the content (meaning) of one's actions. To maintain otherwise seems to be begging the question. We can, thus, agree with Dan Zahavi (2009) in contending that any account of the self which disregards this primitive form of self-referentiality, mineness or form-ness of experience is a non-starter, and that any description of the experiential dimension of the self must do justice to the primitive bodily awareness of the sort, described above.

Mead never made up his mind about how exactly the process of taking the attitude of the other takes place. This is visible quite clearly in Mead's wobbly treatment of the concept of imitation<sup>11</sup> as well as in his not entirely satisfying attempt to explain the process of taking the attitude of the other via vocal gestures (see below). Nonetheless, at several places of his writings, he seems to be entertaining the idea that the origin of the self might be found in bodily states. In *Mind, Self, and Society* (henceforth *MSS*), for instance, he admits that we could talk of a single self if we identified the self with a certain feeling-consciousness, and that previous thinkers such as James and Cooley have tried to find the basis of selfhood in affective experiences. Mead even admits

that there is some truth in this sort of treatment, but then denies that it is the whole story and maintains that the core of the self is cognitive (Mead 1934/1967 pp. 164, 169, 173; Reck 1964, p. xxxi).<sup>12</sup>

Second example, that is definitely worth mentioning, is to be found in Mead's article "The Mechanism of Social Consciousness" (1912/1964). It was in this text, where he introduced the peculiar importance of vocal gestures for the process of taking the attitude of the other. Mead was convinced that in the case of vocal gestures we can perceive our action in the same way others do, and hence, can we also respond to it as others do.<sup>13</sup> Mead's understanding concept of the vocal gesture brings us, however, very little with respect to the key issue, i.e., explaining the emergence of self-awareness. It is true that, on the one hand, in case of vocal gestures it is easier to correlate our action (making a sound) with responses of others toward it. Nevertheless, if that correlation is to take place, we have to be aware that it is *our* sound that others are responding to in the first place. This is far from trivial. Other animals can make vocal gestures that are systematically responded to by others in a certain manner. Yet, since they seem to lack the awareness of a peculiar sort of *ownership* of those gestures, they do not develop the ability to take the attitude of the other. Also vocal gestures, therefore, presuppose some sort of pre-reflective self-awareness and any account of self-awareness in terms of vocal gestures *alone* would be a circular explanation.

The extent to which Mead emphasized the role of vocal gestures in the process of taking the attitude of the other in *MSS* has led several Mead commentators to argue that interaction by means of vocal gestures is the

<sup>10</sup> Apart from phenomena like inhibition, which, nevertheless, does not explain the emergence of self-awareness either. See Booth (2013, p. 142).

<sup>11</sup> See Mead (1909/1964, pp. 99-104; 1914/1982 pp. 54-58, 144; 1934/1967, pp. 51-61). For detailed analyses of Mead's outlook on imitation see Cook (1993, pp. 84-92), Booth (2013), Madzia (2013).

<sup>12</sup> Zahavi (2009) rightly remarks that what at first sight looked like a substantial disagreement between Mead and his predecessors might in the end be more of a verbal dispute regarding the appropriate use of the term 'self' (p. 568).

<sup>13</sup> See Mead (1922/1964, p. 243; 1924-1925/1964, p. 287, 1934/1967, pp. 61-68, etc.).

necessary precondition of becoming self-aware in the process of social interaction (see Baldwin, 1986/2002, p. 76-77; Thayer, 1981, p. 252; de Waal, 2002, p. 61). This contention is, nevertheless, quite problematic. Already in "The Mechanism of Social Consciousness" Mead holds that also the deaf-mutes can develop relatively normal personality: "the vocal gesture is not the only form which can serve for the building-up of a 'me', as is abundantly evident from the building-up gestures of deaf-mutes" (1912/1964, p. 140). In such a case, it is clear that something other, more basic, than vocal gestures is presupposed in order for the process of taking the attitude of the other to take place. Unfortunately, Mead does not elaborate on this point any further in terms of answering the question of what it could be about the human experience that enables even the deaf-mutes to become self-aware.

Lastly, in "The Social Self" (Mead, 1913/1964, pp. 143-144) he speaks that we have a running current of awareness of what we do, which he likens to an observer that accompanies all our self-conscious conduct.<sup>14</sup> He further says that this element of our conscious life is to be identified with the response which we make to our own conduct. Why is this important? In the aforementioned passages Mead seems to be realizing that some sort of self-awareness might accompany our everyday conduct virtually through the entire course of our waking, conscious lives. This is not a position Mead (but also Dewey) would normally defend. According to them, consciousness does not automatically imply self-awareness (e.g., Mead 1934/1967, pp. 135-136). In fact, in their rendition, we spend most of our waking lives in a state of what we could call a 'self-oblivion', in which we encounter objects and events of our ordinary experience in a purely habitual way without making distinction between subject and object of our experience. Self-awareness appears as a result of a problematic situation,

which blocks our 'flow' of action and makes us realize the lack of attunement between our bodies and the environment. Phenomenologically speaking, this is not quite the case. On the one hand, it is undoubtedly true that most of the time we do not *reflect* on what we are doing, since much of our action takes place in a habitual form with no need for reflection. On the other hand, the lack of reflection does not automatically imply that we are not conscious (i.e., pre-reflectively aware) of ourselves as acting agents.<sup>15</sup> Exactly this same point has been made by Evan Thompson in his critique of Hubert Dreyfus' phenomenology of skillful expertise; and applies to Dreyfus' reading of Heidegger just as much as to Dewey's and Mead's phenomenology of everyday experience:

The basic problem is that Dreyfus seems to think that the only kind of self-awareness is reflective self-awareness and hence that there is no prereflective self-awareness in skillful coping ... If skillful coping were not prereflectively self-aware, then it would not be different from unconscious automaticity and would have no experiential character whatsoever. And if it had no experiential character, then there could be no genuine phenomenology of skillful coping but only a logical reconstruction of it. (Thompson, 2007, p. 315)

Although we spend a fair amount of our waking lives in the 'flow' of our skillful coping, which is devoid of deliberate reflection, it is the case that we can bring our past actions to our conscious, reflective attention when we need to; and we are capable of doing this precisely because of the fact that at the time when we performed our actions we were pre-reflectively aware of what we were doing.<sup>16</sup> The primal self-awareness accompanies the predominant portion of our waking lives since we are unthematically conscious of ourselves as agents, although we do not deliberate about everything at all times: "Reflective self-awareness is often taken to be a thematic, articulated and intensified self-awareness, and

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<sup>14</sup> For another analysis of this issue, see Booth (2013, p. 138).

<sup>15</sup> Similar criticism of this pragmatist contention in Lewis (1991, p. 126).

<sup>16</sup> See also Kilpinen (2012).

it is normally initiated in order to bring the primary intentional act into focus. However, in order to explain the occurrence of reflection it is necessary that that which is to be disclosed and thematized is (unthematically) present" (Zahavi, 2003, p. 163). Mead might have been wrong in his 'all or nothing' approach toward the question of self-awareness; more precisely, in thinking that the only kind of self-awareness there is, is the reflective one.

Mead's concept of the self was above all motivated by his anti-Cartesian (anti-internalist, anti-dualist and anti-intellectualist) sentiment in which he probably went a little too far by neglecting the necessary properties of an *individual* human organism that enable it to enter into sophisticated forms of action understanding called taking the attitude or role of the other. At this point the following question suggests itself: Isn't the concept of primal self-awareness just a disguised Cartesianism? Not by any means. Any approach that could reasonably be labelled as Cartesianism would define the mind (or self) as i) detached; ii) contemplative; iii) immaterial and iv) reflective. In this regard, the primal self-awareness, as described above, is a negation of such a picture. As to the first point, the primal self-awareness is an entirely bodily property. It could be described as a model of the body for itself. It is a mode of experience, in which the body, as a totality, is present to itself. It has no existence outside of the bodily experience. In his 'pattern theory of the self', Shaun Gallagher (2013) has called this experiential dimension the "minimally experiential aspect of the self" in which the body is pre-reflectively aware of the mine-ness of the body and experiences itself as being an initiator or a source of action (pp. 3-4). Second, as opposed to the contemplative model of the mind, the primal self-awareness is affective in nature. It could be best described as 'feeling the body from the inside' as a totality, a feeling of being the source of action. Third, since the primal self-awareness is entirely physiologically conditioned, it is also a bodily property, hence, it is material. Finally, it should be emphasized –

the primal self-awareness is not reflective. It does not relate to anything outside itself, nor does it make an object of itself. It is involuntary and not object-directed. It does not have any propositional content. For all those reasons, it is not a Cartesian term in any meaningful sense of that word.

What role, then does the concept of primal self-awareness play in the process of rethinking Mead's concept of the self? First of all, it should be viewed as a bodily property which enables significant communication to take place. We cannot condition our conduct in the same way others do unless we are pre-reflectively aware that it is our own movements that is the cause of the responses of others. This sort of awareness, as the article was at pains to demonstrate, cannot be a result of inference. It is important to point out, however, that primal self-awareness does not, by any means, disprove the social construction of the *reflective* side of the self. As far as its *content* goes, we have no reason to question Mead's claim that the self is entirely a product of inference, in other words – that it is socially constructed all the way down. But the reflective always emerges out of the affective as well as the contentful arises out of the content-less. In his treatment of the development of the self, Mead overemphasized the former at the expense of the latter which resulted in his inability to properly explain what is so unique about human bodies that enables them to take the attitude of other. As this article has argued, the notion of primal self-awareness could be a candidate worth considering.

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### **III. PRAGMATISM AND OTHER PHILOSOPHIES**

**ART, TRUTH, EVENT**  
**POSITIONING THE NON-REPRESENTATIONALIST PARADIGMS**  
**OF PRAGMATIC NATURALISM AND PHILOSOPHICAL**  
**HERMENEUTICS<sup>1</sup>**

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*ABSTRACT: The paper aims at positioning two branches of the 20th century's non-representationalist paradigms of thought, namely, pragmatic naturalism and philosophical hermeneutics, by discussing the pertaining views of John Dewey and Justus Buchler, and in turn, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Martin Heidegger. The first section examines Dewey's views on practice, cognition, and truth, and in turn, Buchler's theory of judgment as an attempt at improving on Dewey's theory of experience. Since it is primarily Buchler's approach that shows considerable affinity to that of Gadamer, the second section proceeds by comparing their respective views on scientific inquiry and art. In order to map in more depth the similarities and differences between their approaches, a short historical genealogy of their versions of non-representationalism follows, as well as a discussion of the two pivotal points of such a genealogy, namely, Heidegger's idea of ontological difference and the Buchlerian notion of nature. These considerations lead to different conceptions of spatio-temporal relations as well as to different senses of the notion of "event." For that reason, the third section begins with a short discussion of a specific linguistic phenomenon, namely, the middle voice, by means of which some basic features of hermeneutic philosophy pertaining to the mentioned notions are to be highlighted. The paper concludes with summing up the common and different traits of pragmatic naturalism and philosophical hermeneutics, especially with respect to the issues of truth, justification, event, and interpretation.*

**I. Introduction**

In this paper I consider two trends within a more comprehensive orientation in the Anglo-Saxon and Continental philosophical movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Namely, I concentrate on two branches of what I call here non-representationalist paradigms of thought, namely, on pragmatic naturalism, and philosophical hermeneutics. In particular, I discuss the views of several representatives of these schools, those

of John Dewey, Justus Buchler, and in turn, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Martin Heidegger. My aim is to position their approaches in the light of one another, and that can be done most readily along the issues of art, truth, and event.

This way of posing my topic has been inspired by John Ryder's recently published volume (2013) titled *The Things in Heaven and Earth: An Essay in Pragmatic Naturalism*. In this book Ryder develops the comprehensive idea as well as the metaphysical and epistemological implications of a contemporary version of pragmatic naturalism—a philosophical stance that reconciles, among others, pragmatist constructivism with naturalist objectivism—and he also demonstrates the explanatory power and fruitfulness of such an approach when applied to issues pertaining to “social experience,” namely, topics related to democracy, national and international politics, and education. Although Ryder explicates the proposed pragmatic naturalist standpoint mostly by referring to more or less contemporary issues and debates in philosophy, his endeavor is primarily informed by the views of two major representatives of The Columbia School Naturalism.<sup>2</sup> It is Justus Buchler's metaphysics of natural complexes and his thoroughly relational notion of nature that inspire most the metaphysical and epistemological sides of the version of pragmatist naturalism Ryder advocates, and it is John Dewey's thick conception of democracy that guides—beside the epistemological insights gained from Buchlerian naturalism—the author's approach to diverse aspects of social experience.

Nevertheless, the views of these two major philosophical heroes of Ryder's volume clash on one point with one another according to the author's presentation, and that point concerns above all the cognitive import of art, and by implication the issue of truth as event – two topics

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<sup>2</sup> The four major figures of Columbia School Naturalism were Frederick J. E. Woodbridge, John Dewey, John Herman Randall, Jr., and Justus Buchler.

which, in turn, pertain to the very heart of the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, namely, to the ontology of art developed in *Truth and Method*. Dewey figures here as having much more comprehensive notions of knowledge, truth, and human interaction with the world in general, than those addressed in most of the more recent—or, for that matter, more traditional—epistemologies, notions broad enough for comprehending the whole spectrum of human experience. Yet, Ryder also points to several aspects of his thought which are less satisfactory, especially when at stake is that truth which artworks are able to convey. In turn, Buchler is presented as having developed a theory of judgment which successfully improves on Dewey's conception of experience, in such a way that it is able to do justice to the cognitive dimension of art, among others. Although in his discussion of the issue of art and knowledge the author does not refer to Gadamer and his ontology of art, it is striking just in how many important respects the views he presents—following Buchler—converge with those of Gadamer, although the remaining crucial differences are not to be overlooked, either.

Thus, one of my primary interests in this paper is to map, compare, confront with one another, and position the main features of these approaches, in particular the various ways they conceive the basic manner in which humans comport themselves toward their external world, and thereby achieve meaning in their life. This concerns first and foremost an issue regarding to which one can observe a clear affinity between the overall philosophical outlooks of the investigated approaches, indeed, a common feature of pragmatism in general, and philosophical hermeneutics. Namely, both attempt to overcome the traditional representationalist paradigms of conceiving the basic nature of the relation between humans and their enviring world. As opposed to the strict line, of Cartesian origin, drawn between the subject and its objective world—which is to be bridged again via methodological means—both of these

philosophical trends entertain a more elementary and much more comprehensive idea of how humans relate to the world. Such a non-representationalist orientation is carried out in both camps by appealing to the primacy of—although diversely conceived, nevertheless basic notions of—practice, over against the traditional representationalist privileging of methodologically secured theoretical world-comportment. Thereby they are also compelled to offer newly construed accounts of knowledge and truth, as in fact they do.

All these appoint the main issues I'll concentrate on. First I examine one-by-one the pertaining views of the two discussed representatives of The Columbia School Naturalism, namely, Dewey and Buchler. Here I'll address in particular their respective conceptions of interaction, cognition, and truth, all of them obviously being informed by their respective notions of practice. Since it is primarily Buchler's approach that shows considerable affinity to that of Gadamer, I proceed by sketching and comparing their respective views on scientific inquiry and art. Furthermore, in order to map in more depth the similarities and differences between the mentioned two versions of pragmatic naturalism, on the one hand, and the hermeneutic philosophies of Heidegger and Gadamer, on the other, I offer a short historical genealogy of their non-representationalist paradigms of thought. Having done so, I concentrate on the two pivotal points on which these philosophical stances seem to converge with, and at the same time diverge from, one another, namely, on the pragmatist notion of nature, and in turn, on the fundamental Heideggerian concept—followed also by Gadamer—of the so called ontological difference. Since the pertaining considerations will lead us to different conceptions of spatio-temporal relations as well as to some sense of the notion of "event", as a next step I insert a short discussion of a specific linguistic phenomenon, namely, the middle voice, by means of which some basic features of hermeneutic philosophy pertaining to the mentioned notions, and thereby its specificity within the non-

representationalist paradigms, are to be highlighted. Finally, I conclude by focusing on and summing up the common and different traits of pragmatic naturalism and philosophical hermeneutics, especially with respect to the rather epistemological issues implied by them.

The structure of the paper is the following, accordingly:

*I. Introduction*

*II. The Pragmatic Naturalism of Dewey and Buchler*

II.1. Dewey on Practice, Cognition, and Truth

II.2. Buchler's Theory of Judgment. An Attempt at Improving Dewey's Theory of Experience

*III. Positioning Pragmatic Naturalism and Philosophical Hermeneutics*

III.1. Positioning Buchlerian Naturalism and Gadamerian Hermeneutics along the Issues of Scientific Inquiry and Art

III.2. Overcoming Modern Subjectivism. A Genealogy of the Discussed Non-representationalist Paradigms of Thought

III.3. Heidegger's Idea of Ontological Difference and the Buchlerian Notion of Nature

*IV. Truth and Event*

IV.1. Medial Events, Middle Voice, and Philosophical Hermeneutics

IV.2. Epistemological Consequences. Truth, Justification, Event, Interpretation

**II. The Pragmatic Naturalism of Dewey and Buchler**

**II.1. Dewey on Practice, Cognition, and Truth**

As it is well known, Dewey's pragmatism departs from the long-standing Western tradition of privileging theory over against practice, and he does so by developing a non-dualistic account of experience, and of nature as it is experienced. His departure concerned both basic historical forms of privileging theory, namely, the high esteem for the theoretical way of life (originating in ancient Greece), and the modern representationalist view of the relation between cognition and world (originating primarily from Descartes). As an illustration of Dewey's non-representationalist agenda I quote only one short passage, from 1908:

"The issue is no longer an ideally necessary but actually impossible copying, *versus* an improper but unavoidable modification of reality through organic inhibitions and stimulations, but it is the right, the economical, the effective, ... the useful and satisfactory reaction *versus* the wasteful, the enslaving, the misleading, and the confusing reaction" (Dewey 1908a, 134).

This orientation entails a shift away from the primacy of theory within the theory-practice opposition, to the alternative between good or less satisfactory actions and reactions. By this move theory becomes understood as a particular practice, namely, a tool in the service of action within an overall primacy of practice.

The primacy of practice has been foreshadowed in the history of philosophy at least from Kant's so called anthropological turn onward, who discerned the real role of reason in its being constitutive of morality, rather than cognition. In fact, such a primacy became a recurring topic in the form, e.g., of Fichte's concept of "I" in which being and acting overlap one another; or in the views of Schelling, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche, according to which being is ultimately willing; or in Marx notion of production, etc. It is peculiar to Dewey's metaphysics, however, that practice for him is to be

understood as “the practical machinery for bringing about adaptation of the environment to the life requirements of the organism” (ibid., 133), in short, as the functioning of organic human life. In such a context, everything receives its determination through the function it has, namely, the role it plays in the overall operation of the human organism.

Accordingly, cognition for Dewey is itself an organic process, fully derivative of practice:

“[...] the appropriate subject-matter of awareness [i.e., cognition] is not reality at large, a metaphysical heaven to be mimeographed at many removes upon a badly constructed mental carbon paper which yields at best only fragmentary, blurred, and erroneous copies. Its proper and legitimate object is that relationship of organism and environment in which functioning is most amply and effectively attained; or by which, in case of obstruction and consequent needed experimentation, its later eventual free course is most facilitated” (ibid., 136).

The function of cognition is to help overcome whatever obstacle arises in the ongoing flow of precognitive, practical activity (see also Blattner 2000, 232-34). Ideas are, similarly, to be regarded as what their functions are, namely, they are intentions to get practical organic activity back under way in some definite fashion, they are plans or rules for action. As Dewey puts it: “ideas are essentially intentions (plans and methods), and [...] what they, as ideas, ultimately intend is *prospective*—certain changes in prior existing things” (1908b, 99). The purpose of knowing is to secure the undisturbed flow of practical life, and for that end, to assist the controlling of the environment. The truth or falsity of a particular idea or a unit of knowledge is to be determined according to its success or failure at fulfilling *that* function. A true idea is an operational one: one that works, one that is a solution to a problem, one that “corresponds,” that is, answers—like a key to the conditions set by a lock—to the functional demands. Success in solving that problem which gave rise to the idea of how to solve it, makes that idea warranted assertable, and in that sense true.

As Ryder points it out in his volume, Dewey’s understanding of what counts as knowledge and truth is much more comprehensive than most approaches to that issue developed in more recent epistemologies, analytic or otherwise. The fact that cognition is treated by Dewey as a functional element of a general, creative process of evolving experience seems to be a conception broad enough for comprehending the whole spectrum of the various ways in which humans comport themselves to the world. Yet, there are less satisfactory aspects of Dewey’s approach, too, which may become explicit and especially pressing with regard to the question of the cognitive import of art—and Ryder does not fail to point them out. He enumerates two of the possible obstacles to “building into Dewey’s sense of logic the cognitive dimension of art” (2013, 7/15).<sup>3</sup> The first is that for Dewey science remained the paradigmatic instance of knowledge, and even if he conceived scientific inquiry in broad, non-representational terms, “it is not clear,” Ryder writes, “that it can accommodate knowledge that results from query of the sort that characterizes the arts” (ibid.). Furthermore, insofar as Dewey equates true knowledge with warranted assertability, to that extent he tends to privilege knowledge in the form of propositional truth. But such a conception is “likely to be too restrictive to handle cognition in the arts, simply because the arts are not for the most part about assertions, warranted or otherwise” (Ryder, ibid.).

In sum, although Dewey redefined the whole epistemological issue of cognition and, indeed, the very relation between humans and their environment in general in an anti-Cartesian and non-representationalist manner, namely, in terms of the factual practice of organic human life (rather than sheer thought), he nevertheless tended to think along the model of scientific inquiry and its propositional truth. And even if

<sup>3</sup> I refer to Ryder’s volume by the formula: chapter number / page number *within that chapter*, for I have access only to a chapter by chapter division of the book.

he recognized the warrant of such a truth in its practical, operational, functional success, the enumerated doubts pertaining to these and similar issues are reasons good enough for exploring the ways and possibilities in which Dewey's conception of experience and interaction may be improved.

## **II.2. Buchler's Theory of Judgment. An Attempt at Improving Dewey's Theory of Experience**

With that purpose in mind, Ryder turns to Justus Buchler's pertaining considerations, who was explicit on the point that Dewey's tendency to think of knowledge in terms of inquiry was a major shortcoming of his conception of experience in general. Buchler developed his theory of judgment and his resulting concept of query as an attempt to correct just that Deweyan tendency and, indeed, the traditional view of knowledge prevailing in it, namely, knowledge understood as the result of inquiry. The aim of Buchler's approach is to recognize and acknowledge the *various* ways in which humans interact with, and thereby may learn about, their environment. Whenever some kind of selection governs an interaction, a selection in the sense of "a more or less systematic organization or manipulation of complexes toward some end or [...] result" (Ryder 2013, 7/22), such an interaction is a judgment according to Buchler. Judgments, then, are purposeful orderings of the complexes that surround us, and they are classifiable in three basic groups: they are either assertive, or exhibitive, or else, active judgments.

So called assertive judgments are generally propositional statements, and they are evaluable regarding their truth-value. It is noteworthy that assertive judgments need not necessarily be linguistic (Ryder's example here is a mathematical equation). And, of course, the sheer fact that an utterance is linguistic does not already render it assertive—consider e.g. a linguistic performance, a recitation, which is a case of exhibitive judgments. As such, it does not so much state something factually true

or false, but rather reveals some novelty about its subject matter, as works of art generally do. The evaluation of exhibitive judgments differs from how we evaluate assertive judgments, namely, according to their (referential) truth-value. For an exhibitive judgment is rather suggestive and evocative, and it is evaluable "for example by the deeper understanding and appreciation it enables or by the expanded possibilities it reveals," Ryder explains (*ibid.*, 7/18). Finally, so called active judgments manipulate their surroundings by acting upon them, by doing something with them to some effect. A typical case of assertive judgments is a declarative sentence; that of exhibitive judgments is any work of art; and an activity of producing something or just doing something (not assertive or exhibitive) falls in the category of active judgments.<sup>4</sup>

These categories of judgment are only ideally distinguishable in a clear cut manner, practically they often overlap one another. Nevertheless, all of them may yield some kind of knowledge: they may highlight, explore, or reveal in one way or other the complexes they are to judge. Furthermore, when judgments of any kind are developed in some methodic or systematic way, they become sharpened and interrogative procedures, that is, instances of query. Insofar as such interrogative procedures may yield real knowledge, the results of query of any of the enumerated kinds are to be regarded as of cognitive value. The obvious aim of Buchler's theory of judgments and his concept of query, in which such a theory culminates, is to make room for a notion of cognition wider than that implied by scientific inquiry (which is a specific form of query, one properly to be associated with assertive judgment). Science, art, but

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<sup>4</sup> It may be of some interest to note that Buchler's classification coincides to a remarkable extent with the pertaining division introduced by Wilhelm Dilthey (1927). Within the so called objectifications of life (*Lebensausdrücke*) Dilthey differentiated between the following three groups: concepts, judgments, patterns of thought; acts or actions; and expressions of life-experience (*Erlebnisausdrücke*).

also perfecting of any kind of activity—all of these are forms of query for Buchler.

The claim that knowledge results from such a comprehensive notion of query, which in turn is not exhaustible by any procedure of inquiry associated with assertive judgment or propositional truth, demands of course that the concept of truth be broad enough to cover non-propositional forms of truth. Ryder in fact develops a pluralistic notion of truth claiming that:

“[...] truth itself has a multiple meaning [...] In some cases [...] truth is a matter of accurate depiction or reflection, in others it is a matter of insightful evocation, and in still others it has to do with having an impact on us. All of these and no doubt other senses of truth have in common the fact that they enable us to carry on, to move on to the next proposition, belief, insight, or experience” (ibid., 7/27).

In order to broaden, accordingly, Dewey’s definition of truth as warranted assertability, Ryder introduces the notion of truth as “warranted actionability,’ whatever its source and in whatever orders of our experience it is relevant” (ibid.). It must be stressed, furthermore, that the author emphasizes here the fact that “truth has something to do with the moving forward” and that it has a verbal sense such as depicting, enabling, engendering something, etc., rather than a static sense of reflecting some state of affairs (ibid., 7/26-7). It is especially this verbal sense of truth which I’d like to address below, comparing it with a similar notion in the context of hermeneutic philosophy (part IV.). Before that, however, I’ll try to position the two discussed non-representationalist paradigms of thought in several different respects.

### III. Positioning Pragmatic Naturalism and Philosophical Hermeneutics

#### III.1. Positioning Buchlerian Naturalism and Gadamerian Hermeneutics along the Issues of Scientific Inquiry and Art

On this point it is quite a natural step to turn to that philosopher, namely, to Hans-Georg Gadamer, who devoted most of his energies to the philosophical justification of both the cognitive import of art and the scientific value and dignity of the humanities.<sup>5</sup> On a point of his volume Ryder makes the following suggestion: “epistemology generally would do well to re-examine its principles with the cognitive capacity of art in mind” (2013, 7/25). In fact, this is almost exactly the task we find carried out in Gadamer’s magnum opus, except that—for reasons to be explained later on—his investigation takes the form of ontology, rather than epistemology.<sup>6</sup> If we now begin to compare the kind of Buchlerian pragmatist naturalism Ryder advocates with Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, we find the first important similarity, accordingly, in their very orientation. Namely, both of these philosophical approaches are motivated by the task of legitimizing forms of cognition beyond that implied by scientific inquiry.

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<sup>5</sup> The fact that Gadamer has been preoccupied by these themes is immediately reflected in the very titles of the first two (out of three) parts of his *magnum opus*: “Part I. The question of truth as it emerges in the experience of art,” and “Part II. The extension of the question of truth to understanding in the human sciences.”

<sup>6</sup> Ryder writes: “Imagine how differently naturalist epistemology might have developed had it begun with the [...] reasonable assumption that because art results in understandings and insights that we have every reason to count as knowledge, we may therefore regard the knowledge generated by art as among the paradigmatic instances of knowledge. That this has not occurred is clear from the fact that one is hard pressed even to find the word ‘art’ in the indexes of major epistemological studies” (ibid., 7/24). Yet, in Gadamer’s case experience of art is the paradigmatic instance of knowledge drawn from any kind of non-methodical, hermeneutic experience.

Attacks on objectifying knowledge have been launched on the Continent most explicitly perhaps by Husserl, Heidegger, and Sartre. Husserl regarded objectivism as untenable within the phenomenological framework of the immanency of intentional consciousness, insofar as objectivism implies the “transcendent moment” of adequacy to a mind-independent reality and as such it is to be “bracketed” in the process of so called phenomenological reduction. In turn, Heidegger and Sartre criticized objectivism mainly as an escape from the existential concern for authenticity. In *Truth and Method*, however, Gadamer advocates a more relaxed position toward objectifying knowledge—similar to that reflected in Buchler’s theory of judgment—insofar as he defends the truth claim of hermeneutic query beyond—and not instead of—that acquired methodologically. This, then, is a second similarity between the discussed two positions. Gadamer, no less than the Buchlerian version of naturalism, does acknowledge a certain validity of scientific knowledge. What he refuses, though, is the sciences’ hegemonic claim that methodologically secured and in that sense objective knowledge would be the only, or even primary, form of truth. It is for that reason that in his magnum opus Gadamer aims at exploring the whole breadth of the so called “hermeneutic phenomenon” (namely, experience of art; experience of history—especially, but not exclusively—in the humanities; and linguistic world-experience in general, also in its philosophical refinement), defends the peculiar truth claim of such kinds of hermeneutical experience, and highlights their role within the *Bildung* of individual and communal life.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> It is striking how similar the setting, the terms, and the description of the significance of the arts and the humanities offered by Ryder are: “Modernism has emphasized objectivity to such an extent that it has obscured the many respects in which people in fact do create our lives, our societies, and most importantly the respects in which our lives have meaning. This is done implicitly in daily life. More formally, it is done through the arts and the humanities, more than anywhere else. Literature, music, the visual arts, the performing arts, history, and even philosophy [...] have one important

Nevertheless, Buchler and Gadamer apparently conceive the defining characteristics of scientific inquiry in somewhat different terms, and this seems to inform to a considerable extent the rest of their theories. For Buchler, the peculiarity of science is that it utilizes the human capacity for producing assertive, propositionally fixed judgments. In turn, the peculiarity of science for Gadamer is that it aims at producing objectifying, de-contextualized knowledge through methodological rigor.<sup>8</sup> For Gadamer, the opposition between scientific and other kinds of cognition rests on the difference between practices that are methodologically secured and those interpretive ones which—for a number of reasons discussed below, the so called hermeneutic circularity being only one of them—escape methodology; whereas for Buchler the corresponding opposition between assertive and the other two kinds of

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trait in common. They all select aspects of their subject matter and relate them in new ways, whereby they generate, and reveal to an audience, new relationships, new meanings, and new experiences. These activities are all creative of our world precisely in that they bring to our attention ways of seeing and thinking that had not been available before. Furthermore, in doing so they are not simply revealing something that has all along been hidden, waiting to be discovered. On the contrary, they are creating new properties of the world, novel characteristics of the subjects they study and of the lives of those of us who interact with them, as either observers or participants” (2013, 5/11).

<sup>8</sup> For sake of clarity, it is advisable to differentiate between the possible meanings of the term “objective.” In its strongest sense “objective” refers to either the notion of reality-in-itself, or the ideal case of knowledge representing such reality-in-itself, apart from any subjective moment within such knowledge. In turn, objective knowledge in the Kantian sense pertains to the world of phenomena and obtains its objective validity—not so much from mind-independent reality, but rather—from the fact that each and every rational subject has the same a-historical a priori constitution of consciousness the proper use of which may produce knowledge valid for all. Today, however, when the notion of such an a-historic structure of consciousness, as well as the possibility of having access to reality as it is in itself, are mostly regarded as untenable, the term “objective” is for the most part taken in a more realistic sense, one that typically refers to results of scientific, methodologically secured procedures (such as e.g. an experiment) designed to exclude subjective and other equivocal moments from the inquiry.

judgment rests on the difference between propositional and non-propositional embodiments of judgment, all of them being capable of methodical or systematical refinement.

There are at least two important aspects to this apparent difference. The first is that according to Gadamer the assertive judgments typically produced in the sciences, and philosophy influenced by the sciences, feed on a nominalist grasp of language, namely, language utilized as a system of signs rather than approached as a speculative-mirroring medium of ontologically constitutive reality. Furthermore, methodology and nominalist utilization of language go hand in hand, insofar as methodical procedures aim precisely at excluding—beyond all the subjective factors—linguistic equivocity inherent in non-terminological language usage. To that extent, Gadamer’s distinction between methodological and hermeneutic practices seems also to imply or comprehend the Buchlerian distinction between assertive and other kinds of judgments: methodological practices aim at producing propositional truths, whereas hermeneutic practices may lead to some understanding which is expressible in non-propositional language, exhibitiv artworks, or actions, which nevertheless reflect some truth. But Gadamer’s distinction does not only seem to comprehend Buchler’s insights in this respect, it seems to point beyond the latter—and that concerns the second aspect to be highlighted here.

Namely, the human capacities for presenting forms of cognition beyond that implied by scientific inquiry are certain non-assertive types of judgment for Buchler, whereas it is understanding for Gadamer. Although there certainly are discernible overlaps between the two notions, of utmost importance here for us are the differences between them. In his sketch of the history of the concept of judgment Gadamer traces it back, first, to the humanist notion of *sensus communis* (not to be equated with Aristotle’s similarly termed concept

developed in *De Anima!*), and in a second step, to the Greek notion of *phronesis*, the Aristotelian elaboration of which offers the very model for Gadamer in articulating his notion of understanding. All these are important here for two reasons. The first is that by means of such a genealogy Gadamer immediately situates the whole of his philosophical approach in the humanist tradition, and this is reflected in the fact that the “organ” of hermeneutic query—that which governs it—is not so much any systematic procedure, but rather, a “universal and common sense” (*sensus communis*). Such a “sense” is not a psychological talent, not something we may or may not have by nature. It is something one may acquire exclusively through *Bildung* (see the chapter on *Bildung* in Gadamer 2004, esp. 15-17). Although such a *sensus communis* includes in itself the capacity of judgment, it points beyond the latter, insofar as it is a disciplined “sense” acquirable only in the process, and as a result, of having become *gebildet*. To that extent, there seems to be a tension on this point between Buchler’s and Gadamer’s views. For the methodic or systematic sharpening of judgment—be it assertive, exhibitiv, or active—is part and parcel of Buchler’s notion of query. As opposed to that, the *sensus communis* governing hermeneutic practice cannot, by any means, be methodized, systematized, let alone being formalized.

The fact that hermeneutic practice resists methodology is also underlined by another, even more decisive aspects, and that is the second lesson to be drawn here from Gadamer’s mentioned genealogy. This concerns the very nature and constitutive moments of understanding, the core concept in hermeneutics which refers to the elemental mode of our being open for whatever is. Nevertheless, I’ll address here several issues regarding the treatment of art in the presently discussed authors, primarily because it is the experience of art—as the paradigm case of hermeneutic experience in general—on which the peculiarities of Gadamer’s ontological conception of understanding can most readily be demonstrated.

As mentioned earlier, Gadamer takes the cognitive significance and truth claim of art for granted, just like Buchler and Ryder do. He would probably subscribe to Buchler's claim that art can most readily be associated with a kind of exhibitiv judgment, too. For Gadamer's central notion for describing "the mode of being of the work of art," that is, what art "does" or is able to achieve, is *Darstellung*, and this concept implies "exhibiting" or "displaying," as well as "presentation" (the term with which *Darstellung* is translated in the English edition of *Truth and Method*). This suggests, already on the level of terminology, a certain proximity of the pertaining views of these authors.

Now, in Dewey's notion of continuously evolving experience there seems to be no clear distinction between making an artifact and creating a work of art. In turn, Buchler's theory of judgment does make room for such a distinction, insofar as creating artworks is a matter of exhibitiv judgment, whereas making artifacts results from a form of active judgment. Nevertheless Gadamer, who in this regard follows the Greek distinction between *techné* and *poiesis*, not only draws the distinction between "making" and "creating," but he does so by referring to a peculiar ontological process. For it is part of the essence of making or producing something that there is a plan (based on an idea of the product) available in advance, and the task is to realize it—which can be done repeatedly. As opposed to that, it is an essential characteristic of artistic creation that it cannot in a strict sense be reproduced. This fact points to an essential feature of works of art, namely, that every truly artistic creation is as much the outcome of an uncontrollable event, of a unique and unrepeatable event of "succeeding," as it is the result of an effort on the artist's part. With this, a notion of event constitutive in the creation of artworks comes to the fore.

Furthermore, in a chapter of his volume titled "Making Sense of World Making: Creativity and Objectivity in Nature" Ryder makes the point that "creativity and

objectivity [...] stand in a symbiotic relation with each other. Objectivity provides the framework in which creativity occurs, and creativity is the developmental process of the world" (2013, 5/13). This amounts to conceiving the basic relation between nature and art in a very similar way as that emphasized by Gadamer. For in that respect, too, Gadamer follows ancient Greek insights according to which there is a sense of continuity between art and nature, namely, art having its place where nature left room for its further perfection. Gadamer underlines such continuity by maintaining that the form of motion which prevails in nature and the verbal sense of the "being" of artworks as they are experienced are the selfsame. Both of them take place in the form of play (*Spiel*), namely, as "self-presentation (*Selbst-Darstellung*) [which] is the true nature of play" (Gadamer 2004, 115). It is for that reason that nature has for long been regarded as the model for conceiving the essence of art:

"[...] the being of the work of art is connected with the medial sense of play (*Spiel*: also, game and drama). Inasmuch as nature is without purpose and intention, just as it is without exertion, it is a constantly self-renewing play, and can therefore appear as a model for art." "[...] self-presentation is a universal ontological characteristic of nature" (Gadamer 2004, 105, 108, respectively).

However, for Gadamer the mentioned continuity prevails not merely between art and nature, but indeed, between any mimetic representation and its "original," what it represents. And such continuity is of primary importance for showing the cognitive dimension of art. For art is not to be regarded, as it became customary at least from Schiller onward, as a matter of "beautiful semblance," that is, the opposite of reality. On the contrary: artistic presentation has an essential, ontologically constitutive relation to that what it exhibits. Gadamer shows that for example in the case of pictures which differ from sheer copies precisely in virtue of their standing in such an essential relation to their originals. But more generally, his point is that any

case of mimetic representation is not only an act of highlighting the essential features of that which is being mimetically presented, but such an act of highlighting is made possible by an emanation-like event that guides the process in which one tries to capture the original. Mimetic representation is that *of* the original—in the sense of both subjective and objective genitive, but with a greater emphasis on the latter—it is grounded in a prevailing ontological relation between the representation and what it represents:

“The content of the picture itself is ontologically defined as an emanation of the original.” “The work of art is conceived as an event of being (*Seinsvorgang*) [...] Its being related to the original is so far from lessening its ontological autonomy that, on the contrary, I had to speak [...] of an increase of being” (Gadamer 2004, 135, 145, respectively).

As we can see, the concept of *Darstellung* is an overarching notion for Gadamer, one that binds together the concepts of art, play (as well as the spectator, who “despite the distance [...] still belongs to play”), but eventually also the concepts of word, and furthermore, speculative language, and Being (namely, the “speculative character of being” as “self-presentation,” where self-presentation “and being-understood belong together”—Gadamer 2004, 115, 427, respectively):

“Obviously it is not peculiar to the work of art that it has its being in its presentation, nor is it a peculiarity of the being of history that it is to be understood in its significance. Self-presentation and being-understood belong together not only in that the one passes into the other [...]; speculative language, distinguishing itself from itself, presenting itself, language that expresses meaning is not only art and history but everything insofar as it can be understood. The speculative character of being that is the ground of hermeneutics has the same universality as do reason and language” (Gadamer 2004, 427).

What is important here for us is that *Darstellung*, especially in its primary sense of *Selbst-Darstellung*, is an utter ontological notion for Gadamer, one that refers to an anonymous process of the emanation-like self-

presentation of Being, a temporal fulfillment in which we are faced with, and our understanding may be enlightened by, whatever presents itself for us. What is primarily “exhibitive” in the context of philosophical hermeneutics is not merely one of the forms of human judgment, as it is the case in Buchlerian pragmatic naturalism, but rather, it is the achievement or fulfillment (*Vollzug*) of something supra-individual, and even—partly—supra-human.

However, the most important question regarding such a result is perhaps this: *How are we to make a somewhat clearer sense of such an opaque, for many even unintelligible, notion, namely, of something like a non-human quasi-agency?* It is this question that leads us, first, to the task of presenting a short genealogy of the discussed non-representationalist paradigms of thought; second, to an analyses of the two key notions of these paradigms; and third, to the discussion of a peculiar linguistic phenomenon—the so called middle voice—which is to shed some light on the ontological notion of “event.”

### III.2. Overcoming Modern Subjectivism. A Genealogy of the Discussed Non-representationalist Paradigms of Thought

In order to see more specifically the points on which the views of the discussed thinkers seem essentially to converge and/or diverge, I begin with sketching a short genealogy of their non-representationalist paradigms of thought. By the term “non-representationalism” I refer to philosophical approaches which conceive the relation between cognition and world in other than the representational terms of accurate mirroring or reflecting.<sup>9</sup> In fact, many of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries’

<sup>9</sup> It is worth of note, however, that such non-representationalist approaches need not at the same time to deny or exclude the possibility that certain world-compartments of ours are able to represent in some sense our environing world. Yet, they certainly do not regard the cognitive acquisition of “objective”

main philosophical initiatives struggled with representationalist conceptions of knowledge, as well as with the formalism and self-referentiality inherent in the modern notion of subjectivity underlying them.<sup>10</sup> The latter notion was introduced by Descartes' *cogito me cogitare* (subject as a reflective, thinking substance), and it was retained also in Kant's concept of a transcendental synthesis of apperception. Nevertheless, if the roots of representationalism are primarily to be associated with the rationalist and empiricist traditions, than the deepest roots of non-representationalism can be found, I would argue, in Kantian transcendental idealism. For according to the so called Copernican revolution "objectivity" is constituted, at least regarding all the aesthetic and rational elements of its form, by subjectivity; and the concomitant results are, on the one hand, that reason has only a regulative role in cognition, whereas its true constitutive role is to be found in guiding moral action, and on the other hand, that a basic distinction must be drawn between things-in-themselves and the way they appear for us, i.e. what is noumenal and what is phenomenal. These results amount to rendering untenable not only the classical notion of metaphysics—as an *a priori* discipline dealing with basic constituents of the mind-independent reality—but also the notion according to which what we can know only *a posteriori*, via rational representations of our empirical impressions about the things-in-themselves, is able adequately to mirror or reflect the things as they are in themselves.<sup>11</sup> In short, the Kantian non-

representationalist impulse can be found in his idealist principle of the transcendental "identity of subject and object," or else, his idealist constructivism, regarding cognition and knowledge.

Such a (transcendental) idealism found its continuation on the Continent in various trends, among them the two traditions important here for us, namely, German Idealism, and Husserlian phenomenology of consciousness. The static, a-temporal formalism—but not the ultimate self-referentiality—inherent in Kantian subjectivity has been overcome especially by Hegel's notion of a historically unfolding spirit, and in particular his concept of self-consciousness relying on material work, and in turn, also by Husserl's investigation into the temporal, process-like unfolding of the Kantian transcendental apperception, the process in which transcendental subjectivity constitutes pure consciousness through its intentional acts. Nevertheless, both of these approaches explored a temporal unfolding and self-constitution of some kind of subjectivity—be it an absolute, or a transcendental one, respectively.

The classical pragmatists reached also back to Kantian transcendentalism, but also to Hegelian historicism. They recognized the importance of the notion—of Hegelian origin—that the world-constitutive role of the subject should be extended to historically transformable categories instead of a-historical *a priori* structures of cognition. In that regard they referred primarily to human practices involved in ethically and politically structured networks of human needs and interests, and thereby they explicitly rejected the subject-centered conceptions of knowledge as mere reflection. This is the case in Dewey's approach, too, in which Hegelian historicity and Darwinian naturalism merged with one another, issuing in his all-encompassing concept of a more or less continuous organic process of evolving

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representations of the world as the primary form of the relation between humans and their environment.

<sup>10</sup> In this regard, consider e.g. Kierkegaard, Marx, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Dilthey, and Freud in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and in turn, e.g. existentialism, versions of Marxism, (post-)structuralism, philosophical hermeneutics, deconstruction, and other French phenomenological approaches in 20<sup>th</sup> century Continental thought, and the entire tradition of American pragmatism and naturalism.

<sup>11</sup> It can be contested whether such phenomenal *a posteriori* representations still accurately reflect portions of mind independent reality, or they are to be regarded as belonging entirely to an other order than that of mind

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independent reality. In any case, the Kantian Copernican turn points out basic difficulties in the idea of representationalism.

experience and nature, a process in which all kinds of traditional dualisms—such as subject and object, or nature and spirit, etc.—dissolve. In other words, non-representationalism takes on a naturalist outlook modeled on the paradigm of organic life processes in Dewey's case—one that has little to do with the mathematized concept of nature in modern sciences—and Buchler shares this naturalist impulse as we'll soon see in more detail, even if in very different, non-biologicistic, and much broader terms.

Now, the affinity between these pragmatist traditions and Continental hermeneutic philosophies is largely due not only to their respective departure from modern Cartesian subjectivism, but also from the traditional Western emphasis on essences and substances. Pragmatism represents a "relational" way of thinking, one in which essence is being redefined and dissolved in terms of relations. On the Continent, Husserl's work on intentionality—the correlation of consciousness and its cognized "objects," i.e. the phenomena—has served as a decisive impetus for later developments toward a critical confrontation with, and ultimately temporalization of, classical substance-metaphysics. This was primarily achieved by Heidegger's so called "destruction" of the traditional presence-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*) ontology.

Perhaps the chief novelty in the early Heidegger's thinking is that he gave an ontological—and historicist—turn to Husserlian phenomenology. *Being and Time* carries out such an ontological turn by an investigation that aims at uncovering the meaning of the Being of entities—and ultimately the meaning of Being as such—, and also by the fact that it introduces "understanding" as the ontologically basic constitutive element of the very Being of human *Dasein*. That turn is a historicist one at the same time, inasmuch as Heidegger invests the notion of Being with a temporal, verbal sense, and also because understanding proves to be finite, always already historically-culturally determined, and event-like. The proper subject matter

of such a phenomenological ontology is, then, the meaning of Being—always to be understood as the Being of something: of a certain kind of being, or the sum of beings—where Being is not itself an entity but "what shows itself in itself" (for us). Phenomenological ontology so conceived is "hermeneutic," furthermore, because "what shows itself in itself" for us can only be approached under certain interpretative-hermeneutic conditions, due to our tendency to be preoccupied by beings, rather than by the meaning of their Being. The central idea here, then, is that Being is conceived as a phenomenal and temporal event of self-showing, as opposed to the notion of "Being" understood as the "existence" or presence of some substance or present-at-hand entity. Heidegger captures this idea in his famous notion of "ontological difference." In turn, it is this Heideggerian idea and that of his phenomenological-hermeneutic ontology—but not his fundamental-ontological question of Being as such—that Gadamer follows in his elaborations of the mode of Being of art, or that of history, language, etc.

As the sketched genealogy of the discussed non-representationalist paradigms of thought shows, they derive from the idealist and historicist impulses of Classical German Philosophy, and divide into naturalist and non-naturalist-phenomenological branches, regarding which the pivotal points are the pragmatist conceptions of nature and the Heideggerian concept of ontological difference. Now we turn to the exploration of these two issues, contrasting Heidegger's basic concept primarily with the kind naturalism Buchler advocates, for the simple reason that the latter is much more broadly conceived than Dewey's notion of nature, the latter being articulated solely in terms of organic human interactions.

### **III.3. Heidegger's Idea of Ontological Difference and the Buchlerian Notion of Nature**

In this part I proceed by characterizing the central notions of these two thinkers one after the other, and having done so, by relating them along certain common and divergent aspects of them.

Husserl's attack on naturalistic philosophy rests on a notion of nature according to which it is but the sum of the causal relations between entities in space and time (Husserl 1965, 79-122). Naturalism so conceived is unacceptable for Husserl within philosophy, because philosophy as a rigorous science must concern itself with "evidences"—phenomenologically reduced, final intuitions of meaning—attainable within the immanency of pure consciousness, and the basic feature of consciousness is intentionality. Intentionality and causality are the fundamental defining characteristics of two different domains of beings for Husserl, consciousness and nature, respectively, and it is the phenomenological investigation of the constitution of meaning in pure consciousness which is to ground any other sciences, among them the sciences of nature.

In turn, Heidegger points to the fact that in drawing such a distinction between consciousness and nature Husserl relies on a traditional distinction, one that is not justified by phenomenological insight. Instead of relying on inherited concepts taken over uncritically, one must phenomenologically inquire into the peculiar meaning that the very Being of different domains of beings in each case has for us, that is, into the modes in which the fact that such regions of beings "are" is in each case meaningful for us. In such questioning, the Husserlian notions of consciousness and its intentionality are replaced by Heidegger with the rather ontological notions of *Dasein* and its constitutive self-transcendence (its "openness"). This way a path is opened for a phenomenological re-description of the ontological specificity—in the sense of the specific meaning of

Being—of regions of beings referred to by traditional terms, such as nature, history, world, consciousness, ideal entities, etc.

The important point here for us is that Heideggerian phenomenological ontology aims at uncovering—not the metaphysical traits or "categorical" determinants (let alone objective attributes) of different kinds or regions of beings, but rather—the meaning (which is strictly speaking an "existential" and not a category) that the Being of such kinds of beings in each case has for us. This means that notions like that of nature and naturalism can acquire a definite meaning only subsequently, which is to say, by means of a phenomenological investigation into the regional ontology of nature as such, but in turn, such an investigation must rely on and be guided by a fundamental-ontological query into the meaning of the mode of Being of nature—and such meaning is attainable, if at all, only as something that phenomenally "shows itself."

Usually the term "nature" is supposed to refer to a specific region of beings, one which is to be distinguished from "history," or from "ideal beings" such as mathematical entities, etc. As opposed to that, those meanings which the Being of such regions of beings gain for us do not belong to any of these regions, because such meanings are not some kind of objectively or metaphysically determinable beings, but rather, they "appear as," "show themselves as," or "prove to be," such and such, and they do so in the mode of phenomenal "self-giveness" within our relation to or comportment toward the beings in our world. For example, without prior—although for the most part implicit—understanding of what it means that there is such a thing as a tool, no making use of tools would be possible. Such meanings are understood—in a covered up manner, to be sure—prior to any explicit comportment toward beings. And such understanding is neither something "subjective," nor something "objective"—it emerges within, and in virtue of, our

“understanding relation” (our basic mode of self-transcendence) to beings, and meaning so understood emerges as something that “show itself” for us.

The first and final kinds of “givenness” in Heidegger’s phenomenological ontology, then, are the different meanings of different modes of Being of different kinds of entities, and they present themselves in each case as a phenomenal self-givenness (in the fashion of Husserlian “evidence,” but conceived in ontological terms, as something not reducible to the intentional acts of consciousness). The fact that such a self-givenness cannot be adequately described as belonging to some domains of beings, be it nature, consciousness, history, or whatever, is expressed by Heidegger’s famous notion of ontological difference. It prohibits that we equate the Being of anything with some being, and thereby it also prohibits that we regard the very phenomenal self-showing of the Being of anything as some kind of being, be it natural, or otherwise.

Thus, an “ontological event” of a phenomenal “self-giving” of meaning (as it is expressed, e.g., in the German sentence “*Es gibt Sein.*”) is strictly speaking neither natural, nor supernatural. It is a mistake, e.g., to equate the Heideggerian notion of Being with some supreme being, such as God, or for that matter, nature. God or nature attain their own meaning of “Being for us,” which are to be distinguished from them as beings having such and such traits. The objective, or even metaphysical traits that are constitutive of beings are something other than what it means for us that there are such beings (and different regions of beings “are for us” in different senses). For example, a tool can have such and such traits, but the meaning of its Being—as Heidegger shows—is that it is “ready-to-hand” (1962, 98); a mere extant object can be such and such, but the meaning of its Being for us is that it is “present-at-hand;” a human can be such and such, but the meaning of her or his Being is that she or he “exists” (both: 1962, 67). The Being of something is always the meaning we

understand by understanding (not merely traits of that something, but) the very fact that it “is,” and thereby the particular meaning it “attains for us.” In turn, whenever such an understanding emerges it does so as an event. It is an event of emerging meaning. As the light makes first possible the visibility of any being, so it is the meaning implicit in a being’s “Being for us” that makes first possible the intelligibility of, and thereby our adequate mode of comportment toward, that being.

Regarding Buchlerian naturalism we start with Ryder’s observation that in the American naturalist tradition—and therefore also in the cases of Buchler and Dewey—“nature” “is broadly and richly enough conceived that there is no philosophical need to posit anything outside nature” (2013, 2/1). Here the conception of nature is broad enough not to exclude, but to comprehend even the notion of divine—whenever felt necessary—but only within the confines of some kind of naturalistic theology. Accordingly, the term nature refers here to “whatever there is,” with “no need to insist that this or any other word have only one meaning” (ibid., 2/3). It is not to be restricted to any specific regions of beings, be they physical or spiritual, real or ideal, found or made, encountered or fictional, and it is not to be equated with the sum total of such spheres of beings, either, insofar as the term nature does not refer here to a closed universe of beings. Furthermore, in Buchler’s case—but as we will see, not in that of Dewey—the conception of nature cannot adequately be circumscribed by referring to any specific means by which one may attain some kind of impression, conception, or knowledge in any sense, about nature, be it sensory perception, experience in the broadest possible sense, logical tenability, or whatever that may be. “Nature” for Buchlerians does not mean the field of scientific inquiry. It is not exhausted by the Husserlian notion of a causal order of spatio-temporal entities, either. It is not merely what is empirically given. It does not refer to the Kantian notion of phenomenal appearances or the laws regulating such appearances. It

is not merely what is experientially given. Nor is it a definite metaphysical entity. Nature is none of these, because it is all of these and even more.

It is with good reason that so far we offered only negative delimitations of this term, namely, delimitations from restricting or limiting modes of conceiving nature. As Ryder also points it out, “no other definition is possible,” for the simple reason that “for the pragmatic naturalist nature does not serve as a category in any normal sense” (ibid., 2/4). One might object that it is a vague concept, then. Indeed, except that one is better off regarding it as a “heuristic” notion—and not in any sense a “representational” one—a notion that primarily functions as “a general perspective or frame of mind [...] prepared to try to understand whatever is encountered or invented as being among the complexes of nature. This is why Buchler [...] ended up describing nature as simply ‘providingness’” (ibid., 2/4; Buchler’s term is from 1990b). The thrust of such a notion of nature in the American tradition of naturalism is that it promotes an inclusive, rather than exclusive, attitude toward every aspect of whatever is, and that it is also able to serve as the basis of a metaphysics, that of “natural complexes” in Buchler’s case (1990a), and of “experience and nature” in Dewey’s case (1958).

Although the central notion of such metaphysics may at first seem to be vague, it nevertheless has contours, and the first and most important one of them is that it does exclude the idea of any kind of non-relationality, i. e. the very notion of ab-solute as (but not the concept of divine as such—see Ryder 2013, 6). One could even say that “naturalism” here means nothing other than this fact, namely, that whatever there is, it must consist to some degree and in some sense of relations, it must be “continuous with something else, i.e., [...] there is nothing that is entirely other” (ibid., 2/4). In that sense nature is “all-inclusive.” Therefore, as long as one asks about the “what” implied in such a conception of nature, one fails to do justice to it. For it is “purposefully to leave

open the full range of actualities and possibilities, realities and imaginings” (ibid., 2/3). The metaphysics of such a factually undefined notion of nature is not concerned with some encompassing “what” of “whatever there is.” Rather, it is concerned with the question of “how,” namely, how anything must necessarily be, provided that whatever there is, it must be natural, i.e. relational. It is for that reason that nature can be conceived in an un-exhaustible manner, in fact, it “is to be understood as pluralistic, which is to say that nature consists of whatever we find in it, and in experience, itself a fully natural process, without any need to reduce one kind of complex to another” (ibid., 7/1).

What needs to be shortly mentioned on this point is that Dewey’s notion of nature is not entirely coextensive with that of Buchler. They fit together, however, and that is what Ryder advocates in his volume. Taking primarily Darwinian biology as the paradigm of his own metaphysics of experience and nature, Dewey made an effort to merge the two basic aspects of the interactions of humans with their environment, namely, the rather passive, encountering or “finding” part and the rather active, creative or “making” part. As a result, Dewey conceived a notion of experience in which the ongoing and changing organic interaction between the experiencer and the object of experience is itself constitutive of what is experienced. This way nature is defined in terms of experience, it is but the whole of the thoroughly dynamic and interactional dimension of experience for Dewey. In Buchler’s view, however, nature is a heuristic and open-ended metaphysical notion, something that reaches beyond all the conceivable dimensions of human experience. Dewey’s project of overcoming traditional dualisms in terms of human interactions with their environment, promising as it is, has in this respect a major disadvantage, namely, that it is over-ambitious in “reducing” nature to the experiential dimension. Buchler restores the right proportions here by emphasizing that it is not nature

that should be grasped in terms of experience, but vice versa, it is human experience that is to be understood in terms of “whatever is.” Human interaction with “whatever there is” is but a vanishing aspect of all that is or may be. Yet, the two approaches can be reconciled, and Ryder shows in detail, how. As he points out:

“experience and the rest of nature are related to one another in such a way that the world can be understood as the interconnection of experience and the rest of nature without reducing either to the other. A relational ontology allows us to do precisely this by making it possible to say that complexes of nature are constitutive of experience, and that experience is constitutive of the complexes of nature to which it is related. Thus, the two are integrated without experience being defined away and without nature being inappropriately read through the prism of the human interaction within it” (2013, 2/5).

The results of our survey so far regarding the Buchlerian notion of nature and the Heideggerian idea of ontological difference can be summed up, with some further observations, as follows. None of these notions are in any sense “representational;” none of them is a category; both refer to something that reaches beyond any and all regions of extant beings; and—perhaps most importantly—*both imply something supra-human, regarding to which some sense of relationality is constitutive*. Both notions break with traditional substance-metaphysics, although they differ in their attitudes toward metaphysics as such. The two notions differ, furthermore, in their understandings of the term “there is;” in their esteem of abstraction or formalization; in the terms in which they are respectively conceived; and in the kinds of relationality they maintain, among others.

None of these notions are in any sense “representational.” Buchler’s notion of nature is such because it is not a category, but a heuristic and open-ended metaphysical notion which includes, but also refers beyond, all the regions of extant beings; and furthermore, because—although what it names is, in

fact, in some sense a metaphysical entity, but beyond that—it is the sum of the metaphysical *conditions of “relational existence” as such*, without factual restrictions, and regardless of the question whether such existence is actual or merely possible, as well. In turn, Heidegger’s notion of Being is not a category either, but an existentiale—which is to say that it has nothing to do with traits of objective or mind-independent reality, but rather, it refers to those basic meanings which different kinds of beings (among them human beings) have for us in virtue of their very Being, and by the same token, are constitutive of human existence by making possible our comportment toward such beings. Both notions refer to something, then, that reaches beyond any and all regions of extant beings. Buchler’s notion of nature includes, but also transcends the realm of whatever is extant. Heidegger’s notion of Being is of another order than that of extant beings, altogether. Furthermore, nature for Buchler, as opposed to Dewey, refers to something that reaches beyond all the conceivable dimensions of human experience, too, and in that sense it refers to something supra-human. In turn, Heidegger’s notion of Being refers to an event of self-showing that may become a “given” only to human understanding—it is a self-showing for us, to be sure—but nevertheless an event the fulfillment of which is beyond our control. To that extent, both notions imply something supra-human.

Yet, Ryder’s point regarding Buchlerian metaphysics, namely, that it implies “nothing that is entirely other” (2013, 2/4), is also relevant in Heidegger’s case. Here we find one of the central commonalities between pragmatic naturalism and philosophical hermeneutics: both of them maintain a certain sense of relationality or contextualism, conceived in naturalistic and phenomenological-hermeneutic terms, respectively. Buchler’s notion of nature does away with every sense of absolute and the metaphysical concept of substance by replacing them with a notion of pan-relationalism. In turn, Heidegger’s notion of ontological difference calls attention to the fact that even if there is some absolute

being, the very fact that it “is” can reveal itself, or become disclosed, only for a being who is able to understand it—i.e., in their correlation. And the same holds for the Being of substances. Regarding its Being, every kind of being is inevitably correlated to understanding it—understanding the fact that it is, and the meaning of the fact that it is. “Being” is a matter of being understood. In that sense, “Being” is not to be conceived as a substance—recall Heidegger’s prohibitive notion of ontological difference.

However, beyond the fact that both central notions of the discussed philosophers depart from traditional substance-metaphysics, they differ in their stances or attitudes toward metaphysics in general. If the term metaphysics is to refer to all that which reaches beyond physics or “nature” (the latter understood here as a domain of extant beings), in that case both discussed notions, namely, nature and Being, are “metaphysical.” Yet, if one understands metaphysics as the discipline that aims at disclosing the ontological traits of mind-independent reality, than Buchler’s notion of nature is an “affirmative metaphysical conception instead of a conception based on a supposedly necessary structure of knowing and experiencing” (Buchler 1990b, 269). In turn, the Heideggerian notion of ontological difference leads to an utterly non-metaphysical investigation into the question of the Being of beings—and ultimately to that of Being in general—one that is to open anew and revitalize such questions *as questions*, and to that extent it is designed to overcome any sense of a traditional, metaphysical notion of Being. Heidegger follows the Kantian, so called “anthropological turn” in doing philosophy. He raises the question of Being from a perspective prior to, one that precedes, that of metaphysics, namely, from the perspective of our finite, temporal, historical existence.

Thus, Buchler’s enterprise can be characterized as a metaphysical relationalism, whereas that of Heidegger is a temporal-historicist contextualism. Is there a way to

relate them in a more substantial fashion? Are there reasons for their specific manners of procedure, reasons we could assess in the light of one another? What I’d like to claim here is this: yes, there is at least one way to assess the scope, manner of procedure, and result, of these approaches, and it concerns several further interrelated issues, such as that of “existence” and “nonexistence,” abstraction *versus* facticity; creativity and freedom; and also the issue of temporality.

Buchler’s approach comprehends—but it does so only in a certain sense—the kind of (historicist) contextualism Heidegger emphasizes. Within the frames of Buchlerian naturalism all kinds of temporal relations—central as they are in Heidegger’s philosophy—are but specific kinds within the context of a network of other kinds of relations. In a similar fashion, concerning our “creative construction of meaning” Ryder writes: “[...] in our attribution of meaning to a specific event [...] meaning [...] is one among the innumerable constituent complexes that taken together and in their specific relations are the event” (2013, 5/17). Buchlerian naturalism is conceived broadly enough to include any kind of relation or context, be it temporal, or whatever. But it is such in virtue of its procedure of abstraction and utter formalization, and that in turn is carried out at the expense of disregarding some issues, issues that are fundamental in philosophical hermeneutics.

Buchler conceives “existence” in a certain opposition to traditional substance metaphysics, namely, in terms of relations. “To exist is to prevail in an order or orders, whatever they may be” (Ryder 2013, 2/8). Existence is “prevalence” for such naturalism, in whatever context, regardless of the differences between kinds of beings that can be said to exist or prevail. This is a generalized and formalized notion of existence, however, one that goes back to the scholastic distinction between *existentia* and *essentia*, and further of course, to the Aristotelian distinction between *energeia* [*actualitas*] and *dynamis* [*potentialitas*]. Therefore, even if Buchler

does not ascribe existence to substances any more, but only to relations and to relations of relations, the very concept of existence he entertains is, nevertheless, but a continuation of the tradition of substance metaphysics, and it is something that remains unproblematic for him.

This is a question Heidegger addresses explicitly, however, who offers a genealogy of the so called “metaphysics of presence” originating from the Greeks, and criticizes it on the basis of its inadequate understanding of Being, of conceiving Being as something present-at-hand (*Vorhanden*). As opposed to the latter, Heidegger’s notion of ontological difference emphasizes that different kinds of beings “are” in different senses, and therefore the senses in which they “are” cannot adequately be captured by one and the same concept, namely, “existence.” Accordingly, one of his basic distinctions concerns the difference between the modes in which *Dasein* “is,” and the modes in which beings unlike *Dasein* “are.” The reason for drawing that distinction is that “*Dasein* is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather [...] in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it” (Heidegger 1962, 32). For humans, the issue of their existence, of the fact that they are and have to be, is not something they could disregard, something they could possibly escape from—as long as they exist. Humans are “thrown into” their existence, and in existing they cannot but relate to, care about their own existence (Being)—in fact, they are not able not to care about it, even if they fail to care about it in their effort to escape from the task and weight of existing, in their “inauthentic” mode of Being. This elemental fact of “being involved in our own existence” explains why it is that Heidegger reserves the term “existence” for the mode of Being proper to (human) *Dasein*, whereas his terms “ready-to-hand” and “present-at-hand” refer to the modes of Being proper to beings unlike *Dasein*, namely, tools and extant objects (these are the “same beings” regarded as ready-to-hand within their pragmatic context of use, and in turn, as sheer present-at-hand entities looked at in a de-contextualized manner, respectively).

If Buchler’s approach is much more comprehensive in scope than that of Heidegger—who was solely preoccupied with the question of the meaning, truth, and *topos* of Being throughout his life—it is such in virtue of its procedure of *abstraction and formalization*, or—to put it otherwise—its uninvolved, de-contextualizing, extrinsic, almost structuralist (although dynamic) spirit, of his vision conceived in terms of relations and locality, in a geometric temper, about whatever is or may be. These features stand in sharp contrast to Heidegger’s involved, contextualizing, immersed or intrinsic, historicist, existential and temporal manner of conceptualizing the *facticity* of human life and the *meaning* of Being as a question—a contrast that is reflected also in their differing understandings of the term “there is.” Heidegger famously criticized almost our entire philosophical tradition for its theorizing tendency, and its varied metaphysics produced by such a “theoretical gaze.” As opposed to that, Buchlerian naturalism presents a theorizing-metaphysical esteem for an anonymous, dynamic, and entirely relational structure, of whatever is.

How are we to approach such a contrast in an at least somewhat unbiased manner? We have examined one of Buchler’s concepts, “existence,” as it appears in the context of Heidegger’s philosophy. Now I propose to examine one of Heidegger’s central issues, namely, the aspect of temporality, as it appears in the context of Buchlerian naturalism. Our question is: How does the “temporal” figure in such naturalism, how does something new emerge within its pan-relationalism, and what is the place of creativity—in particular human creativity—in it?

Within the frames of Buchlerian naturalist metaphysics, whatever there is, it is defined in terms of relations. There is no absolute involved, no final atomic element, no substance. The constituents of such a pan-relationalism are themselves constituted by relations.

One can talk about complexes, however—reminiscent to some extent of Leibnizian “aggregates”—the traits of which are defined by the relations in which they stand to one another, and the complex itself is defined by its relational locations. This view holds on every level of whatever is. Complexes can be viewed as themselves having traits, as orders locating traits, and again, as themselves being traits of other complexes. The idea is that everything is relational on every level, and the partition is a matter of relational location.<sup>12</sup> In this vein, Buchler emphasizes the “natural definition” of the traits—traits of complexes, or again, complexes as traits of other complexes—where “definiteness” is due to the relational locations in which a trait stands. This way every constituent of “nature,” itself void of substances, is defined “by nature itself,” without recursion to essences, or anything other than locations within an open-ended pan-relational network. Since everything in such a network is defined “by nature itself,” Ryder calls the naturally defined traits and their network as “objectivity.”

Furthermore, such a network of relational locations is not static, but dynamic. It is such due to the fact—presumably—that an open-ended network can never achieve the state of balance and static order. It is that dynamism which is the source of “creativity in nature.” It consists in the alteration of the relations that define a trait, a complex, or a complex as a trait. Creativity in this sense is a matter of relocation, entering new relations, taking on new traits, partaking in new orders.

Alteration of relations and thereby of traits of natural complexes may as well occur due to humans. In that case humans become constituents of the complexes

they relate to, influencing the natural definition of the traits of those complexes. Humans themselves are part and parcel of nature so conceived, and their interventions into the orders of natural complexes do not introduce anything that is not possible by nature alone. Such an intervention is a matter of rearrangement, alteration, and not a matter of introducing something “entirely new” or “original.” The “birth” or the “perishing” of anything are merely matters of alteration of traits and relational orders with respect to the ordinal location of that specific something. Such alterations are examples of the emergence of relatively new prevailing relational locations, and in turn, of the relative “alescence” of previously prevailing relational orders. The notion of “nonexistence,” of “nothing,” can acquire no sensible meaning within such an open-ended network of relations. These notions qualify as non-relational absolutes with no place in a pan-relationalism.

The fact, however, that the traits of natural complexes are “naturally defined” by their respective ordinal locations, and to that extent they can be regarded as “objective” traits of nature, and furthermore, that humans and their interactions with natural complexes are conceived here as being part and parcel of nature so conceived, seems to imply a deflation or even elimination of the notion of subjective, *human freedom*. First, humans are said to be capable only to influence the natural definitions of traits of complexes, but not capable to originate such traits, if the latter is to mean the introduction of absolute new traits previously not related to any of the naturally defined traits in nature. Freedom as an unprecedented, originary act, qualifies again as an absolute with no place within the frames of a pan-relational metaphysics. Second, although the moment of human freedom seems to be recognizable in the acts of judgment we make, and judgments are selections according to Buchler, such selections seem nevertheless to be understood, again, as themselves ultimately being defined naturally. “Mathematical entities have the properties they do by virtue of natural

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<sup>12</sup> “Location” is to be understood here as a metaphysical, as opposed to an empirical, concept. For example, one can justifiably talk about relational locations within semantic instances without recursion to an empirical notion of space, etc.

definition, as do dreams, hopes, and fictional characters” (Ryder 2013, 1/11). As complexes of naturally defined relations of nature, humans and their activities are themselves thoroughly and objectively defined relationally or naturally. Third, freedom might perhaps be considered as consisting in acts that are not contradictory to the dynamics of nature—reminiscent of Spinoza’s “solution” to the problem of freedom. But even in that case, the possibility of not acting in accordance with natural dynamics must be explained, and that seems to be implausible. Therefore, the objectivity of nature seems to comprehend all the moments of creativity, inasmuch as creativity is but the dynamic aspect of objectively defined natural complexes. Considered from the metaphysical perspective of Buchlerian naturalism, human freedom appears as an illusion—as Nietzsche has already pointed to that direction (2000, #19.)—an illusion stemming from the illusion of some notion of an ultimately substantive, non-relational agency. Buchlerian naturalism seems to give voice to a notion of “nature” which refers to an “anonymous dynamics,” namely, that of prevalence and alescence with respect to traits or ordinal locations of “natural” complexes.<sup>13</sup>

One of the observations we can make here is that, for Buchlerians, the notion of nature *comprehends the spatio-temporally* defined order we usually call “nature,” as well as the historical dimension of human cultures, and all the possible others. The anonymous relational dynamics of Buchlerian nature includes as one among the other kinds of its orders the empirically understood

<sup>13</sup> We might consider the fact, however, that even if ontologically speaking freedom is an illusion, it is nevertheless a meaningful illusion for most humans, and as such a meaningful instance it may be regarded as a constituent of semantic relations, a specific kind within the relational network of nature. But the same can be said about any of the meaningful human notions (among them those which have no place in Buchler’s metaphysics, such as “nonexistence,” absolute, substance, etc.). Here, however, I leave open this train of thought.

spatio-temporal order of our environing “natural” world, just like the cultural-historical ones. One of the consequences of this fact, then, is that there is a continuity between nature and the human order, a continuity that is neither causal-mechanical, nor biologicistic-evolutionary, nor any other in some specific sense, but a continuity of general, metaphysically conceivable structural analogy. This point gives metaphysical support to both Buchler’s claim—mentioned earlier in this paper—that art has a cognitive significance, as well as to the overall view of Buchlerians according to which every kind of judgment leads to some sense of knowledge.

A further, for our purposes even more important observation is this: if Buchlerian naturalism seems to refer to a view about an anonymous dynamics of prevalence and alescence with respect to relational and ordinal locations, then *spatiality and temporality* figure here *in a double sense*. As we just emphasized, in their empirical sense the spatial and temporal relations are only specific dimensions among other kinds of relational dimensions of nature.<sup>14</sup> The spatial as well as the temporal relations, when understood empirically, are comprehended here equally in terms of relational locations and their prevalence and alescence, no less than the a-spatial and a-temporal ones. The metaphysical notions of relationality, locality, and their dynamics, are all-comprehensive in Buchler’s view. It is on this level that spatiality and temporality reappear, already in a metaphysical sense. In their metaphysical—which is to say here, de-factualized, formalized—sense spatiality and temporality surmount and govern, as final metaphysical conditions of the possibility of, the relational locality, and in turn, the dynamics of prevalence and alescence, of the traits of natural complexes. Without a formalized notion of space

<sup>14</sup> One may wonder whether a typology of the factual *kinds* of relations, and thereby a certain ontology, could be developed within the frames of Buchler’s general and formalized relational metaphysics?

no relational locality is conceivable, and without a formalized notion of temporality no dynamics of prevalence and alessence are conceivable.

If we now want to relate this result to some aspect of the approach initiated by Heidegger, it is the following question that may yield some orientation for us: *How, in what different manners, can spatio-temporal relations be conceived at all?* In the next part of my paper I propose to examine a linguistic phenomenon—the middle voice—in order to shed some light on the specific sense of “event” characteristic in Heideggerian-Gadamerian hermeneutic philosophy. I intend to do that as a preparation for answering—only with respect to certain aspects, in the last part—the question posed above, namely: Given the fact that Heidegger’s approach stands in sharp opposition to Buchler’s regarding the issue of traditionally conceived theorizing and also that of metaphysics, how are we to approach such a contrast in an at least somewhat unbiased manner? As I’ll try to show, this question is immediately connected to the question we just posed, namely: *How, in what different manners, can spatio-temporal relations be conceived at all?* In fact, the latter question proves to be the very core of the former one, as we shall see, or—to put it otherwise—the common ground for an unbiased comparison of the discussed approaches is to be looked for in their basic reliance on some understandings of spatio-temporal relations as such.

#### **IV. Truth and Event**

##### **IV.1. Medial Events, Middle Voice and Philosophical Hermeneutics**

For reasons that will soon be clear, I will use the term “medial event” for referring to the Heideggerian-Gadamerian notion of an anonymous process of self-presentation “of Being.” I use the quotation marks here because the terms “self-presentation” and “Being” are coextensive, they are synonymous in the sense that it is

the “Being” of the different beings that presents itself by itself, or conversely, whatever presents itself by itself is nothing else than the “Being” of beings, whatever kind.

My central claim here regarding such medial events of “self-presentation” is that they are most properly expressible linguistically by the so called middle voice of verbs. For that reason, in what follows I’ll discuss this linguistic phenomenon as well as the philosophical significance of the notion of “event” inherent in it, a significance it acquires within the broad field of anti-Cartesian attempts at overcoming modern subjectivism.

The middle voice is primarily known from ancient Greek, because in most of the major occidental languages it is not expressible by a morphologically distinct form. (Yet, spoken Hungarian, for example, and other non-Indo-European languages also have such a form.) Thus, our occidental linguistic development attests to the fact that the original function and meaning of the middle voice has characteristically been lost, and *thinking in terms of activity and passivity has become predominant*. Such a loss is clearly indicated by the fact that even standard introductions to ancient Greek grammar describe the middle voice as some mixture of the active and passive voices: as they explain, the middle voice “represents the subject as acting either upon himself (reflexive) or in his own interest” (Chase and Phillips, Harvard University, 1961, 90), or else, it “is often used for actions which in some way affect the subject” (Wilding, Oxford, 1986, 68). As it is conspicuous, in such characterizations *the subject remains in the center of the action* expressed by the verb: it is the subject who acts and at the same time is being acted upon.

As opposed to that, the real significance of the middle voice is – when compared to the active and passive voices – that it gives voice to a third, autonomous meaning not reducible to any mixture of the meanings expressed by the active and passive voices. Such reduction is also invalidated by the claim – generally

accepted among linguists – according to which the middle voice is more primordial than the passive voice (e.g. Cline 1983, v). This is also the view of the eminent expert of Indo-European languages, Emile Benveniste (1966, 145). He also offers a delineation of the function and meaning of middle voice according to which it brings to language an “action” of a “subject” standing in the medium of an event, whereby the *subject is displaced, it gets out of the focus in favour of the event taking place.*

Benveniste’s main theses include the followings, among others.

i) The distinction between the active and the passive voices, fundamental as it is in the verbal system of spoken occidental languages, is “inessential to the Indo-European verbal system” (145).

ii) The passive voice stems from the more ancient middle voice.

iii) As the developmental history of Indo-European languages attests to it, the primordial verbal system consisted of two voices, namely, the active and the middle. This was, then, replaced by the triad of active-middle-passive (“only for a given period in the history of Greek” [145]). Finally, the opposition between the active and passive voices replaced the former triad.

iv) However, the usual categorization of the diatheses as well as the terms used for grasping them (active-middle-passive) stem from the Greek grammarians, who gave expression only to a peculiarity of a certain stage of language. Therefore, the meanings and functions of the different diatheses, among them those of the middle voice, should be made accessible in a different, more original way.

v) As Benveniste shows, the principle of a properly linguistic distinction between the two primordial voices, active and middle, turns on the relationship between

subject and process (the subject is either external and therefore active, or internal and therefore middle, to the process).

Several observations are apposite here concerning Benveniste’s claims. First, the Greek notion of *mesotes* should not be construed – in Benveniste’s manner – as “the middle” or “the transitional” between active and passive, but rather, it is to be understood as “*the medial:*” as that verb which brings to expression an “action” of a “subject” *standing in the medium* of a process or event. This suggests both that such an “action” is not a pure action, and that the middle voice is never purely passive. Second, the philosophical significance of Benveniste’s approach can be delineated in a preliminary manner by comparing the (primordial) active-medial opposition to the (occidental) active-passive opposition. Within the active-medial opposition both voices express three aspects: *the (temporal) event expressed by the verb; the subject of the event; and the locality (“spatiality”) of the subject with regard to the event.* It is this latter aspect regarding to which the active and the medial differ from one another: the active is external, whereas the medial is internal to the event taking place. As opposed to that, within the frames of the active-passive opposition both voices express merely two aspects: the action (not any more an event!); and subjectivity—and the difference between the two voices is whether the subject is the agent of the action, or it is the one being acted upon. This is a one-dimensional perspective (subject→action→subject), and in each case the subject stands in the focus. By such a transition two notions inherent in the middle voice, namely, *the locality (“spatiality”) of the subject, as well as that “in which” it could be localized, namely, the notion of a pure event as such (as opposed to some “action”), get lost.* As opposed to that, within the paradigm of the ancient active-medial opposition both diatheses are able to express in a single unit the threefold aspects of *temporal event-“subject”-its locality.*

We may summarize the philosophical significance of the above considerations regarding middle voice as follows. The primordial opposition between active and middle voices represents a kind of *thinking in terms of subject and verb*. As opposed to that, the occidental opposition between active and passive voices represents the predominance of a kind of *thinking in terms of subject and object*. Therefore, the return to the ancient and mostly forgotten insight into mediality may indeed be one of those forms in which the philosophical fixation of such thinking in terms of subject and object, namely, the Cartesian subject-object dichotomy, can be overcome.

In fact, my claim is—and this concerns the philosophical significance of the linguistic phenomenon of middle voice—that the hermeneutic philosophies of Heidegger and Gadamer are basically revitalizations of the ancient insight into mediality, investing it with a far reaching ontological significance. Both Heidegger's *Being and Time* and Gadamer's *Truth and Method* are queries into a single and unitary medial phenomenon: *Dasein* as *in-der-Welt-sein* determined medially by the *Seinsfrage*, and in turn, the so called "hermeneutic phenomenon" with the paradigmatically medial notion of the fulfillment of *Spiel* as self-presentation in its center.

Following the etymology of the term according to which it is derived from the Greek middle-voiced verb φαίνεσθαι, "to show itself," a phenomenon—taken in the strictest phenomenological sense—becomes for Heidegger a pure "event of showing itself" (which is but a synonym of "Being"—Heidegger 1962, 51-55). What is to be emphasized is that this "showing itself in itself" is a *pure medial event*, a temporal occurrence and fulfillment (*Vollzug*) pure and simple. It makes no sense to talk about causes or agents behind such a self-showing, as if there would be something more to the mere process of "showing itself." The "what" in the phrase "what shows itself" refers to nothing else but the unfolding of a medial event of self-showing. Therefore, the thematic field of phenomenological ontology is that of pure

events of "showing itself" (called Being). Furthermore, since the question of Being can only become pressing for a being medially predisposed, *Being an Time* outlines the basic features of such a medial "sub-ject," which is to say, it offers a medial anthropology in which human *Dasein* is exhibited as a "subject" constituted by a medial event (its very existence) at its core—an event into which it is thrown, towards which it is open, about which it cares (or, for that matter, fails to care).

In turn, Gadamer's central notions of play, fusion of horizons, conversation, and above all, the speculative *Selbst-Darstellung* of whatever is, are all instances of medial events. The fact that his notions are medial is made explicit by Gadamer only once, on the example of play:

"[...] the primordial sense of playing is the medial one. Thus we say that something is 'playing' (*spielt*) somewhere or at some time, that something is going on (*im Spiele ist*) or that something is happening (*sich abspielt*)." "[...] if one starts from the medial sense of the word 'playing' [it] clearly represents an order in which the to-and-fro motion of play follows of itself. It is part of play that the movement is not only without goal or purpose but also without effort. It happens, as it were, by itself" (Gadamer, 104, 105, respectively).

To that extent, there seems to be no question as to the fact that both Heidegger and Gadamer exemplify in a phenomenological-ontological manner what the middle voice means according to Benveniste.

#### **IV.2. Epistemological Consequences. Truth, Justification, Event, Interpretation**

We are in a better position now to highlight the presumably most basic affinities and differences between Buchlerian naturalism and Heideggerian (-Gadamerian) ontological phenomenism. The fundamental affinity between these approaches can be found in the fact that both Buchler and Heidegger rely on *respective understandings of an ultimate sense of*

*spatio-temporal relations*, understandings which in turn define their whole philosophy. It is a consequence of this basic fact that both of these approaches are concerned with something thoroughly relational, and therefore both refuse to make use of any sense of absolute, as well as of any form of classical substance metaphysics. Accordingly, both accomplish some form of overcoming modern subjectivism. Most importantly, both philosophers give up thinking in terms of activity and passivity, and both of them introduce something anonym and supra-human. There is a basic difference, however, in the very manner in which they conceive their specific notions of some ultimate and anonym spatio-temporal constellation. In doing so, Buchler only formalizes, but does not break with, the common sense view of space and time, a view that was predominant also in the metaphysical tradition of the West (at least from Aristoteles onward). As opposed to that, Heidegger—and in his footsteps, Gadamer—introduce into ontology a primordial, medial sense of spatio-temporal relations.

To put it otherwise, the two approaches are in some sense “externalist” (formalized-abstract-metaphysical) and “internalist” (factual-historicist-medial-interpretative-anthropological), respectively. This difference has far reaching consequences regarding their respective understandings of the issues of agency, truth and justification, theory and practice, creativity, and the notion of event.

1) One of the important consequences of this difference concerns the issue of agency. Although both stances break with the paradigm of thinking in terms of activity and passivity, they accomplish such a move in different ways and with different implications. Buchlerian naturalism seems to overcome modern subjectivism via dissolving the agency of human subjectivity in the dynamics and “creativity” of objective, naturally defined relational constellations. In that regard, Buchler moves in the same direction which many of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>

centuries philosophical efforts took in their departure from the central role previously ascribed to Cartesian subjectivity. For in many cases they did so at the expense of giving up the notion of subject as a free and spontaneous agent (think especially of Nietzsche, or of Freudian sub- and unconscious, and again, the postmodern *topos* of the “death of subject”). Yet, to the extent that in Buchler’s case objectivity (i.e., that which is defined by nature and not by us) obtains its meaning in virtue of its contrast to—what would count as—the subjective, his break with the paradigm of thinking in terms of activity and passivity does not seem to imply an overall departure from the modern thinking in terms of the Cartesian subject-object dichotomy. Buchler thinks in terms of objective relations. He dissolves agency and patiency by referring to such—altering, dynamic—relations. As opposed to that, hermeneutic philosophy thinks medially, in terms of subject and verb (event). Such a thinking is not willing to pay the price of giving up the notion of free—although historically conditioned—human agency, and in fact it offers a way of conceiving “subjectivity” in a non-Cartesian, medial manner, as a full-fledged agent who is sub-jected to, and is constituted by, events of self-revealing and enlightening meaning. Thus, while the Buchlerian project of conceiving the self in terms of objective dynamic relations, as well as the hermeneutic approach of understanding the subject in terms of medial ontology, equally stand in continuity with critiques of modern subjectivism, they differ in the important respect that the latter—as opposed to the former—is nevertheless able to maintain a sense of human freedom.

2) In addition to Buchler’s objectivism, there is at least one more point on which traces of modernism are discernible in his endeavour. It concerns the issue of justification. Namely, Ryder makes the point that the Buchlerian metaphysics of natural complexes “cannot be justified by reason alone” (2013, 2/5). Buchler’s metaphysics definitely has something to do with the spirit of “more geometrico”—not so much in its phrasing

and its manner of textual expression, but rather in its degree of formalization and almost deductively relatable conceptual apparatus—and as a metaphysics it is an a priori, speculative achievement of human reason. Nevertheless, Ryder's point echoes a more or less generally held view in the classical pragmatist tradition, namely, the view that any theory or unit of knowledge can be justified—and thereby regarded as true—only by virtue of its success in the process of its pragmatic valuation. An idea, theory, or whatever of cognitive import, is considered to be successful “if by putting it to work we are able to do things we are not able to do otherwise, and create relatively few new problems along the way” (Ryder 2013, 2/5-6). Truth must be practically enabling.

There is a sense in which such a pragmatic view of truth and justification stands in continuity with the modern notion of theory, as opposed to that of the ancients which resurfaces—as we will see—in Gadamer's case. For in sharp contrast to the ancient privileging of the theoretical way of life in which theorizing was but the highest form of practice, in modernity the relation between theory and praxis altered drastically, so that theory came to be regarded as for the most part independent of, and prior to, practice, and in turn, practice came to be understood to a considerable extent as the application of theory. As we can see, there is some kind of parallelism between that modern development and the point Ryder makes. If theory is in need of a posteriori, experiential, pragmatic justification, then theory and practice are regarded as distinct in some sense.

As opposed to that, one of the basic features of hermeneutic philosophy is that it is concerned exclusively with that kind of knowledge which is not separable from being, or—to put it otherwise—with historically constituted, “embodied reason,” knowledge that is not a noetic construction but “historically real,” knowledge that is not abstract-“technical,” but rather,

“practical-factual-existential” throughout. Regarding Heidegger's notion of Being, e.g., the justification of this notion is in each case a matter of—phenomenologically disciplined—“understanding-hermeneutic intuition,” and to that extent it is neither a metaphysical-“rational,” nor a pragmatic way of justification. Yet, such an understanding is simultaneously both an understanding of some meaning, and at the same time an enabling “capacity,” or better, a “potentiality-for-Being” (*Seinkönnen*—Heidegger 1962, 183), the basic “existential” that opens up possibilities of Being for human *Dasein*. As the basic constituent of our openness toward whatever is, understanding is strictly speaking neither a theoretical, nor a practical “capacity” of ours. It constitutes our very existence in the sense that we “are,” we exist as, understanding (or, for that matter, not-understanding) beings. The term “understanding” refers in hermeneutic philosophy to the very mode of carrying out our existence, and as such it is prior to the theory-praxis distinction. Any theory as well as any praxis stems from understanding. Although the pragmatist maxim according to which truth must be practically enabling is thereby fulfilled also by hermeneutic philosophy, it is achieved here without conceiving theory and praxis as distinct.

3) Accordingly, the pragmatic claim according to which every cognition and every proposition is inevitably involved in some context of practical issues is echoed, all along, in hermeneutic philosophy as well. It is expressed in the basic hermeneutic notion of the so called hermeneutic circle, especially in one of its constituents, namely, the so called “fore-structure” of understanding—discovered by Heidegger, and adopted by Gadamer and their followers. Such a “fore-structure” or “pre-understanding” refers to the fact that understanding is always already conditioned by some previous understanding of the subject matter in question. Understanding begins by the “negative” experience of some disturbance, namely, by facing the fact that our expectations are being negated, something

else than what we have so far assumed seems to be the case. Thus, some prior understanding is the condition of the possibility of any event of understanding. Understanding is always already historically situated and motivated.

In turn, whatever is understood, it is justified in the very event of understanding, and it remains such till it becomes negated by some new encounter. This way our always finite understanding is continuously being provoked, and it goes through a process of formation within the context of the historicity of human beings. To that extent, hermeneutics would wholly subscribe to the pragmatist claim made by Ryder, namely, that “our judgments are provisional and conditional, and [...] they undergo ongoing ramification in experience and query” (2013, 7/25). But it could not agree with the Buchlerian reason offered for that, namely, that all this is “a reflection of the general relationality of nature” (ibid.). Hermeneutics could not agree with that last point simply because it is a metaphysical claim, one that is not in our finite and historically defined power to make, or at least, one that contradicts hermeneutic insights into the historically conditioned nature of every understanding. It is this that explains the “internalist” aspect of hermeneutic philosophy.

4) According to hermeneutic philosophy, the arena of meaning formation is the context of the historicity of human beings. It is for this reason that the horizon-forming powers of language and all kinds of tradition receive decisive importance in hermeneutics. This can be seen more specifically in Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics. As we have seen, it is the Heideggerian insight into the ontological difference, and the project of phenomenological-hermeneutic ontology issuing from it, that Gadamer follows in his elaborations of the mode of Being of art, that of history, language, etc. Gadamer does not follow Heidegger’s fundamental-ontological question, however, the question aiming at the disclosure of the meaning of Being as such. This is not an arbitrary

choice on the part of Gadamer, but rather, it follows consistently from his orientation and the results attained from such orientation. Namely, in working out the mode of Being and specific temporality of works of art, Gadamer recognizes in that mode a general “pattern,” the very pattern in which the historicity of humans is conceivable. It is the pattern of traditioning (*Überlieferung*) as such, the very manner in which the event of traditioning can take place and achieve its fulfillment. For human existence is ultimately historical, and it is such primarily in the sense that humans belong to, participate in, and thus, (their understandings) are constituted by, events of *Überlieferung*. In turn, such events are in each case an *Überlieferung* “of” some *Sache* (subject matter, issue, question, case).<sup>15</sup> It is in that sense that our historicity consists in participating in handed down *Sachen*.

Several points must be highlighted here. One of them is that by this move the notion of *Sache* takes center stage for Gadamer, in fact, it acquires the position and dignity which the notion of Being had for Heidegger. It is so because Heidegger’s leading question of Being is but *one* among an inexhaustible number of possible *Sachen* “waiting for” *Überlieferung*. Gadamer’s investigations concern the historical conditions of the possibility of *Überlieferung* as such, and in that sense they highlight the historicity or historical embeddedness of the very issue of Being, too.

A further point is that *Überlieferung* takes place as a medial event, as the *Überlieferung* “of” some *Sache*. This genitive is to be understood as a simultaneously subjective *and* objective one, for the “subjectivity” of the human participants is no less constitutive in the event of *Überlieferung* than the very event in which the fulfillment of *Überlieferung* takes place. But even if this

<sup>15</sup> The best discussion of the Gadamerian notion of “*die Sache*” can be found—in my view—in Nicholas Davey’s powerful volume on Gadamer’s hermeneutics (2006, 69–91).

genitive is a simultaneously subjective *and* objective one, in virtue of the fact that such an event falls outside of human control, the emphasis falls on the objective side. Accordingly, when the hermeneutic approach highlights the fundamental mediality of the subject and conceives it in its medial involvement in whatever happens to it, such an approach corresponds to the fact that the *Sache* of understanding is always something that “befalls” the “subject.” But it is not any kind of *Sache* which can do so. The “subject” must be predisposed to the *Sache* that befalls it, it must have some kind of pre-understanding of it, and to that extent it must be involved in it, must belong to it, be subjected to it. Such a subject is not any more an “exclusive subject,” then—not an agent acting in a sovereign manner, not a purely spontaneous subject—it does not control and command the event, from outside, as it is the case with the active voice. Rather, the subject of middle voice is a nonexclusive, participating one: a subject “actively” participating in an event which happens to it.

Furthermore, *Überlieferung* is an utterly “communal,” and not an individual matter. Any *Sache* is that for a community of people, in fact, it is *die Sachen* which bind people together, above all. A *Sache* is something supra-individual, then. It is something that is historically-culturally constituted, something that owes its validity or “Being” for its being handed down. Thus, to the extent that a *Sache* “is” in virtue of the medial event of its *Überlieferung*, a moment of something supra-human and uncontrollable is also constitutive in its “Being”. For the same reason, it is utterly contingent, something that can easily lose its meaningfulness over time.

In turn, our involvement in such supra-individually constituted *Sachen* takes the form of participation—participation in the event of *Überlieferung*, which is not an objectivization in any sense. That, in which one participates, is by no means something objective. For Gadamer, a hermeneutic-

interpretive query is a matter of acknowledging and ultimately understanding the supra-individual meaningfulness and validity of some inherited *Sache* or subject matter.

“Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated.” “Understanding is, essentially, a historically effected event.” “[...] being situated within an event of tradition, a process of handing down, is a prior condition of understanding” (2004, 291, 299, 308, respectively).

Thereby theory receives a new meaning for Gadamer, one that he draws from his analysis of the mode of Being of works of art, and that of historicity in general. As he shows, insofar as the spectator belongs to the play of art, his participation in such a play cannot be adequately conceived in terms of subjectivity. Yet, by devoting her full attention to what is being exhibited, the spectator accomplishes a “being outside of herself,” a kind of self-forgetfulness, which in turn is due to its being present at, being wholly with (*Dabeisein*) that which is presented to her. It is constitutive of the role of spectator, furthermore, that she is “set at an absolute distance, a distance that precludes practical or goal-oriented participation,” and at the same time makes possible seeing the play as a whole, which is “a genuine and comprehensive participation in what is presented” (2004, 124). Such participation may fulfill itself in an event of truth:

“A spectator’s ecstatic self-forgetfulness corresponds to his continuity with himself. Precisely that in which one loses oneself as a spectator demands that one grasp the continuity of meaning. For it is the truth of our own world—the religious and moral world in which we live—that is presented before us and in which we recognize ourselves” (ibid.).

Based on this model of the spectator who participates in the meaning of what is being exhibited for her, Gadamer rehabilitates the notion of theory within the context of our historicity, our hermeneutic-interpretative world-

comportment in general. As opposed to Heidegger's hostility toward theory (which he closely associated with the traditional metaphysics of "present-at-hand" he resolutely criticized), Gadamer sticks to the temporal sense of Being emphasized by Heidegger, but at the same time he manages to conceive a corresponding non-constructivist notion of theory, and thereby he reconciles the two. Theory is a peculiar form of cognition for Gadamer. It is not the grasp of methodologically secured objective instances of knowledge, not the grasp of discernible regularities and laws, it is not a know-how, either, not something detached from practical life. Theory is first and foremost participation for Gadamer, participation in the event of self-revealing meaning with respect to some supra-individual *Sache*.

"But *theoria* is not to be conceived primarily as subjective conduct, as a self-determination of the subject, but in terms of what it is contemplating. *Theoria* is a true participation, not something active but something passive (*pathos*), namely being totally involved in and carried away by what one sees" (2004, 122).

What is contemplated, namely, some *Sache*, is something temporal, as opposed to being substantive. What is understood in such contemplation, is simultaneously some meaningful aspect of the *Sache*, and our selves with respect to that *Sache*. Thus, theory in its specific sense is neither a tool, nor an act of the subject for Gadamer, but rather, it is a matter of participation in meaning-formation, and as such, it is the highest form of practice.

5) As we can see, furthermore, "productivity" or "creativity" here is a matter of some supra-individual—yet, simultaneously human and supra-human—event. Although human activity is not contested in hermeneutics, the creative aspect of human interaction with the world is conceived as the result of such events of participating in some culturally formed, historically contingent and plastic, meaning. Thus, hermeneutic philosophy maintains that there is a

"foundational relation" between the creative moment of meaning formation, on the one hand, and objectivity, on the other. Not because hermeneutics would defend a kind of idealism, which it does not—not with respect to the extantness of beings. On the contrary. Hermeneutics has a robust sense of "realism," and it also upholds the unsurpassable and constitutive finitude of human understanding. Rather, the foundational relation between meaning formation and objectivity is due to the fact that—as hermeneutics maintains—every meaning (even that of "objectivity," which is the precondition of any claim about such objectivity) is something arrived at within the context of our historicity. The contrast with Buchlerian objectivism is decisive here: in hermeneutic philosophy, creativity emerges in the dimension of human historicity, whereas for Buchler it is a matter of objective nature.

6) A related issue concerns the notion of "event" which appears in both discussed schools in close association with their respective concepts of truth. As opposed to certain trends in analytic philosophy which recognize only two kinds of "vocabularies," namely, that of causality and that of intentionality, pragmatic naturalism has no difficulty with making a non-emphatic use of the term "event" in referring to whatever takes place in nature. But pragmatism maintains a more significant sense of this term as well—and Ryder doesn't fail to call attention to this fact, either (2013, 7/26)—a sense that immediately pertains to the issue of truth. As one of the relevant passages from William James puts it:

"True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those that we cannot. [...] The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process: the process namely of its verifying itself, its verification. Its validity is the process of its validation. [...] The connexions and transitions come to us from point to point as being progressive, harmonious, satisfactory. This function of agreeable leading is what we mean by an idea's verification" (1962, 194).

The sense in which the term “event” is attached here to the notion of truth, then, is that “truth happens” to a unit of knowledge insofar as it “proves to be”—or “doesn’t prove to be”—true in a process in which it is put to work. The notion of “event” is understood here in the manner of common sense, that is, as a process taking place in some practical context. Something is to be regarded as true if it is enabling and workable: “knowledge is a matter not of what we think but of what we can do in relation to our lived environment” (Ryder 2013, 14-15).

As opposed to that, the notion of event in hermeneutic philosophy, where it plays a decisive role, is primarily used in a rather transcendental, or better, medial sense—as an event of phenomenal self-showing of Being (which is “given” for an understanding intuition), the event of understanding, the event of fusion of horizons, or the event of self-presentation of a play, etc. In such contexts, the event is the mode in which truth and meaning is revealed and therefore is attainable for us, in its immediate and convincing evidence. It refers to the event-like character of truth-happening, either in the sense of a sudden and enlightening flash of meaning, or in the sense of a mimetic representation that reveals its subject matter “as it is, indeed,” in its truth. Neither of these senses have anything to do with something that would “verify itself” in a consecutive process in which it proves to be workable. Rather, they have to do with an event of “being revealed.”

7) The final point I’d like to make pertains probably to one of the most important common features of pragmatist naturalism and hermeneutic philosophy, and it is something that John Ryder repeatedly pointed to in our conversations, and the present paper was trying to elaborate in some depth. It concerns the issue of interpretation. For despite the many differences between these two branches of non-representationalist paradigms of thought articulated in this paper, there is a pragmatically and hermeneutically equally important,

even decisive, characteristic of them, one that may well be peculiar to these two philosophical attitudes. It is such precisely in virtue of some of their common and enumerated features, such as their thorough relationalism or contextualism and their concomitant departure from substance metaphysics; their critiques of modern subjectivism; the emphasis they put on human finitude and the practical embeddedness, conditioned and perspectival nature, of all human judgments and understandings; the fact that both make room for acknowledging productivity and creativity beyond whatever is objective in the sense of extantness; and that they do all these in such a way that none of them is advocating any notion of relativism in the nihilistic sense of “anything goes,” but maintain their respective notions of truth, as well as relaxed, non-combative, yet, utterly critical attitude toward cognition and knowledge in general.

The reason for the fact that these features are common to both approaches can perhaps be summarized as follows. Viewed hermeneutically, Buchlerian relationalism is but a general formalization—and metaphysical extrapolation (with some losses, to be sure)—of the contextualism implied in the factual, hermeneutic-historical situation of all understanding and interpretation. Approached from the perspective of Buchlerian metaphysics, hermeneutics and its focusing on the historicity of meaning formation is but a particular dimension—with insufficient attention paid to issues of objectivity—of the universal relationality of nature. Thus, the central issue here is the pan-relationalism or pan-contextualism upheld by the two schools. The pan-relationalism of the Buchlerian metaphysics has been emphasized throughout this paper. The pan-contextualism of hermeneutic philosophy was perhaps less highlighted so far. Such a pan-contextualism is most explicit in one of the basic concepts of hermeneutic philosophy, namely, in the so called hermeneutic circle. Such circularity has been recognized throughout the history of hermeneutics

(Grondin 1994), and it was already part and parcel of ancient rhetoric. Taken in its most general, formalized sense the hermeneutic circle refers to the fact that the parts of a whole can be understood only by relating them to the whole, and vice versa, the whole can be understood only by referring to its parts. In philosophical hermeneutics, however, this notion of circularity takes on an ontological significance, and it comprehends now the whole breadth of the “hermeneutic phenomenon,” namely, our own fore-understanding of the *Sache* or subject matter in question, and the “voices” of contemporary and historic others addressing that *Sache*. Such a *Sache* is therefore something common to the parties of encounter, and it has a plastic and un-exhaustible supra-individual meaningfulness over against any particular view entertained about it. In turn, any view held about a *Sache* proves to be “only” an interpretation, and even apparently opposing views may have their own particular truth with respect to the *Sache*, due to the particular context from which they approach it. This does not mean, however, that interpretations are arbitrary. Rather, the truth of interpretation is a matter of sorting out legitimate and un-legitimate pre-understandings *with respect to the Sache*. In this way the measure of every interpretation is the *Sache selbst*, and the truth of interpretations can be judged in the light of the many voices in which that *Sache* came to language.

“what constitutes the hermeneutical event proper [...] consists in the coming into language of what has been said in the tradition: an event that is at once appropriation and interpretation. Thus here it really is true to say that this event is not our action upon the thing, but the act of the thing itself” (Gadamer 2004, 459).

Something similar is true of Buchlerian relationalism, at least regarding the perspectival, aspectual nature, and the pluralism, of our legitimate descriptions of the world. If nature is thoroughly relational, and if “the creative construction of meaning is a moment [...] of the creative dimension of a relational, ordinal nature”—as Ryder says (2013, 5/18)—then meaning can be construed in as many ways and in as many respects as the un-exhaustible relational network that constitutes nature allows it to do. Here the plurality of legitimate interpretations corresponds to the multiplicity of nature.

Regarding such permissive, but nevertheless critical spirit which characterizes both of these trends of thought, it can be considered as of secondary importance, after all, whether one conceives its ontological background in terms of nature, or in that of historicity.

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## MODERNITY AND PRAGMATISM<sup>1</sup>

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ABSTRACT: Pragmatism is a philosophy that has grown out of the specific conditions of modernity (the urban environment of Boston and Chicago at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) and that belongs more widely to the Protestant-based way of thinking that shapes the 'spirit' of Western civilisation, specifically in the USA. Despite this the relationship between the philosophy of pragmatism and modern civilisation, which is the core of this paper, is far more complex. Pragmatism is not simply the 'child' of modernity and it is certainly not an ideology of technocraticism, scientism or even economism, as its perfunctory critics like to declare. Classical pragmatism was a version of modern philosophy that stood in critical opposition to modernity, in some aspects even preceding postmodernism. This paper also demonstrates the relevance of neopragmatism in the critique and reconstruction of contemporary late modernity.

### Introduction

The history of philosophy is replete with different 'turns' – thus, it also constitutes the history of these 'turns': first of all there was the epochal *anthropological turn* set in motion by the Sophists and their critical pupil Socrates during the time of antiquity. We would most certainly also find turns in the history of medieval philosophy (albeit if only in the shape of personal turns such as that of Augustine, from a worldly life to a holy life, which, nonetheless, had fundamental consequences for philosophy). Even though philosophy seems to have developed continually over the centuries, with no epochal turn of any kind, the history of modern philosophy is far more dynamic: at its centre lies a well-known, perhaps even the most well-known, turn of all – *Kant's Copernican turn*. This was the culmination of what the philosophical historian John Smith has called the 'reflexive turn', commencing before the time of Kant during the period of Descartes and Locke – and referred to more in European terminology as a shift towards the

subject or also as an *epistemological turn*. Thus, since Kant, the history of modern philosophy has been full of turns, full to bursting, as it were: from the *hermeneutic turn* associated not so much with Schleiermacher or Dilthey as with Heidegger and Gadamer, and in particular, the *linguistic turn*, associated primarily with Russell and Frege, but also symbolised generally by Wittgenstein. Yet another turn remained on the fringes of these turns, the *pragmatist turn* – a turn towards pragmatism – which, however, has made a come-back in the context of another recent turn: the *postmodernist turn* (even if we cannot equate them). In the history of modern philosophy we might also include – *à la* Kuhn – the following four paradigmatic shifts: 1. Cartesian-Kantian, 2. hermeneutic, 3. linguistic, 4. pragmatist and their conversations – in a Rortyan sense.<sup>2</sup>

It is this fourth turn – or the *relationship between modernity and pragmatism* – that is the subject of my paper. Namely, what is modernity in relation to pragmatism and what is pragmatism in relation to modernity? I shall divide this question into two constituent, if rather complex, themes: the first being the situatedness of *pragmatism in modernity* and the second being *the reflection of modernity in pragmatism*.

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<sup>2</sup> However, very recently still another turn has appeared, the „speculative turn“ initiated and endorsed by American „speculative realist“ Graham Harman defining his philosophy as „object-oriented“. Despite being directed against post-Kantian and postmodern (textualist) continental philosophy, this seems to be an explicit return to pre-modern philosophy (of Aristotle and others), to some sources of medieval philosophy and to Leibniz's metaphysics, and thus overtly anti-pragmatist (e.g. with their opposition to „correlationism“). But on the other hand some proponents of this „turn“ also evoke Peirce's metaphysics and Whitehead's process philosophy. See: L. Bryant, N. Srnicek and G. Harman, eds. *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*. Melbourne: re.press, 2011.

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 7th CEPF conference, Turda, Romania, June 3-9, 2012.

### 1. The situatedness of pragmatism in modernity

This topic contains within it a whole series of historical and philosophical questions: What is the place of pragmatism in the history of modern (and/or Western) philosophy (and more broadly, in the history of modern culture)? How does pragmatism 'fit into' this history, if at all? How does it connect with the main streams of thought in modernity, or, how does it oppose them? What has pragmatism brought to Western modern philosophy that is new (and different); what is not (or would not be) there, was it not for pragmatism?

Clearly nobody would object to the suggestion that 'pragmatism is modern philosophy' and one of its constituent parts (and not simply from a temporal perspective); although the premise that applies the most is that *the concept of modern philosophy* – however universalised (and this universalisation is one of its features) – is still predominantly *Eurocentric* (indeed, so is the very concept of philosophy that we have become used to employing).<sup>3</sup> Psychologically, this is perhaps natural; philosophically, this does us little credit, particularly in the post-enlightenment and global era. William James (a brilliant psychologist) described this psychological convention thus: when a new philosophy emerges, the first stage is where established philosophers attempt to marginalise and ignore the new philosophy, during the second stage, they try to silence it through criticism and in the third stage they begin almost to declare themselves as the original authors. This convention can clearly be applied more widely, not

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, the well-known and important Oxford philosophical historian Anthony Kenny (1931-) does not recognize pragmatism in his *A Brief History of Western Philosophy* (1998, Czech translation 2000); neither does Roger Scruton (1944-) in his *A Short History of Modern Philosophy* (1981, Slovak translation 1991), much read in Slovakia. While Kenny does at least partially correct this in the fourth volume of his *A New History of Western Philosophy* entitled *Philosophy in the Modern World* (2007) when writing about Peirce and James (although not, however, about Dewey), Scruton continues to ignore pragmatism in the second edition of his history (2002).

only to philosophy, but also to the history of pragmatism, where it fits like a glove.

What kind of philosophy then is pragmatism? In the context of modernity and modern philosophy (and its history), I can only very briefly introduce here the three fundamental characteristics of pragmatism.

*Firstly*, pragmatism is a philosophy that has developed out of two roots: the older of which is *European*, and the younger *North American*; at the same time, it is difficult to say which is more significant. It depends on the interpretation. Nonetheless, thus far the most widespread story about the history of pragmatism, emphasising American exceptionalism and originality, is now starting to be counterbalanced by a more complete story.

For instance, according to Robert Brandon, a most original contemporary new pragmatist, pragmatism is a *synthesis of German idealism and Darwinism*. Brandon begins his most recent work<sup>4</sup> with the claim that "Kant was just as important to the classical pragmatists as he is to pragmatists today" and it is from Kant that he takes his two crucial ideas: 1. a normative turn (i.e. the notion that our opinions and actions are subject to evaluation, that we are responsible for them and that they represent our obligations; and 2. pragmatist methodology (i.e. the idea that actions and opinions, and also our evaluation of them, are the things that we do, carry out). Brandon himself conceives of his philosophy not as 'analytic pragmatism' (as it was known until recently) but as 'rational pragmatism', that is, as linking new pragmatism with rationalism, which is a response to the linguistic turn, i.e. it cannot avoid being conceived of as a philosophy of language. Brandon conceives this pragmatist philosophy of language on the basis of the concept of practices in such a way as to distinguish

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<sup>4</sup> R. B. Brandon: *Perspectives on Pragmatism (Classical, Recent and Contemporary)*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011.

between discursive (linguistic) and non-discursive (extra-linguistic) practices, where the first are simply the intentional articulation of the second. Non-discursive (extra-linguistic) practices are therefore (ontologically) fundamental; within them norms are spontaneously created that we articulate as rules and principles at the level of language. According to Brandom, this means that in theories of language, pragmatics should take precedence over semantics, and not vice versa, as has traditionally been the case and remains so.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, Sami Pihlström interprets the tradition of pragmatism in the history of philosophy and particularly its roots as being more Eurocentric than Americanist.<sup>6</sup> He also emphasises the synthesis between Kant and Darwin. According to Pihlström, pragmatists resolve the same questions that Kant's critical project dealt with, that is, what the conditions of human experience are (theoretical and practical, scientific and moral); although, the pragmatists, unlike Kant, do not see these conditions in the transcendental structures of human thought, rather they see them in historically changing human practices, or in the norms created within these practices. The pragmatists, just like Kant, begin from the perspective of the subject, which structures reality through its activities; however, they naturalise the subject's reason and activity, i.e. in the spirit of Darwinian inspiration they anchor them primarily in natural reality, within which sociocultural activity and reality also emerge and exist.

This new kind of interpretation of the pragmatist tradition simply shows in the end that the classical founders were right, for they themselves had pointed to the European roots of their philosophy, acknowledging

and follow on from them: Peirce in relation to Kant<sup>7</sup>, James in relation to Mill, Dewey in relation to F. Bacon and Hegel, and Rorty in relation to Heidegger and Wittgenstein. Without European philosophy then, there would have been no pragmatism in the USA either, although it is not simply the recipient of European influences.

*Secondly*, pragmatism is a philosophy that *critically* defines itself in relation to other directions taken by modern (but also older) philosophy.<sup>8</sup> It is a critique of modern philosophy 'from within'; despite the fact that the American environment meant that it could be viewed from another viewpoint and distance. The pragmatists do not accept any philosophical truth as given, unconditionally, and they do not think that contemporary and future philosophers necessarily need pose the same questions as those of the past did, nor that they have to resolve them in the same way. Of course, discontinuity in the history of philosophy is not a matter of free will or subjectivism, and certainly not a fashion, but has certain 'logic'. Pragmatism is not subjectivism, but critical investigation.

Above all, pragmatism is *anti-Cartesianism*, in that it deconstructs the individual fundamentals of modern philosophy and consequently some do not hesitate to refer to its 'father', Peirce, as the first postmodernist.<sup>9</sup> Continuity between Peirce and Descartes is found in the fact that both sought to resolve the same problem: to find a method of arriving at clear, perspicuous ideas in our thinking; however, the 'logic' of their attitude and approach led them both to entirely different conclusions. Another shared moment between Peirce and Descartes is that both were concerned with scientific knowledge as an epistemic ideal. Peirce's

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<sup>5</sup> Brandom outlined the basis of his pragmatic theory in his earlier writing: *Making it Explicit* (1994), *Articulating Reasons* (2000), *Between Saying and Doing* (2008), *Reason in Philosophy* (2009).

<sup>6</sup> S. Pihlström, ed.: *The Continuum Companion to Pragmatism*. London and New York: Continuum, 2011.

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<sup>7</sup> Peirce defined pragmatism as Kantianism without the thing-in-itself.

<sup>8</sup> Including Kantianism and Darwinism, in not taking epistemological the centrism from Kant, and not applying Darwinism to social sphere.

<sup>9</sup> For instance, the semiotician John Deely.

concept of inquiry as a practical manifestation of the fact that man is by nature “an inquisitive and inquiring being” is, however, far more complex than Descartes’ theory of knowledge. Peirce is Descartes reconstructed and cannot be reduced simply to this.

Similarly, pragmatism in theoretical philosophy, that is, philosophy as thinking about being, thinking and acting (in metaphysics, epistemology and ethics), opposes Kantianism in its approach and method of conceptualisation (and thus carries the hallmark of anti-Kantianism), and indeed also Platonism (and can therefore be characterised as anti-Platonism).<sup>10</sup> Hence, Peirce and James defined their philosophy primarily as a method of solving philosophical questions in the broadest sense of the word, i.e. as a universal or complete approach to philosophical (and other scientific and moral) problems on a meta-level in general (as a meta-method or metaphilosophy). It is not, however, true that pragmatism is simply a kind of anti-philosophy. Pragmatism has its own metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and so forth; therefore, it has its own conception of traditional and new philosophical questions. Pragmatism as philosophy is, in the first instance, a theory of meaning (statements and acts) and a theory of truth. Further, pragmatism contains and develops, in a positive sense, philosophical conceptions such as the theory of inquiry, the theory of experience, the theory of acts, etc. Concepts such as these include, for instance, naturalism in metaphysics, fallibilism, and radical empiricism in epistemology, ontological and axiological pluralism, ethical meliorism and so forth.

*Thirdly*, pragmatism is a type of modern practical philosophy, since part of its philosophical identity is grasping the practical nature of human being in its

entirety including thought itself and philosophy as an intellectual practice, and at the same time re-orientating philosophy towards current human problems.

The philosophy of pragmatism contains other fundamental characteristics (historicism, contextualism, romanticism...), which I cannot consider in detail here. To conclude this section, I shall simply proffer a quotation by Habermas, who in answer to Mitchel Aboulafia’s question, “*What do you see as the most lasting contribution of pragmatism to the tradition of Western philosophy and social thought?*”, replied thus: “Alongside Marx and Kierkegaard pragmatism emerges as the only approach that embraces modernity in its most radical forms and acknowledges its contingencies, without sacrificing the very purpose of Western philosophy – namely, to try out explanations of who we are and what we would like to be as individuals, as members of our communities, and as persons *überhaupt* that is, as man”.<sup>11</sup>

## **2. The Reflection of Modernity in Pragmatism**

Pragmatism is unquestionably the product of American culture in the historical stage of its development that might be characterised as the ascent and peak of *modernisation*, if we also take into account features such as industrialisation, urbanisation, and the growth of business, technology and capitalism generally. It is a philosophy that has grown out of the specific conditions of modernity (the urban environment of Boston and Chicago at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) and that belongs more widely to the Protestant-based way of thinking that shapes the ‘spirit’ of Western civilisation, specifically in the USA.<sup>12</sup> The

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<sup>10</sup> Overall pragmatism is anti-absolutism in philosophy: it does not seek life-saving formulas or miraculous truths independent of human effort, or the historical situation or culture, nor does it seek imperatives that would overcome the contingency, variability and plurality of the world in which we live.

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<sup>11</sup> M. Aboulafia, M. Bookman, and C. Kemp, eds.: *Habermas and Pragmatism*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002, 229.

<sup>12</sup> It was W. James who pointed out the connection with the Protestant spirit of capitalism. There are, however, other stories of pragmatism as an original American philosophy whose roots mean that it fits into the pre-urban, agrarian community of the first ‘settler pioneers’

pragmatists themselves were staunch supporters of the *idea of progress*, most notably represented by J. Dewey, when he became one of the central figures of the first phase of the reform *movement of progressivism* (1890-1929).<sup>13</sup> The main outcome of this wide social, political and intellectual movement was the transformation of the wild, unregulated capitalism of the USA into a more regulated version (including, for instance, the fight against corruption). Dewey, however, within all this, concentrated on *education*, which he considered to be a deciding factor in progress alongside democracy.<sup>14</sup> At that time, Dewey began developing his thoughts on technology in terms of his concept of instrumentalism; it is, however, a mistake to characterise him as a technocrat or 'social engineer'.<sup>15</sup> Approaches such as these date from later (after 1945) and in spirit they are closer to the philosophy of positivism with its ideas on theory (science) as an instrument to be applied by experts to achieve their 'objective goals'. Dewey's philosophy of technology is construed within Aristotelian and Hegelian terminology, linked with the idea of participative democracy and, especially, the key notion of creative intelligence as a type of rationality, comprising not only knowledge and science, but also values and morals. Dewey is Kant reconstructed and this reconstruction lies within an amalgam of critique, creativity and action (hence, all three of Kant's critiques).

When, however, Dewey was to reflect later, in his main socio-philosophical work<sup>16</sup>, on the outcome of progressivism and the state of American culture and society, he was not overenthusiastic. On the contrary, he

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(S. Pratt, P. Thompson, T. Hilde).

<sup>13</sup> The movement continues today and still has its protagonists, including for instance the dissident N. Chomsky, the 'prophetic pragmatist' C. West, the cognitive scientist and philosopher G. Lakoff, and others.

<sup>14</sup> It was at this time that he was working on his philosophy of education, the synthesis of which is his *Democracy and Education* (1916).

<sup>15</sup> As did the members of the Frankfurt School and as L. Hickman refuted in his work.

<sup>16</sup> *The Public and its Problems* (1927); *Individualism Old and New* (1930); *Liberalism and Social Action* (1935); *Freedom and Culture* (1939).

talked of this culture being in crisis and was critical of the "money culture", since "[t]he money medium of exchange ... drastically condition[s] the other activities of the people"; he talked of "religious prosperity" as "dedicated to making money"; and of economic determinism as practiced, of "a house divided against itself", where the inhabitants are spiritually confused, upset and troubled; of an "enormous industrial machine", for which we are neither mentally nor morally prepared; of the "quantification, mechanization and standardization" of life; of the "absence of critical thinking" and mass persuasion; of uniformity and the "lost individual"; of the dominance of corporatism, mass production and consumption; of the rule of the financial oligarchy and the disintegration of society; of mediocre and conformist government; of "the scandal of private appropriation of socially produced values", and even of corruption as a moral perversion, etc. And what kind of therapy did he propose in relation to this diagnosis? In addition to education and democracy in the broader sense<sup>17</sup>, he talked of a new individualism and a new liberalism, of the need for social regulation of the economy, of institutions and norms embodied in the new social organisation generally, based on intelligence as a means of creatively solving problems and on broad social cooperation in the name of the development of all individuals and their freedom to achieve self-realisation. Dewey outlined a vision of social liberalism or liberal socialism which remained undeveloped and misunderstood.

In conclusion, let us return from Dewey to the philosophy of modernity. What is the central problem in modernity (as an epoch and as a culture) and thus with modern philosophy as well? I incline towards the opinion of those philosophers who see this problem in terms of a conflict between *knowledge and values* (truth and

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<sup>17</sup> The cure to the problem with democracy, he believes, is not more democracy (quantity), but better democracy (quality); namely, participative democracy.

meaning, science and morality)<sup>18</sup> and/or between rationality as an instrument of power, and rationality as an instrument of cooperation (as Habermas would put it between instrumental and communicative rationality), but also between technology and humanism, that is, between the 'two cultures' within modern culture. Modernity is based on the 'knowledge industry' (Dewey's term) and on 'religious rationality' in contrast to the old pre-modern values, framed in the Western world in terms of Christianity, which find themselves at a disadvantage in this conflict. And the way out of this is evidently not Kant's brilliant intuition that we should "deny knowledge in order to make room for faith". This central conflict between knowledge and values results in and is manifest in the oscillation and bifurcation of modern philosophy. After all, the branch that has since the beginning been fashioned along the lines of a science has survived quite successfully in this frame, but it does face the risk of being accused of scientism. The second branch, reliant not only on faith but also on art, has existential problems. Postmodernity means that a system and models based on 'pure science' either violate us or disintegrate due to resistance to this violence.

One solution could clearly be to bring together and integrate both sides of this conflict into a single complete conception i.e. to philosophically demonstrate how it is possible for there to be harmony between knowledge and values. So long as we understand science to be an 'objective truth' and justify our actions using precisely this kind of knowledge, and, on the other hand, as long as we understand values to be pure subjective constructions, and as long as our conception of human and social good is dominated by the ideology of scientism, which posits that scientific truth is the greatest good that shows the way into the future, then we shall remain nominally in the clutches of the old dichotomy between knowledge and values, but in reality

we subscribe to the highest values of knowledge, science and rationality as ends within themselves. Yet have we not noticed that knowledge is a means rather than a goal and that value-free science does not exist? Science is a value, but can it stand in the way of our values? Should it not be philosophy that investigates the way in which knowledge and values are connected?

Pragmatism by its nature is an anti-dualist philosophy that seeks to resolve precisely this core conflict of modernity by investigating "how things relate to one another" and one of the fundamental dualisms that it concurrently reconstructs is the *dichotomy between facts and values* where it demonstrate that pure facts and pure values do not exist.<sup>19</sup> Pragmatism is a rational and humanistic reconstruction of modern philosophy with an open programme and end-point.

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<sup>18</sup> For instance, H. S. Thayer (1923-2008): *Meaning and Action. A Critical History of Pragmatism*. Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981 (1968 by The Bobbs-Merrill Comp. Inc).

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<sup>19</sup> H. Putnam: *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002.

## **IV. BOOK REVIEWS**

## BOOK REVIEW

### THE PRESENT STATE OF PRAGMATIST AESTHETICS?

WOJCIECH MAŁECKI (ED.) (2014): *PRACTICING PRAGMATIST AESTHETICS. CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE ARTS (VALUE INQUIRY BOOK SERIES, VOL. 275)*

New York: Editions Rodopi, 224 pages (cited as *PPA*).

LESZEK KOCZANOWICZ & KATARZYNA LISZKA (EDS.) (2014): *BEAUTY, RESPONSIBILITY, AND POWER. ETHICAL AND POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF PRAGMATIST AESTHETICS (VALUE INQUIRY BOOK SERIES, VOL. 277)*

New York: Editions Rodopi, 195 pages (cited as *BRP*).

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#### I

Every review is supposed to give a definite answer to a simple question: "Would you recommend reading, or even purchasing, the reviewed publication(s)?" When it comes to the two volumes at hand, I'm afraid that I cannot offer more than an ambiguous "yes and no": Yes, because both essay collections address questions that are of prime importance to anyone who is interested in the basic requirements, implications, and aspirations of pragmatist aesthetics; and no, because an astonishingly large number of essays draw a rather simplistic, sometimes even naïve, picture of pragmatism in general and pragmatist aesthetics in particular. In other words: Both volumes include contributions that are fairly instructive, thought-provoking, and innovative. At the same time, though, they present far too many undifferentiated accounts of pragmatism's alleged potential for contemporary ethical and aesthetic thought. Pieces of excellence are thus accompanied by highly questionable lines of thought that in some cases even threaten to undermine pragmatism's reputation in regard to current debates on the nature and scope of aesthetic experience and the relationship between ethics and aesthetics, respectively.

In what follows, I will not provide a critical summary of each contribution to the above mentioned volumes. Instead, I will proceed in a rather selective manner: I will first highlight those themes, ideas, and hypotheses that I believe to be of great value for a deeper understanding of pragmatism's experiential notion of the aesthetic on the one hand and of the ethico-aesthetic implications of pragmatist thought on the other (section II). In this context, I will pay particular attention to a number of essays that are of great help in exposing some of the most notorious fallacies about pragmatism's supposed philosophical specificity. I will then focus on those theoretical considerations that I find to be highly debatable (section III). In doing this, most of my attention will be directed towards ideas that are brought forward in recourse to Richard Shusterman's pragmatist aesthetics.

#### II

Both volumes are the result of a research project, "Practicing Pragmatist Aesthetics: Art, Politics, Society," that was funded by the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education. It is therefore no coincidence that both editions are supposed to complement each other. In fact, Wojciech Małecki's edition often operates as a kind of prelude to Leszek Koczanowicz's and Katarzyna Liszka's edition. While the former is primarily concerned with the specificity, actuality, and applicability of pragmatist aesthetics, the latter examines the ethical and political consequences of a pragmatist conception of the aesthetic. Małecki's edition, to be more precise, provides a theoretical foundation for the thematic focus of Koczanowicz's and Liszka's edition by delivering a set of ideas and concepts whose scope does indeed go way beyond the sphere of the arts and aesthetics. Those readers who are interested in getting a more thorough impression of the status quo of pragmatist aesthetics and ethics may therefore want to study both anthologies successively or simultaneously (which is not to say that such an approach will necessarily lead to satisfying reading impressions).

It comes as no surprise that most contributions are either directly or indirectly influenced by John Dewey's *Art as Experience* (1934). Not only was Dewey the first and only classical pragmatist who dwelled on the philosophy of art and the notion of aesthetic experience;<sup>1</sup> with his *Art and Experience*, he also published a seminal contribution to the theory of aesthetics that still serves as a major source of inspiration to various contemporary pragmatist aestheticians. As Wojciech Małecki points out in his introduction to *Practicing Pragmatist Aesthetics*, Dewey's aesthetic theory is mainly concerned with two objectives that constitute a decisive centerpiece of any pragmatist understanding of aesthetics: First, Dewey argues for a decidedly *experiential* notion of the aesthetic that is less concerned with *artistic objects* than with the dynamic character of *aesthetic experience* as such. "Experience" is Dewey's aesthetic master term, not the physical "work of art" or classical aesthetic key concepts such as "Beauty" or "the Sublime". Secondly, Dewey's experiential approach towards the aesthetic vigorously opposes the traditional Western dichotomy between art and aesthetics on the one hand and the realm of everyday life and ordinary experience on the other. According to Dewey, the quality of the aesthetic "is implicit in every normal experience" (Dewey 2008c, 18), which is why he believed that the sphere of the aesthetic cannot, and ought not, be limited to the sphere of the fine arts. From a pragmatist point of view, any kind of activity bears the potential to become aesthetic. The question that is of utmost importance to a pragmatist account of aesthetics, then, is how this potential may be effectively realized. Dewey's *Art as Experience* can be read as a first systematic effort in finding a satisfying answer to this question.

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<sup>1</sup> Neither Peirce nor James wrote a substantial treatise on the theory of aesthetics, which does not imply that aesthetic considerations were entirely irrelevant for their particular philosophical investigations. For a more detailed description of Dewey's exceptional position in the history of pragmatist aesthetics, see Richard Shusterman's contribution to *Practicing Pragmatist Aesthetics*.

Although both volumes draw on the experiential and anti-dualistic leitmotifs of Dewey's aesthetic theory, most contributions build on the work of another towering figure in the history of pragmatist aesthetics: Richard Shusterman. Indeed, *Practicing Pragmatist Aesthetics* was initially prepared in response to the twentieth anniversary of Shusterman's 1992 *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*, which is widely regarded as the most influential publication on pragmatist aesthetics after Dewey's *Art as Experience*. Hence, most parts of Małecki's edition eventually amount to a joint reflection on the singularity and applicability of Shusterman's pragmatist account of aesthetics. This emphasis especially applies to Shusterman's widely known project of somaesthetics, which highlights the fundamental importance of the sentient body for an adequate understanding of aesthetic experience. Being an outcome of the very same research project, an identical observation can be made with regard to Koczanowicz's and Liszka's essay collection, whose indebtedness to Shusterman's philosophy is indeed so vast that its subtitle should actually be read as "Ethical and Political Consequences of Richard Shusterman's Pragmatist Aesthetics."

The fact that each volume begins with an essay written by Shusterman himself is probably the clearest sign of how essential his work is for the respective outlooks of the two essay collections. Shusterman's contribution to *Practicing Pragmatist Aesthetics*, "The Invention of Pragmatist Aesthetics: Genealogy and Reflections on a Notion and a Name," provides a concise description of the origin and career of the term "pragmatist aesthetics." The essay starts with a brief introduction into Peirce's, James's, and Dewey's individual considerations on the theory of aesthetics. Moreover, it explains why Dewey deliberately refrained from using the term "pragmatist aesthetics" in his *Art as Experience*: Alarmed by the fierce criticisms of his previous writings on pragmatism, Dewey was afraid that such a term would only thwart an unbiased reception of his book. As

Shusterman shows, this hope not only proved to be erroneous but also unconvincing, as Dewey's approach towards the notion of aesthetic experience was after all based on a thoroughly pragmatist conception of experience.

If we follow Shusterman's subsequent autobiographical remarks about the genesis and impact of his *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, though, the obvious "pragmatism" in Dewey's aesthetics does not imply that the notion of "pragmatist aesthetics" as a label for an independent branch of aesthetic theorizing is a direct or exclusive corollary of *Art as Experience*. In point of fact, Shusterman is "convinced that the notion of pragmatist aesthetics (though undeniably inspired by Dewey) is essentially the product of neopragmatist thought, and that the term gained wide, international currency only after it began to be employed and promoted systematically through the publication of my book, *Pragmatist Aesthetics* (1992) and other writings (beginning in 1988 and continuing up to the present)" (PPA, 22). Shusterman tries to verify this assertion with the help of statistics: Presenting the findings of a comprehensive data base search (JSTOR, *The Philosopher's Index*, ProQuest), he declares that "there has been a 627 percent increase" in the use of the term "pragmatist aesthetics" or other variants of this phrase "since the year *Pragmatist Aesthetics* was published" (PPA, 28). Shusterman acknowledges that his search was confined to English mentions, but it can be deemed as certain that searches in other languages will lead to similar results. It goes without saying that the label "pragmatist aesthetics" can be attached to the works of many other pragmatist scholars (such as Richard Rorty, Joseph Margolis, or Thomas Alexander, to name but a few). At the same time, though, it is beyond doubt that the notion of "pragmatist aesthetics" as an aesthetic discipline in its own right was first and foremost promoted by *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, whose enormous success is not least mirrored by its subsequent ten translations.

Shusterman's contribution to *Beauty, Responsibility, and Power*, "Somaesthetics and Politics: Incorporating Pragmatist Aesthetics for Social Action," gives a brief sketch of the political and ethical potential of his somaesthetics. Despite its brevity, the essay puts forward a number of ideas and concepts that prove to be of programmatic relevance for many other articles in Koczanowicz's and Liszka's compilation. After defining somaesthetics "as the critical study and meliorative cultivation of the experience and use of one's body as a site of sensory appreciation (*aesthesis*) and creative self-fashioning" (BRP, 5), Shusterman highlights that the task of a decidedly melioristic "somaesthetic cultivation" (BRP, 8) of the self does by no means serve aesthetic purposes only. Following a Wittgensteinian stance according to which ethics and aesthetics form a fundamental unity, Shusterman proclaims that the project of somaesthetics offers "a means of strengthening our somatic capacities [...] so that we are better equipped to engage in social and political struggles" (BRP, 8). More specifically, Shusterman believes that his somaesthetics is able to foster a liberating, emancipatory potential due to its capacity to "explain many of our irrational political enmities", such as "the fanatical kind of hatred that some people have for certain foreign races, cultures, classes, and nations" (BRP, 9).

Shusterman seeks to support this idea by means of a quasi-Jamesian line of argumentation: Just as James (see James 1992, 352), he holds that our bodily actions and expressions play a constitutive role in the formation of our feelings, attitudes, and belief systems. How we feel and think about ourselves and others, Shusterman contends, is neither primarily nor exclusively determined by purely cognitive faculties but rather a product of particular "body politics" and idiosyncratic "somatic styles" (see Shusterman 2012, ch. 14, for a detailed explanation of this idea). Shusterman is therefore convinced that the systematic promotion and advancement of "somaesthetic consciousness-raising"

will eventually provide “a pragmatic remedy” for “issues of racism, sexism, homophobia, and violence” (*BRP*, 10). Seen from this perspective, mere words and logical argumentations do not suffice to overcome such pressing ethical and political problems – what is additionally required for that purpose is a kind of “somatic training” whose focus lies on those (often unconscious) bodily habits and “deep visceral feelings” that both “generate” and “foster” dehumanizing, discriminatory, and excluding patterns of thought, perception, and action (*BRP*, 10).

Critics might argue that Shusterman’s trust in the enlightening power of his somaesthetics represents nothing but an updated version of behaviorism. Although such an accusation does not seem to be totally out of place, it incites us to ignore some undeniably instructive facets of Shusterman’s philosophy of embodiment. On the one hand, it may of course be questioned whether “somatic training” really provides the most effective “remedy” against racism, sexism, homophobia, or other kinds of prejudice. On the other hand, however, the idea that the deliberate provocation of “experiences of *somatic dissonance*” (*BRP*, 12) will eventually stimulate the formation of a more reflective and critical attention to one’s personal somatic style shouldn’t be dismissed too hastily. Why should the “disruption” (*BRP*, 12) of previously unreflected somatic styles and body politics be less productive than rational arguments, especially given that all of the enmities mentioned above are explicitly related to physical aspects (skin color, sexual orientations, styles of clothing, etc.)? After all, Shusterman’s somaesthetics doesn’t differ too much from Pierre Bourdieu’s widely acclaimed “habitus theory,” which does in point of fact demonstrate a considerable programmatic affinity with pragmatism’s traditional interest in the notion of “habit” (see Shusterman 1999). Bourdieu too insisted on the contingent character of our bodily habits and somatic norms. But unlike Shusterman, he seems to have been less optimistic in terms of the possibility to escape the

subjugating power of specific body politics. While Shusterman quite frequently appears to be overtly enthusiastic about the alleged transformative power of his somaesthetics, Bourdieu often describes the “habitus” as if its conservative grip was a sheer blow of fate (see Bourdieu 2000). Against this background, Shusterman’s approach may well be regarded as a promising alternative.

On balance, I don’t think that one needs to share Shusterman’s emphatic trust in the emancipatory potential of somaesthetics in order to be able to grasp and appreciate the productivity of his notion of “somatic dissonance.” As is well known, a primary task of pragmatism consists in revealing ways and means for “break[ing] through the crust of conventionalized and routine consciousness” (Dewey 2008b, 349). Looking out for the conditions under which novel ways of thought and perception may be realized represents a crucial element of pragmatist thought. Against this background, Shusterman’s somaesthetics vividly highlights two important aspects: (i) The modification of conventionalized patterns of thought, action, and perception is not to be seen as a purely intellectual endeavor. Instead, it always involves a unity of mind and body that Shusterman, following Dewey, rightly renders as *irreducible*. (ii) The notion of “somatic dissonance” reinforces the classical pragmatist conviction according to which the formation of novel ways of thought, perception, and action always presupposes the *lived experience* of irritating ruptures, frictions, discontinuities, or instabilities. Novelty never arises out of the blue – it is a cognitive and material *response* to a situation that is *felt* to be confusing and problematic. The process of casting doubt on the validity of a given belief system, including dominant bodily habits or somatic styles, is thus not under the control of an entirely autonomous mind. It is rather the existential corollary of our somatic embeddedness in an ever-changing world that never stops confronting us with thought-*provoking* moments of surprise, contingency, and spontaneity.

Why do I regard these two aspects as highly important?

First, because Shusterman's experiential pragmatism forms an illuminating contrast to Richard Rorty's linguistic pragmatism. Both authors argue for a fundamental unity between ethics and aesthetics. They also privilege the idea of a flexible self that is characterized by a fundamental opposition against the inherent conservatism of conventionalized patterns of thought, perception, and action. Unlike Shusterman, however, Rorty explicitly advocates a "pragmatism without experience" (Bernstein 2010, 128) that is centered around a rather 'disembodied' notion of language. What Rorty's pragmatist aesthetics is primarily concerned with are "final vocabularies," "metaphors," and particular literary narratives that support the idea of a decentered self (see Rorty 1989), whereas issues related to the concept of experience are deemed irrelevant. Ironically enough, Rorty's pragmatic logocentrism prevents him from giving an adequate account of his own progressivism. On the one hand, he never gets tired of championing a quasi-Nietzschean ideal of a constant redescription of the self. On the other hand, by fostering a primacy of language that doesn't even take note of the sensorial dimension of linguistic signs, Rorty's pragmatism proves to be unable to register those experiential factors that ultimately *trigger* the *felt need* for a further modification of existing habits of thought, action, and perception. Rorty's progressivism, in short, is in no way *responsive*. It merely *dictates* the cultivation of a decidedly progressivist attitude without providing a satisfying explanation as to why we ought to be progressivists at all.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, Rosa M. Calcaterra does not touch upon this aspect in her essay "The Linguistic World: Rorty's Aesthetic Meliorism" (*BRP*, 91–107). Instead of unfolding the weaknesses and blind spots of Rorty's logocentrism, Calcaterra gives a rather uncritical account of his aesthetic meliorism. To give but one example: Calcaterra affirmatively dwells on the fundamental assumptions of Rorty's idea of "linguistic evolution" (*BRP*, 100) without taking note of the experiential factors that eventually facilitate such an evolution. More particularly, Calcaterra keeps silent about the fact that the creative

Secondly, Shusterman's awareness for the generative potential of dissonant experiences runs parallel with a profound responsiveness for the transformative power of artistic practices and aesthetic experience. Although Dewey – Shusterman's main philosophical hero – was historically wrong when he proclaimed that the "function of art" had "*always*" been associated with the impulse to "break through" the crusts of convention (Dewey 2008b, 249; emphasis added),<sup>3</sup> he was definitely right in suggesting that works of art may instigate a thorough "reeducation of the senses" (Dewey 2008c, 324). Not only do works of art often invite for an effective encounter with different modalities of perception, they also bear the potential of making explicit that the germ of novelty and creativity is deeply connected with disrupting experiences of contingency, discontinuity, resistance, or precariousness (see Dewey 2008a, ch. 2). Art, in other words, is capable of illustrating, embodying, and making tangible one of the most fundamental assumptions of pragmatist thought. A particular strength of Shusterman's somaesthetics, and consequently of the essay collections at hand, consists in its explicit consideration of this aspect.

Finally, there is another reason why I find Shusterman's emphasis on the generative potential of dissonant somatic experiences extremely valuable: It challenges current harmonistic interpretations of Dewey's theory of aesthetic experience, such as Scott R. Stroud's contribution to *Practicing Pragmatist Aesthetics*, "The Art of Experience: Dewey on the Aesthetic." In this essay, Stroud postulates an equivalence between

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transformation of an established "final vocabulary" is initially a response to a problematic situation that calls for the development of a novel, possibly more fitting, kind of vocabulary.

<sup>3</sup> As Andreas Reckwitz recently demonstrated, privileging the new in place of the old is a decidedly modern phenomenon (see Reckwitz 2015). It is precisely modernist art that programmatically challenges conventionalized modes of perception and explicitly refuses to function as an aesthetic means of symbolic representation or a tool for producing "beautiful" objects.

Dewey's famous conception of growth on the one hand and his notion of aesthetic experience on the other. "Growth," Stroud writes, "occurs when an organism feels the resistance the environment offers to its impulses, and when that organism then finds ways to overcome these resisting features through meaningful action" (PPA, 35). Since such a "successful temporal struggle with a recalcitrant environment" may be "described as being aesthetic in felt quality," Stroud adds, "growth" and "aesthetic experience" are supposed to represent nothing more than different designations for one and the same event (PPA, 35). Stroud develops this idea on the basis of Dewey's *Art as Experience*, a book that he is undoubtedly deeply familiar with (see Stroud 2011). However, I'm afraid that Stroud's strong emphasis on the idea of "meaningful unity" (PPA, 36) is in danger of neglecting that the experiential quality of *disunity* marks an equally important category for a Deweyan understanding of growth. Rendering growth as "the reaching of organism-environment equilibrium" (PPA, 35) is, of course, absolutely in line with Dewey's naturalization of the aesthetic. Nevertheless, I believe that Dewey's idea of growth stands for more than the harmonious closure of an activity – it may also be interpreted as an appeal to establish a dynamic, flexible, and progressivist habit of mind that is based on an elaborate responsiveness for the experiential frictions that actually stimulate the deployment of what Dewey famously called "creative intelligence" (see Dewey 1917). Growth, in other words, is not solely an *effect* of particular actions – it is also the goal and outcome of a "pragmatic ethos" which is characterized by a pronounced willingness of being (and staying) susceptible for those experiential qualities that invite for a "serious encounter with what is other, different, and alien" (Bernstein 1992, 328).<sup>4</sup> Sami Pihlström, in his

brilliant article "'Anything Goes' vs. 'Who Touches this Book Touches a Man': William James and Paul Feyerabend on Metaphysical, Ethical, and Aesthetic 'Abundance'," is therefore absolutely right in reminding us of the fact that pragmatism mainly originated from the determination to "[take] *disharmony* seriously" (BRP, 51).

Although I am critical of Stroud's overemphasis on the aspect of unity, I find his article highly instructive, especially when it comes to grasping the peculiarity of a pragmatist understanding of aesthetic experience. As is well known, a decisive feature of pragmatist thought consists in arguing for a future-oriented kind of philosophizing. Richard Rorty, for instance, emphatically professed that the main idea of pragmatism basically amounted to an "apotheosis of the future" (Rorty 1999, 27). Stroud, in turn, reminds us that pragmatism's forward-looking orientation does by no means go hand in hand with an undermining of the present. Echoing Dewey's conviction according to which experience is nothing but "a future implicated in the present" (Dewey 1917, 9), Stroud points out that a pragmatist theory of aesthetics expressly "values the present situation or object as equal to or greater in worth than remote states of affairs, goals, and so forth" (PPA, 42). For Stroud (just as for so many other aestheticians), aesthetic experience is not a mere means for the achievement of remote ends; it rather amplifies our awareness of the numerous "possibilities that are felt as a possession of what is now and here" (Dewey, as quoted from Stroud in PPA, 43).

According to this position, the pragmatic value of the future is intimately tied to the experiential richness of the present. Glorifying the future *as such*, as Rorty

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is deeply inspired by Dewey. Moreover, Bernstein makes absolutely clear that the fallibilist open-mindedness of a "pragmatic ethos" is resting on an elaborated awareness for the productivity of experiential dissonances and ruptures (see Bernstein 2010, ch. 6). Thus, his "pragmatic ethos" may well be regarded as a trigger and prerequisite of growth.

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<sup>4</sup> Bernstein does not refer to Dewey's aesthetics and conception of growth in the quoted passages. It should be noted, however, that his reflections on the "pragmatic ethos" are brought forward in light of a decidedly experiential interpretation of pragmatism that

apparently suggested, would therefore be counterintuitive to a strictly *experiential* account of pragmatism. Hence, Stroud is definitely right in holding that a pragmatic orientation towards future possibilities of experience is first and foremost a corollary of a firm receptiveness to the inherent contingency of the “now and here” of present experiences. Since aesthetic experience is shown to be characterized by an intimate bond with the present, Stroud is also right in contending that Dewey’s theory of aesthetics can be read as an instruction as to how such a receptivity may be cultivated. Consequently, Stroud’s further claim (*PPA*, 39–44) that Dewey’s *Art as Experience* eventually leads to an aesthetics of existence whose main objective consist in embodying a decidedly pragmatist idea of the “artful life” (an idea which marks an essential cornerstone of Shusterman’s somaesthetics as well), definitely deserves particular attention.

Against this background, Emil Višňovský’s essay “Making the Pragmatist Art of Living Explicit” proves to be a perfect complement to Stroud’s article. Višňovský argues for an “existential pragmatism” that renders pragmatism as “a successor to Sophists, Socrates, Stoicism, and Epicureanism” (*BRP*, 141). Pragmatism, Višňovský writes, “is a distinctive philosophy of life” (*BRP*, 137) insofar as it “provide[s] an understanding of the human condition that corresponds with its transformation” (*BRP*, 141). Accordingly, pragmatism is also labeled as a “philosophy of transformation” (*BRP*, 141). Seen from this perspective, the philosophical peculiarity of pragmatist thought is deeply associated with the acknowledgement of the fundamental precariousness of the human condition. Echoing Peirce’s law of tychism, James’s views on the constant flux of experience, and Dewey’s ideas on the relationship between experience and nature, Višňovský writes:

“Life experience has shown that change which is beyond our control is the greatest danger to life and, based on this, humans have come up with an initiative for permanently extending the limits

of their control. [...] experience has also shown that there is, and can be, no absolute human control over nature such that would eliminate any kind of change.” (*BRP*, 142)

The most defining starting point of pragmatist thought, Višňovský contends, is provided by the inevitability of change. Indeed, Peirce’s unlimited semiosis, James’s meliorism, or Dewey’s notion of growth are all reminiscent of this fact. The same goes for fallibilism, experimentalism, and many other pragmatist key concepts: They all share an existential origin that points to the inescapability of change. Rorty was therefore wrong in identifying pragmatism with a fundamental attack and resolute jettisoning of *any kind of metaphysics*. It is of course true that the classical pragmatists were all critical of the metaphysical tradition. At the same time, though, they still rested their particular philosophical investigations on a firm metaphysical basis. Furthermore, as Višňovský (just as Pihlström) shows, this basis was also always inextricably linked with ethical considerations. Especially James and Dewey were fully aware of the fact that the inevitability of change is mirrored by an inescapability of responsive modifications of the world. It is plainly impossible *not* to respond to an experience of resistance, uncertainty, or precariousness. Thus, a primary task of a pragmatist “creative intelligence” consists in making sure that our material responses to the experience of change eventually lead to a “betterment of life and the human condition” (*BRP*, 145). If this ethico-existential interpretation of pragmatism is plausible (which I think it is), it does not suffice to identify pragmatism as a *philosophy of transformation* – it should also be understood as a *philosophy of responsibility*.

Višňovský’s article suggests that the idea of meliorism should be placed at the center of an existential account of pragmatism that both acknowledges and embraces the transformative power of experience. In doing this, he (unwillingly) unveils a set of inconsistencies that can be found in the two volumes under review. Else Marie

Bukdahl, for instance, in her essay “Embodied Creation and Perception in Visual Art,” seems to argue for a perfectionist interpretation of meliorism. In reference to the work of the Danish/Norwegian artist Marit Benthe Norheim, Bukdahl affirmatively quotes Richard Shusterman in order to promote the idea that artistic practices are capable of supporting “the pursuit of perfectionist self-creation in the art of living” (Shusterman, as quoted from Bekdahl in *PPA*, 148). This statement clearly complies with the meliorist stance of Shusterman’s somaesthetics, whose intention “to enhance the understanding, efficacy, and beauty” (Shusterman 2012, 27) of our bodily actions and “to correct the functional performance of the senses by cultivating improved somatic awareness and self-use” (Shusterman 2012, 34) does in fact hint at a strong affinity with the idea of perfectionism.<sup>5</sup> Although Višňovský explicitly supports Shusterman’s integration of ethics and aesthetics, his own remarks about the ethical purport of meliorism wouldn’t allow for a perfectionist reading of the term. “Pragmatist meliorism,” Višňovský writes, “is not perfectionism” (*BRP*, 145) – and I think that he is absolutely right in highlighting this point. A perfectionist is never content with a given situation; she seeks to improve a situation irrespective of its present state. Perfectionism, in other words, is not related to the effort of *meeting the challenge of inescapable change*, which forms an integral element of meliorism. Instead, it constantly seeks to *initiate change*. Perfectionism is not characterized by the impulse to better a particular *situation*; it is rather concerned with the idea of *betterment* as such. In short: While meliorism is responsive, perfectionism is actionistic. In highlighting this fundamental difference, I do not intend to imply that Shusterman’s aesthetic meliorism is necessarily irresponsive or actionistic. In fact, my affirmative discussion of the notion of somatic dissonance signals that I believe that his pragmatist aesthetics does *not*

amount to such an orientation. Nevertheless, I am indeed afraid that his project of somaesthetics at least implicitly paves the way for a perfectionist understanding of meliorism that is barely reconcilable with Višňovský’s existential interpretation of pragmatism – an interpretation, I should add, that seems to be perfectly in line with the ethical intentions and implications of classical pragmatism.

### III

Even though I rate Višňovský’s “Making the Pragmatist Art of Living” as one of the most instructive contributions to recent pragmatist scholarship, I would like to begin the critical section of this review with some further reflections on his essay. First, it find it surprising that Višňovský makes absolutely no mention of Cornel West’s prophetic pragmatism (see West 1989). On the one hand, Višňovský refers to Sidney Hook’s depiction of pragmatism as a philosophy that expressly acknowledges “the tragic sense of life as a feature of human experience” (Hook, as quoted from Višňovský in *BRP*, 142) in order to promote his idea of an existential pragmatism. On the other hand, he doesn’t seem to consider that West might function as a perfect ally in support of this idea. More than any other contemporary pragmatist, West has incorporated Hook’s “sense of the tragic” as an essential cornerstone of his pragmatist thought (see West 1993). Since West pays particular attention to the ethical and political implications of a pragmatist “sense of the tragic,” Višňovský’s reflections on the “pragmatist art of living” would undoubtedly have profited a lot from a serious engagement with West’s decidedly existentialist interpretation of pragmatism.

Secondly, Višňovský postulates a programmatic contiguity between pragmatist aesthetics and the particular aesthetic programs of Nietzsche and Foucault (*BRP*, 147). In doing this, he is of course echoing an idea that is widely shared among pragmatist scholars

<sup>5</sup> This affinity is probably most explicit in Shusterman’s discussion of Stanley Cavell’s reflections on “Emersonian perfectionism” (see Shusterman 1997, 99–110).

(including Shusterman, to which Višňovský refers in this context). At first sight, the drawing of such a parallel does in fact seem quite reasonable. Just as pragmatist aesthetics, be it in the vein of Dewey or in Shusterman's fashion, strives for an expansion of the aesthetic to everyday life, so do Nietzsche and Foucault seek to demonstrate that "life itself, not only objects, can become the subject matter of art" (BRP, 147). However, this obvious similarity should not prevent us from noticing some profound differences between the respective aesthetic principles and ambitions. Despite Rorty's fascination for Nietzsche's aesthetic meliorism, we should be aware that its overall structure is hardly compatible with the deep democratic orientation of pragmatist aesthetics. Indeed, Nietzsche's passionate inclination towards the unconventional and novel basically follows an ideal of social distinction. Nietzsche's "aesthetic self" looks out for alternative ways of thought and perception for the sake of escaping the "mediocrity" of the "common man" (see, e.g., Nietzsche 2001). Difference, not communication or an interest in the shared experience of thought-provoking moments of surprise, chance, and incertitude, functions as a decisive leitmotiv of Nietzsche's aesthetic thought. Again, novelty is not seen as a (meliorist) response to the experience of frictions and ruptures but rather as an end in itself. Unfortunately, neither Višňovský nor other contributors to the essay collections at hand – such as Rosa M. Calcaterra, who entirely follows Rorty's questionable usurpation of Nietzsche in her essay "The Linguistic World: Rorty's Aesthetic Meliorism" (BRP, 91–107) – critically touch upon that matter.

A similar observation can be made with regard to Foucault. On the one hand, it goes without saying that pragmatists can easily identify with Foucault's genealogical disclosure of the historical contingency of social conventions, moral ideals, cultural norms, or forms of subjectivity. It is also obvious that Foucault's writings and statements about the ethical value of an aesthetics of existence exhibit certain commonalities

with Deweyan accounts of the artful life. But equally striking, on the other hand, are the agonal, even revolting ethico-political conclusions Foucault draws in light of his insights into the historical ubiquity of contingency. Foucault does not contend himself with providing an anti-necessitarian understanding of the human condition; especially in his many interviews on the idea of an aesthetics of existence, he additionally calls for the cultivation of an "agonal ethics of thinking otherwise" that seeks to prevent any resurgence of the familiar and conventional (see Schmid 2000) – thus Foucault's general suspicion against the conserving character of social and political institutions (see, e.g., Foucault 1982). At least I, for one, believe that such a suspicion is alien to an experiential account of pragmatism. I do not doubt, of course, that Foucault's genealogical project paves the way for a philosophy of transformation. However, it is one thing to transform a particular socio-cultural constellation *in response to a specific problem or conflict* that is compelling us to modify a given set of beliefs and habits; and it is quite another thing to transform conventionalized patterns of thought, action, and perception *in consequence of one's knowledge* about their inherent contingency. Taking contingency seriously, both on a personal ethical and on a broader political level, implies the acknowledgement of the fact that every existing socio-cultural constellation may be different and that it is therefore open for revision and modification. It does not imply, however, that what *might or could* be different also *ought* to be different.

These critical remarks are rather marginal as compared to my more fundamental reservations about various aspects of the two essay collections. To begin with, I think that both volumes would have profited enormously from the inclusion of less contributions in order to provide space for a more thorough elaboration of certain ideas, themes, and hypotheses. Krystyna Wilkoszewska, for instance, in her essay "John Dewey and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art," unfolds an illuminating art-

historical reading of Dewey's *Art as Experience* according to which the programmatic aesthetic outlook of this book had been "ahead of its time" (PPA, 88). Wilkoszewska argues that *Art as Experience*, though it mainly referred to impressionist works of art, may be read as a philosophical forerunner of the particular aesthetic programs of avant-garde and neo avant-garde art. A book published in 1934, and written by an author who died in 1952, in other words, is supposed to have anticipated the specific outlook of an aesthetic movement that came up in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Given that Dewey and the (neo) avant-gardists did in fact both highlight "the process of experiencing" instead of the "what' of experience" (PPA, 87), Wilkoszewska's diagnosis appears to be more than plausible. Dewey's and the (neo) avant-garde's reservations against a "museum conception of art" (Dewey 2008c, 12) as well as their attempts at "abolish[ing] the boundaries between art and everyday life" (PPA, 87) just add to the validity of Wilkoszewska's thesis. Unfortunately, though, Wilkoszewska does not give her thesis further support by means of a detailed comparative analysis. Instead of spelling out the extend to which Dewey articulated a proto-avant-gardistic theory aesthetics, she just hints at apparent contiguities. Nor does she dwell on the significant theoretical consequences that follow from her (neo) avant-gardistic reading of Dewey's aesthetics. Indeed, to focus on the "processual character" of aesthetic experience, and to appreciate works of art as "events rather than things" (PPA, 88), represents a decisive element of recent aesthetic thought. Rendering *Art as Experience* as an anticipation of (neo) avant-garde art thus implies attributing Dewey's aesthetics an exceptional actuality for contemporary aesthetics. Against this background, it is surprising to see that Wilkoszewska's essay does not dwell on the eventual affinities that might be identified between Dewey's aesthetics and recent contributions to the notion of "transformative aesthetics," to give but one reasonable example (see, e.g., Fischer-Lichte 2008). Wilkoszewska even keeps silent about other classical

aestheticians who also argued for an experiential account of aesthetics in which art is primarily conceived of as a school of perception (see, e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2002).

Such blind spots, I'm afraid, are quite representative for the two essay collections. Only a few authors, such as Alexander Kremer, who writes about pragmatism's closeness to the hermeneutics of Gadamer and Heidegger in his essay "Understanding, Interpretation, Art, and Neopragmatism" (PPA, 63–80), look out for complementary relations between pragmatism and other schools of thought. In point of fact, most essays display a rather hermetic involvement with particular aspects of pragmatist aesthetics. Since both essay collections clearly label themselves as contributions to the current debate on pragmatist aesthetics, such a bias is of course legitimate. In order to reinforce pragmatism's relevance to contemporary ethics and aesthetics, however, I think it would have been much more productive to put the notion of pragmatist aesthetics in critical dialogue with other prominent theoretical programs. To give but two examples: Why does no one give a detailed account of pragmatism's and phenomenology's shared interest in the *lived quality* of (aesthetic) experience in *Practicing Pragmatist Aesthetics*? And why does no one contrast Richard Shusterman's somaesthetics with Judith Butler's critical reflections on the deep impact of particular body politics in *Beauty, Responsibility, and Power*? Shusterman himself always devoted a lot of his philosophical attention to the comparative study of non-pragmatist authors in order to demonstrate the validity and productivity of his ideas on experience and the soma. Unfortunately, both volumes barely follow this example.

Let me conclude this review with some critical remarks on the reception of Richard Shusterman's pragmatist aesthetics in both editions. Two aspects strike me as odd in this context: First, readers unfamiliar with the present state of pragmatist scholarship might be tempted to

believe that there is only one promising contemporary account of pragmatist aesthetics available at the moment, namely Richard Shusterman's somaesthetics. Although I believe that Shusterman's theory of aesthetics should by no means be underestimated, I think it important to acknowledge the achievements of other accounts of pragmatist aesthetics as well. Monika Bakke, for instance, in her essay "Practicing Aesthetics among Nonhuman Somas in the Age of Biotech" (*PPA*, 153–168), brings forward a thought-provoking plea for an ecological interpretation of experience that seeks to expand Shusterman's notion of the soma to our dealings with nonhuman entities. In this context, she especially highlights the moral responsibilities that follow from our interactions with nonhuman somas. What she does not take note of, however, is the fact that Thomas M. Alexander, one of the most renowned scholars in pragmatism, has already written extensively on the idea of an aesthetics of existence which is based on an ecological theory of experience (see Alexander 2013). I don't want to suggest that Bakke left Alexander's work unmentioned on purpose. What I do believe, though, is that many contributions to the two essay collections hint at a rather limited awareness of what recent pragmatist scholarship has to offer. The fact that Alexander's work is hardly mentioned in both editions provides the most pressing example in support of this impression.

The second aspect that strikes me as odd in regard to the reception of Shusterman's work contributed most to my mixed feelings about the two essay collections. In my opinion, both editions provide far too much space for highly questionable and even naïve interpretations of Shusterman's approach. It may be true, for instance, that a "practical somaesthetics" eventually leads to the "cultivation of a stronger, healthier, better performing body," as Satoshi Higuchi claims by means of a quotation taken from one of Shusterman's numerous publications on this subject (*PPA*, 207). However, I think that Higuchi errs when he additionally states that a practical somaesthetics will ultimately "culminat[e] in a greater

joy of life" (*PPA*, 211). The burden of a weak, unhealthy, and badly performing body may indeed be an obstacle to the human pursuit of happiness, but from this it does not follow that somatic strength, health, and efficiency function as a *necessary* precondition for the fulfillment of the ethical dream of the good life. Whoever claims the opposite confuses the pragmatist quest for meliorism with a perfectionist cult of self-optimization that I think is incompatible with the particular existential *responsivity* of a truly experiential account of pragmatism (see section II above).

Some authors, I'm afraid, expect too much from pragmatist aesthetics. In his essay "Somaesthetic Encounter with Oneself and the Other" (the only article, by the way, that pays at least some attention to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception), Robert Dobrowolski carries Shusterman's trust in the emancipatory potential of somaesthetics to an annoying extreme. Just like Shusterman and many other contributors to the two essay collections, Dobrowolski conceives of somaesthetics as an effective remedy against the most pressing social pathologies of our time. In this context, he calls for the promotion of "a project of common somaesthetic education, which would not only facilitate an increase in our bodily awareness, but also help develop our abilities of aesthetic and ethical self-cultivation, for the sake of ourselves and for the Other" (*BRP*, 131). Dobrowolski is firmly convinced that the establishment of somaesthetics as an integral component of our educational system will eventually contribute to the formation of a social environment that is characterized by mutual respect and benevolence. At first sight, Dobrowolski's initiative for the institutionalization of a somaesthetic education appears to be anything but contestable. However, a closer inspection of his argumentation uncovers that his meliorist expectations are far too high. In explaining "the need to promote somaesthetics appropriate for an everyman," Dobrowolski writes:

“Perhaps we should begin as early as at school, providing children, who acquire social identities, with ample opportunities for positive, cathartic confrontation with sensual prejudices. And by that I do not mean any perverted happenings, like those of Viennese actionists. What I mean is rather a meeting with, for example, a disabled person, so that one could literally touch him/her and, thus, stop being scared of him/her.” (*BRP*, 132–133)

I’m afraid that the last sentence of this quotation cannot be called otherwise than naïve. I understand that we need more than mere “verbal declarations” in order to recognize “the Other’s alterity” (*BRP*, 129), but I do not see why I should “literally” touch the Other in order to recognize his/her personal singularity and dignity. It is absurd to believe that recognition is an immediate corollary of somatic closeness. The torturers of Abu Ghraib prison, for instance, “literally” touched the bodies of their Iraqi inmates for the ugly sake of humiliating, debasing, and dehumanizing a particular notion of otherness (namely, the values of a predominantly Islamic culture). I do not question that Dobrowolski’s initiative is striving for a good cause. But I refuse to accept a “Somaesthetics of Otherness” (*PPA*, 129) that – even if unintentionally – invites us to ask a member of the White Pride movement to run his fingers through the hair of a black fellow being in order to overcome his feelings of hatred and racism. Such a blissful optimism represents nothing but a caricature of pragmatism’s traditional democratic meliorism and utopianism. To avoid any misunderstandings: I am not skeptical of the ethical and political potential of pragmatist aesthetics in general and Shusterman’s somaesthetics in particular. What I do doubt, however, is that the two essay collections under review represent the best that recent pragmatist scholarship has to offer on this matter.

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## BOOK REVIEW

JOHN LACHS, *FREEDOM AND LIMITS*. EDITED BY PATRICK SHADE.  
AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY SERIES.  
New York: Fordham University Press, 499 pp, ISBN 978-0-8235-5674-7.

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John Lachs (born in 1934 in Budapest, Hungary) is a well-known American philosopher, educator, professor at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, and his recent book *Freedom and Limits* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014) sums up and confirms his position in the philosophical arena. This is a collection of his most representative papers, already published in different places during the scope of almost sixty years of his intellectual, educational, and academic activity. The volume is edited and introduced by Patrick Shade for Fordham's *American Philosophy* series.

Five hundred pages of over thirty chapters grouped into five parts cover Lachs's all fields of philosophical interest. Shade's introduction presents a general outlook of Lachs's achievements, both within academia and outside of it, and explains the use of the volume's title: "*Freedom and Limits* underscores the complex tension that arises in Lachs's thinking, for while he celebrates human individuality, intelligence, and creativity, he is nevertheless mindful of the real conditions that curb our endeavours. Meaningful and enriching living are not thereby sacrificed but rather contextualized" (p. 2). Lachs's prologue gets us closer to his biography and shows us the extensive role of philosophy in shaping his mind and his practical approach; the prologue's title, "The Personal Value and Social Usefulness of Philosophy," can be seen as a terse suggestion for all those interested in answering the question: what is the sense of doing philosophy nowadays? Later in the book he develops his idea of philosophy in public life in this way: "we may also think of our work as educating young

people, as making available to them the skills necessary to have a good life" (p. 390).

The first part of the book, entitled "Mind and Reality," presents six chapters on the philosophy of mind, epistemology, and ontology. Some of these chapters extensively consider George Santayana's naturalism, Johann Gottlieb Fichte's idealism, Charles S. Peirce's pragmatism, and the specificity of American philosophy as regards the relationship between materialism and idealism. One of the factors, Lachs says in "The Transcendence of Materialism and Idealism of American Thought," that makes American philosophy unique is its attempt to undercut the materialist-idealist dichotomy, as it was in the case of John Dewey for whom "metaphysics of activity" was such an attempt (p. 103). From what he writes we can conclude that American pragmatists characteristically did not want to get involved into the merely theoretical discussion about the dichotomy and, instead, promoted a practical employment of some aspects of both making philosophy both theoretical deliberation and practical activity in many aspects of life.

The second part of the book, "The Self and Society," consisting of seven chapters, deals with the role of the individual in the community from the point of view of ethical socio-ethical problems: happiness, death, selling organs, leaving others alone, and others. Here we see Lachs's sensitivity to the lot of the non-egoistic individual creatively existing within a communal framework, something that his readers know from his other books: *Intermediate Man* (1981, 1983, 1985), *In Love with Life* (1998), *A Community of Individuals* (2003), and *Meddling* (2014). In "Leaving Others Alone," he presents practical aspects of the theoretical notions of individuality and liberty, and explains: "Curbing our desire to rule over people and abandoning the error of supposing that ours is the only natural or worthy way to live would go a long distance toward making this a more decent world" (p. 210).

The part three, including six chapters and entitled "Pluralism and Choice-Inclusive Facts," seems the most technical, though still the clarity of the author's language is definitely one of his strongest sides. Especially in "Relativism and its Benefits," "Persons and Different Kinds of Persons," and "Philosophical Pluralism," we get a sense of Lachs's attitude towards the everlasting discussion as to how to cope with incompatible values and norms in morality, philosophy, and in other areas of the public life. We can feel a definite reference to Lachs's intellectual background, which is American pragmatism and George Santayana, in a strong pronouncement of pluralism, freedom, and individuality yet, all this, within a social order. I will come back to this below.

In part four (seven chapters), "Meaningful Living," Lachs stresses the importance of the practical feeling of the quality of life, and here we have the emphasis that is put upon the relevance of philosophy to life, which, by the way, is his long term interest: one of his books (*The Relevance of Philosophy to Life*, 1995) was dedicated to this problem as well. Lachs's sources for this are both old and recent; for example, he links Aristotle and Dewey in his criticism of the rat race, and the Stoics and the pragmatists in promoting vitality and progressivism yet within the limits of what is possible and desirable for making life better for all of us. This latter plot is abundantly pronounced in his book *Stoic Pragmatism* (2012).

In the book's final part, which is "Human Advance and Finite Obligation" (six chapters) plus the epilogue "Physician Assisted Suicide," Lachs explains his vision of progress both in individual life and the communal as regards making life more bearable. Lachs is known for his definite views on both of these aspects. He strongly promotes philosophy, among other things, as a tool that may help people realize that satisfaction with life and a sense of self-development do not have to require much funding and any extravagant achievements: loving and

being loved, commitment to the realization of our dearest aims, and rationalization of one's possibilities can give a solid basis for many of us to enjoy life. At the same time, suffering, if not bearable, can be a factor that can turn life into hell, and Lachs, once again, shows us the practical dimension of philosophizing. Namely, he urges us to think about assisted suicide as a humane way of getting out of a terrible plight.

Is there any internal logic in such an arrangement of the chapters and topics? Is it an accidental collation of papers or rather a well considered endeavour? Patrick Shades explains in his Introduction that each part highlights the dominant theme, and within the given part and theme, the consecutive chapters are arranged chronologically. The order of the dominant themes, however, reflects Lachs's focus on philosophical issues throughout his career: from his engagement in the problems of epiphenomenalism and mind (the title of his very first published paper being "Consciousness and Weiss' Mind," 1959, not included in the volume) through the reflection on individual in the communal life, ending with bioethics in recent years.

One of additional values of the volume is showing us Lachs as an independent thinker, I mean independent from George Santayana in the first instance. This is important for those readers who know that Lachs is an author of two books on Santayana (*George Santayana*, 1988, and *On Santayana*, 2006), and the co-editor (with Shirley Lachs) of two volumes of Santayana's unpublished texts (*Animal Faith and Spiritual Life*, 1967; *Physical Order and Moral Liberty*, 1969). Shade indicates Lachs's ties with Santayana as well as Lachs's criticisms of Santayana; on the one hand, his recognition of Santayana's idea of 'animal faith' as offering "vital insights for a philosophy of life" (p. 6), and, on the other hand, his criticism of Santayana on mind, on the materialism-idealism divide, and on essences. At the same time, Shades highlights Lachs's original contribution to the contemporary scene by proposing

the idea of 'stoic pragmatism' and paying special attention to particular socio-ethical issues, and this includes the benefits to be had from ethical relativism. Lachs's idea of 'stoic pragmatism' -- already abundantly discussed by many commentators in many places -- also testifies to Lachs's philosophical independence, this time from American pragmatism (though, generally, Lachs can be included into the camp of pragmatists). For example, he does not follow William James's reservations about stoicism (in *Psychology, Briefer Course*, 1892), and, just the opposite, he proposes to include it as a complementary ingredient of pragmatism. As regards relativism, I would like to comment on it a little longer, since I think Lachs's voice on it should be taken into consideration.

Lachs starts with the thesis that relativism is something natural and profitable for the flourishing of the individual, and even suggests, "Relativism and its Benefits," that dogmatists or the anti-relativists fear relativism for psychological reasons, which is losing a sense of the solid groundwork for their social engagements and their moral stance: "Perhaps it is our animal urge for security that turns us into dogmatists in manners and morals" (p. 219). It seems to me that Lachs assumes without any proof (at least at this place) that relativism is not itself a form of dogmatism (e.g. 'it is absolutely true that there are no universal principles in ethics'), and, hence, that relativism can psychologically be maintained for similar reasons as dogmatists hold it. Later on, Lachs develops his argumentation in a philosophical way by showing us a perplexed moral objectivist (whom he calls a dogmatist) in a situation where he or she faces the problem of the justification of a different or another moral stance executed by his/her close relatives and friends. There are some options according to which the condemnation of, for example, somebody's lying should be examined. Lachs mentions (cf. p. 220): hedonistic reasons (causing more pain), utilitarian reasons (failing to maximizing the social good), and theocentric reasons (God may not approve of it),

none of which can be clearly and indisputably vindicated by the objectivist/dogmatist.

Lachs's scepticism on the possibility to reach any groundwork here, paves the way to the idea of values as "relational terms" (p. 222), and the conclusive part of the argumentation being the recognition of liberty as the main benefit: "The greatest beneficiary of the universal acceptance of moral relativism would, without doubt, be human liberty" (p. 228). Liberty, then, can be used by us to thrive and contribute to our communities; it can, although it does not do so when misused, and much space in the volume is devoted to tell us how the proper usage of freedom should look like. Not only freedom. From his "Philosophical Pluralism" we learn the conclusion he makes from the numerous disagreements among philosophers in the course of history, even the greatest thinkers who do not lack the highest argumentative skills. It is hardly possible to equally take seriously Plato with Nietzsche, Hegel with Kant, and the reason is that they view things from different perspectives, using sundry methods, and coming out of incompatible assumptions. For Lachs, as perhaps for some others, this is not a painful dilemma; just the opposite: "I do not think the world would be a better place if philosophers agreed in their views. Agreement is of value when its absence leads to armed conflict, bitter resentments, or divorce, but it avails little when critical dialogue is the only vehicle on the road to truth" (p. 289). Here, Lachs intentions dovetail with the democratic dimension of the philosophy of American pragmatists, and with the pluralism of Santayana.

What is, then, a particular of philosophy, understood as a set of sundry philosophies. Lachs presents clearly his view on the value of philosophy, and it is consonant with his view on the benefits we can have out of relativism: "Its value lies in expanding our minds by developing imaginative new ways of looking at things and in sharpening our critical skills by offering rigorous objections to every theory" (p. 289). In different

contexts, different people, having specific minds and sensitivities of their bodies, can hardly enjoy unanimous views on many aspect of living. However, this does not degrade the results of philosophers' views and philosophical efforts. Each of them can make effort to develop their own visions, their own criticisms, and their own ways of making life happy within limits necessary for co-operative activities, inter-human relations, and communal well-being.

Some words about Lachs's style of writing must be uttered at the end of this review, since it is unusual if we take academic criteria to be observed especially in a Continental university. First, it is deprived of footnotes and citations; Lachs does not want to explain more than he writes in the body of the text, and he does not shower his reader with innumerable names, titles, philosophical -isms, and quotations from other authors. Second, he writes to more open audiences than those at academia; his texts are understood even by those who have no training in philosophy and read philosophy simply to learn more, for example about moral choices. I consider the attractiveness of his philosophical language as the major advantage of his book; this is not, however, an impotent ornament, but an encouraging calling to philosophers to perform and enjoy their mission:

Philosophy is an ancient instrument whose use is all but forgotten. It sits as mere decoration in the house of learning while the kitchen and the garage hum with activity. We need to learn to play the instrument again, to remind ourselves of the power of its music. We must go beyond scales and finger exercises until its melody becomes the soul of the house. Our music is the outcome and completion of the promising sounds of the kitchen, but also the tool that makes all that busy activity meaningful and joyous (p. 390).



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