6. Intellectuals at War

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The war has revealed a younger intelligentsia trained up in the pragmatic dispensation, immensely ready for the executive ordering of events, pitifully unprepared for the intellectual interpretation or the idealistic focussing of ends. . . . Practically all this element, one would say, is lined up in service of the war-technique. There seems to have been a peculiar congeniality between the war and these men. It is as if the war and they have been waiting for each other.

—Randolph S. Bourne, “Twilight of Idols”

What is the matter with the philosophy? One has the sense of having come to a sudden, short stop at the end of an intellectual era. In the crisis, this philosophy of intelligent control just does not measure up to our needs. What is the root of this inadequacy that is felt so keenly by our restless minds? Van Wyck Brooks has pointed out searchingly the lack of poetic vision in our pragmatist awakeners. Is there something in these realistic attitudes that works actually against poetic vision,
against the concern for the quality of life as above machinery of life? Apparently there is.
—Randolph S. Bourne, “Twilight of Idols”

During America’s brief but traumatic involvement in World War I, Bourne’s growing political reputation became linked inextricably to issues of war and nonintervention. By 1915 his name was associated in the public’s mind with the voice of America’s conscience, the war’s most uncompromising enemy, and, ultimately, its martyr.¹ His opposition to the war was not based on pacifism or on principles of conscientious objection.² Rather, as Thomas Bender rightly notes, Bourne was concerned with the relation of war and culture;³ in that sense, his position effectively redefined the terms of the debate over war and peace.

No other writer at the time offered a principled defense of academic freedom when Charles Dana and William Cattell were fired by Columbia University for “aiding and abetting the enemy.”⁴ No other critic linked American liberal politics to military absolutism. And no other writer recognized that something new had happened in the technical organization and management of modern war that made the collaboration of intellectuals crucial to its success. Modern war, Bourne determined, finding its apotheosis in the liberal state, had made patriotism obsolete and democratic support irrelevant. Depending, above all, on advanced technology, intensified industrialization, and the centralization of political and military authority, it was run by a cadre of bureaucrats, scientific experts, and policy advisers who managed and administered the militarization of society. “War is the health of the state,” he wrote, appropriating Heinrich von Treitschke’s phrase but rejecting his conclusions.⁵ War was not a moral obligation but the state’s raison d’être. Thus opposition to war and the policies of the modern warfare state entailed, at the same time, opposition to the profit and privilege of the intellectuals whose cooperation was essential to its success. By laying bare the relation between the modern liberal state and war and between elite support for war and a militant nationalism, Bourne challenged not only the hegemony of that association but also the ascendancy of his own class of young intellectuals.
The failure of America’s intellectuals to stand outside the growing support for war was, in part, a failure of pragmatism, the philosophical form of progressive liberalism at the time. As originally formulated, pragmatism, according to John Diggins, was a theory of knowledge to Dewey, James, and Peirce; to James, it was also a theory of meaning. As a theory of knowledge, it maintained that the propositions of philosophy, history, morality, and politics could be validated by testing their operations and thus consequences in the daily world of experience. As a theory of meaning, it validated the subjective experience, restoring what James called the “personal point of view.” James, Dewey, and Jane Addams turned to pragmatism rather than to closed systems of thought to create meaningful, personal connections to public life. To the young progressives who followed James and Dewey, pragmatism offered a way of healing the affliction Addams had diagnosed as the subjective alienation of middle-class youth overwhelmed by social forces and provided a means of relieving the objective misery of the urban poor. For its young proponents, pragmatism offered a way out of bureaucratic rationality and a way into a more personally fulfilled life.

Yet in its first crucial test, pragmatism failed on both counts. As a theory of knowledge, it failed to test ideas and their consequences adequately (the idea of whether intervention was necessary—for peace?) or to generate alternatives (should economic production be centralized or the schools be militarized—for democracy?). More important, perhaps, it failed to restore the personal connection to public life that gave it such appeal to the children of the middle class in the first place. With preparation for war, personal connections were sacrificed for bureaucratic service. Social experimentation was replaced by instrumentalism, personal and political values by process. The desire of young progressives and pragmatists to become involved and to be effective—to have mastery, in Lippmann’s terms—led them to serve the state and ignore other alternatives of engagement. In Bourne’s analysis, war thus became more than a practical avenue to realize personal ambition and class power. It became a fantasy into which the intellectual class escaped to resolve the infantilization the state produced by denying them an authoritative role to play as citizen-rulers. The psychic damage that resulted from a nation at total war, he suggested, was just the
kind of consequence that should be part of a pragmatic evaluation of the merits of intervention.

The identification of pragmatism with militarism is not a historical distortion. John Dewey made the connection repeatedly in the pages of the *New Republic* in 1917–1918 in an influential series of articles advocating and supporting U.S. entry into the war and justifying intervention in the name of pragmatism. The thrust of his argument was to show the compatibility of pragmatism and the war, offering pragmatism as the means that could turn the war into a great social experiment in democratic reconstruction. Unconvinced, Bourne called him to account. Invoking “the spirit of William James,” Dewey's former student wrote his own series of essays in the *Seven Arts*, protesting the bureaucratic version of pragmatism as abandoning the emphasis on creative experimentation and contingent truths. His challenge addressed both sides of pragmatism’s promise: it tried to rescue pragmatism’s theory of truth (Dewey’s reliance on science or “creative intelligence”) and to recover James’s attention to the “personal point of view” (and “creative desire”). In his *Seven Arts* articles, Bourne concluded that Dewey and other prowar liberals had “moved out their philosophy, bag and baggage from education to war,” by abandoning “vision” for the fascination with “technique.”

Dewey never responded publicly to Bourne’s charges. Instead he arranged to have him removed as editor of the *Dial*, one of the few journals willing to publish his antiwar essays by 1917–1918. By then Bourne had become quite isolated, as the U.S. Justice Department had prosecuted the *Masses*, for which Bourne also wrote, under the Sedition Act of 1918, closing its offices and sending its editors to trial twice for sedition; the prowar *New Republic* had stopped publishing all but his education articles by 1917; and the funding for the *Seven Arts* was withdrawn abruptly in 1917 as a direct consequence of its backer’s fears of reprisals caused by Bourne’s articles. “The magazines I write for die violent deaths, and all my thoughts seem unprintable,” Bourne wrote a friend in 1918. Within a few weeks after his removal from the *Dial*, Bourne was dead, a victim of the influenza epidemic of 1918 at the age of thirty-two.

The conflict between Dewey and Bourne remains, on one level, a minor episode in American cultural history. On another, it
represents a decisive turning point in the integration of intellectuals and power, a collaboration that is of interest to all intellectuals and activists who must grapple with questions of intellectual honesty, political accommodation, and the relation of theory and practice. The historic integration of liberal, progressive, and socialist intellectuals and power during World War I and the consequences for democratic politics is addressed here. If Bourne is right—that total war can be waged without democratic support, but only with the support of intellectuals, administrators, and experts—then the need for political theorists to reformulate the notion of human agency and examine the sites in which it can be effective becomes a crucial issue to confront.

In this chapter I also analyze the historic relation between pragmatism and war, and by extension, the relation between liberalism and war. It is important to be clear about what I wish to interrogate in this analysis. Although I do not mean to suggest that there is a necessary relation between pragmatism and war because of the historical alliance between pragmatism and militarism and pragmatism and liberalism in the early twentieth century, the still-pertinent question arises: what are the conditions under which a philosophy, grounded in a stance of flexibility, inquiry, and practical critique, can become accommodationist and support dominant or hegemonic political values or politics? In other words, it is clear that in light of the many significant revisions to pragmatism in the last two decades, ranging from Jurgen Habermas’s analysis of the importance of attending to an interest-based knowledge in *Knowledge and Human Interests* to Richard Rorty’s embrace of the free play of political commitments in *Ironic, Solidarity and Commitment*, pragmatism(s) may be critical of dominant political values (as is often the case with the work of Habermas) or supportive of them (as is often the case with Rorty’s). The question I wish to raise is under what conditions in which knowledge is produced and represented today can pragmatic inquiry be both flexible and critical? This issue is both political and pragmatic and remains pertinent today.

In Bourne’s analysis, I suggest, pragmatism became associated with war as a result of two historical calamities: the *unpragmatic* distortion of a pragmatism divorced from guiding principles or “poetic vision,” and the war itself, which created its own “inexorables”
against which, ultimately, _any_ pragmatism could not stand. His argument about the relation of war and pragmatism was thus a complex one. It combined an immanent critique, that is, a pragmatic challenge to the instrumentalism practiced during the war, and an external critique, outside the discourse of pragmatism, that investigated the nature of the modern state in which a pragmatic philosophy functioned. Although historians have suggested that the controversy between Dewey and Bourne was essentially a family affair, that is, one taking place between pragmatists and on “Deweyan terms,” it was also by extension about the nature of liberalism and its political values, a relation that was central to C. Wright Mills’s critique of Dewey’s pragmatism.

Although disillusioned with the wartime pragmatism in the face of the inexorables of total war, Bourne recommended that a reconstructed pragmatism be formulated to keep “intellectual suspense” alive and to prevent the “premature crystallization” of ideas. It resembled his “post-scientific ideology,” in many respects, in that social experimentation, like the old pragmatism, would be central to the testing of ideas. Unlike the old pragmatism, however, its theory of truth would recognize that values and interests were embedded in one’s knowledge and that knowledge was shaped by one’s socioeconomic position and relation to power. It was a stance that also recalled his earlier conception of irony, requiring both political engagement and intellectual skepticism but stubbornly refusing political oppositions: passive/active, prowar/antiwar. Encouraging “malcontents” to take a position “below the battle,” a position of apparent powerlessness, Bourne argued that they could generate alternatives more freely, more critically, even if they had no effect on the course of military strategy or foreign policy. This difficult position, admittedly a stance only for the most radical of social critics, was not a position of acquiescence or political passivity, as many scholars have argued, but a stance of active undecideability, as Ross Posnock persuasively argues.

In Posnock’s analysis, Bourne’s “legacy” of flexible critique was continued in Dewey’s postwar pragmatism in the idea of a “cultivated naivete,” Max Horkheimer’s “immanent critique,” and the restless stance of Michel Foucault’s “specific intellectual,” who sought to avoid totalizing, closed systems of thought while remaining politically
engaged. This unusual lineage, Posnock suggests, shows Bourne to be part of a "style of cultural and political inquiry, whose guiding value is nonidentity and whose philosophical orientation is a pragmatic emphasis on creative, experimental action produced by historically embedded subjects." The pragmatism of the sort Bourne expounded, operating "below the battle," was not shielded from the realities of power but rooted in it. The "malcontented" intellectual did not transcend into the realm of ideas or retreat into paralysis, Bourne insisted, but remained embedded in the practical. "This does not mean any smug retreat from the world, with the belief that the truth is in us and can only be contaminated by contact." It meant that the nature and terrain of political agency was redefined to account for the situated nature of knowledge and identity. Understood in this way, Bourne's construction of pragmatism and his critique of it can offer significant contributions to the continuing debate over pragmatism as critical theory and to the "politics of nonidentity."

From its beginning, World War I was a war of ideas in America. No physical territory was threatened, no diplomatic alliances were abridged, and none of the traditional indices of military interventionism was at stake. Accordingly, the war involved the mobilization of minds. It was advertised by the Wilson administration, debated in liberal journals, and promulgated in the schools as a "war to end all wars," a struggle between the forces of "light" and "darkness," democracy and "autocracy" and "civilization" and "barbarism," whose ultimate objective in order to "make the world safe for democracy" was "peace without victory." This highly inflated rhetoric and abstract level of debate, according to one historian, was particularly congenial to the progressives and liberals of the *New Republic,* who believed, as Croly explained, that "a certain amount of conscious patriotism in our critical standards is necessary in order to enable us to have the effect which we should like to have." Although he later had doubts about continuing involvement in the war, as Edward Stettner shows, at the outset Croly hoped that he and the other editors, Walter Weyl and Lippmann, as conscious patriots, could have an influence beyond New York's intellectual community; they hoped to shape the practical politics
of Washington elites. As their opening editorial stated in 1914, their aim was to “bring sufficient enlightenment to the problems of the nation” in a way that was both “popular” and “serious.”

But more was at stake than high-minded rhetoric. Real economic benefits were an integral part of the foreign policies of the Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson administrations, each designed to enhance and consolidate corporate wealth by stabilizing the social orders that supported it. As William Leuchtenberg shows, the link between progressivism and imperialism had been clearly established by 1912 with the Progressive party supporting imperialist ambitions in Cuba, Mexico, Santo Domingo, and the Far East. Roosevelt’s New Nationalism was based explicitly on Croly’s synthesis of domestic reform and imperialism, as mutually compatible endeavors, outlined in *Promise of American Life* (1909). Moreover, when Croly, the foremost intellectual architect of liberal progressivism in the early twentieth century, undertook the editorship of the *New Republic* in summer 1914, it was on the understanding of its sponsor, Willard D. Straight, that the journal would be a platform “to explore and develop and apply the ideas of Theodore Roosevelt when he was the leader of the Progressive Party.”

According to Leuchtenberg, it was Croly more than any other spokesperson who integrated rhetorical excess with the interest in practical politics. In vague and often evangelical terms, Croly’s *Promise* called for a national revival, including a new ascendancy for the American state imposing order domestically and internationally. In the area of international relations, Croly advised that to achieve a “more definite and a more responsible place in the international system,” the “old-fashioned democratic’ scruples and prejudices” must not be permitted to stand in the way of developing a “stable American international system.” The recent “pacification of Cuba” and “the attempt to introduce a little order into the affairs of the turbulent Central American republic” were necessary to put down “revolutionary upheavals” and to make South American countries “more stable and more wholesome.” The national revival he advanced required a “policy of extra-territorial expansion” to give a “tremendous impulse to the world of national reform.” Domestic reform and international expansion mutually reinforced each other in a single, sustained national program and philosophy.
The belief that linked imperialism and progressivism and made possible the support of progressives and liberals for an American involvement in a European war was based on the underlying and shared conviction that action was valuable *in itself* and that the only legitimate test of a course of action was in its consequences or practical effects. The faith in action for its own sake was so strong among American liberals that at times it overshadowed a second, and equally strong, article of progressive faith, the belief that the American form of democracy was the only legitimate form of government for free nations. Many progressives and pragmatic liberals assumed that democratic results would be achieved regardless of the means employed—the logic being that, as the Spanish-American War had proved, not only were people freed from tyranny because of the war, but “since the United States was the land of free institutions, any extension of its domain was *per se* an extension of freedom and democracy.” But frequently there was no examination of the necessary link between means and ends, a cardinal tenet of pragmatism as James and Dewey had initially formulated it. The appreciation that means were a requisite determinant of ends was lost in the modified pragmatism of the preparedness debate.

In the first months of the war, the *New Republic* editors attempted to evaluate national policy options pragmatically, that is, in terms of their practical consequences or probable results. When the European war still seemed remote to American interests in 1914, their editorials inquired into the consequences of a policy of American neutrality as advocated by fellow progressives and President Wilson when he first assumed office. Especially concerned to deal with the arguments of the pacifists, with whom Wilson and many progressives had allied themselves before the war (on the shared belief that negotiation and arbitration were key in attaining world harmony and universal prosperity), the editors also questioned the results of the pacifists’ urging of a peaceful negotiation of differences through international arbitration and treaties. In both cases, the editors asked if neutrality or arbitration would contribute to (total) victory. Indeed they might have asked if neutrality or arbitration would contribute to a swift cessation of hostilities. The argument for intervention, in other words, was virtually preselected on
the basis of a shared consensus on ends, and the defense of U.S. involvement was made possible on the “pragmatic” grounds that it would speed along victory (rather than peace). Thus defined, it took little time before the editors advanced, on a pragmatic basis, the argument that intervention would also spread the cause of democracy.

Readers of the self-defined “journal of opinion” expressed concern with its vacillating editorial stands, which seemed to change with each turn in contemporary events. The noted historian James Harvey Robinson blamed the editors for failing to define their governing philosophy or underlying principles. The *New Republic*, he wrote:

appears to have no set convictions, no clearly defined political, religious, social, economic, or artistic principles, ancient or modern; it espouses no current issue. Nevertheless it seems to have no end in view. May it not be that the chief public distinction and importance of the *New Republic* consists precisely in not standing for anything.

Amos Pinchot, the pacifist, complained that they were far too coy about which action(s) they endorsed, remaining safely in the realm of “clever academic controversy.” To Bourne, who had been sidelined as a sometime-contributor to the magazine because of his antiwar views, it seemed that the editors cared more about commitment and action for its own sake than for any particular policy or set of programmatic objectives (a view that Dewey came to share a decade later). Thus the editors, from a position of “pragmatic realism,” excoriated the pacifists’ neutrality as being ineffectual while at the same time they condemned Wilson for advocating neutrality in word as well as deed. The problem seemed to be that neither position allowed the United States a decisive role in shaping international events, and the “new republicans” were chafing under the prospects of being ineffective, or worse, irrelevant, in world affairs. Dewey, however, the nation’s preeminent philosopher, defended his *New Republic* colleagues’ ambivalence until May 1917, arguing that “our national hesitation” was justified so long
as it could not be shown decisively and assuredly that American involvement in the war would advance American notions of democracy and civilization.\textsuperscript{33}

Two months later, he changed his mind and began explicitly to defend U.S. entry into hostilities on the novel grounds that war provided an opportunity for socialization and the art of social engineering that would facilitate democratic restructuring. Dewey was not alone in this argument, as even W. E. B. DuBois, among others, was eventually persuaded of its merits. The war, Dewey wrote, provided the opportunity for a “more conscious and extensive use of science of communal purposes” and for “the creation of instrumentalties for enforcing the public interest in all the agencies of modern production and exchange.”\textsuperscript{34} In other words, the new experts, trained in the art of modern administration and scientific management, could use the opportunity of war to shape public institutions and their policies toward one common objective: the communal, democratic republic that lay at the heart of Dewey’s political pragmatism.

Clearly, Dewey was attempting to rescue from war what was valuable in it, namely, the economic well-being of the nation. Private capital would enjoy the increased support and control from a state run by managerial elites, to save it from its own excesses, and the sense of fellowship and solidarity that it could engender, a collectivism that was missing from the public experience. He became so convinced of the orderly and cooperative results that would come from an efficiently run national community mobilized around war and a wartime economy, however, that it took only a small step for him to come out for full-scale intellectual support of the war as an instrument of international progressivism. Intellectuals, he argued, could shape the war to their own ends, turning it into the national enterprise of integration that they craved.\textsuperscript{35}

Writing against pacifists rather than antiwar liberals, Dewey condemned them for their “failure to recognize the immense impetus to reorganization afforded by this war; failure to recognize the closeness and extent of true international combination which it necessitates.”\textsuperscript{36} Their opposition, he seemed to say, had greater stakes than they realized. Their pacifism undermined their anti-
militarism, in his logic, for the war could be an agent of prosperity and peace.

To antiwar dissidents in general, he argued that war could become an efficient means of placing private production under public control. "We shall have a better organized world internally as well as externally, a more integrated, less anarchic system" if the war were permitted to facilitate the design of a "federation of self-governing industries with the government acting as an adjustor and arbiter rather than direct owner and manager." Science could be put to work in wartime, in the production and distribution of war materiel, supplies, and information, and in the administration of personnel in a centralized state. Finally, urging intellectuals to take hold of the "social possibilities of war" and shape them in accordance with social-democratic values, he insisted,

The pacifists [have] wasted rather than invested their potentialities when they turned so vigorously to opposing entrance into a war which was already all but universal, instead of using their energies to form, at a plastic juncture, the conditions and objects of our entrance. 37

A more effective strategy would have been to join the movement of the possible and thus gain effective power.

These arguments reveal two tensions in Dewey's thought. First, although Dewey believed that the war would bring an expansion of democracy, that is, an expansion of democratic ends, there was no clear sense in his writings of what democratic control of war meant. Moreover, the scientific control of war, or economic production, or even public education involved little or no democratic participation but the control of technocratic elites. A war to save the world for democracy was relying on the professionals, consultants, public-opinion specialists. Means and ends, therefore, were not equilibrated. Second, Dewey believed in the "plasticity" of the course of the war, permitting intervention by intellectuals to steer its course. At the same time, there was a conviction in his thought that the direction of the war was virtually determined, with or without the support of liberals. These contradictions may reflect his
fundamental ambivalence over the issue of war and intervention, but they also reveal a surprising lack of flexibility, or lack of conviction in traditional pragmatic thought, such that the disinterested testing of ideas in the real world was foreclosed.

In his ambivalence, Dewey became ironically more accommodationist. In “Conscience and Compulsion,” concerning domestic nativist violence and the suppression of civil liberties, he hardened his position. He urged other uncertain intellectuals to “connect conscience with the forces that were moving in another direction,” that is, temporarily to support a national security state, including its control of the mails, the prosecution of sedition, and injunctions of dissent, despite their distaste for suppressing civil liberties and the undemocratic nature of that policy. The rationale behind his recommendation was that by joining “conscience” to the “forces” that were violating it, one gained familiarity with what one was fighting for (or against). This option, however, was a little like suggesting that intellectuals get “inside the whale,” in George Orwell’s phrase, for without leverage to combat those forces and without an understanding of cause or effect, the liberal pragmatist, the problem-solver, did not have the capacity to get beyond. Dewey seemed to recognize this, and by summer 1917 acceded to what was predetermined. “The appeal is no longer to reason; it is to the event.” Reason, or what Dewey often called “critical intelligence,” had become useless in war. In war, force was all.38

Dewey’s defense of military involvement was thus multivalent and contradictory. He seemed to argue that democratic ends (social reform) could come out of undemocratic means (war and the suppression of civil liberties) if critical intelligence were used and democratic concessions were temporary. Yet, the more events progressed, the less pragmatic his arguments became and the more he accepted the path of least resistance. By November 1917, Dewey seemed not only to accept the inevitability of war (an unpragmatic concession) but also to conclude that the best way to comprehend it was to identify with it.

Dewey’s adjustment came gradually, but the affinity between the war and the young liberal pragmatists was more immediate. In Bourne’s analysis, their “congeniality” was the result of several factors, including the uncritical adoption of an instrumentalist phi-
losophy, a certain social psychology specific to this class, and the nature of total war itself. These arguments are interwoven in a wide-ranging critique that, in the last months of his life, included an examination of the nature of the modern state, but in the interests of clarity, I will treat each strand of his critique separately.

Lippmann initially proffered the social reconstructionist argument in April 1917, the same month that Wilson requested and received from Congress a declaration of war, contending that military mobilization promised more than purely political benefits and ought to be viewed in terms of its broader social consequences. The war could usher in the "national integration" that could keep America from drift. It promised even more a means for advancing individual careers, offering possibilities to the inventive civilians, to those very reformers and pioneers who all along have preached the very gospel which is now transformed from an amiable hobby into a world necessity. It is a war of engineers, inventors, organisers, social experts, a war of co-operation, technique, productivity and sacrifice.

Here was the great opportunity Croly's "exceptional individuals" and Lippmann's generation of "restless" idealists had been waiting for, a chance to redefine national priorities and affirmatively set the course for social and moral regeneration at home and abroad. The war could be a laboratory in which to experiment with ideas about social order, its great, bold adventure giving direction to their drift and a rationale for putting into practical use their talents and expertise of mastery they had acquired under the tutelage of progressive social scientists. Service to the war became the higher ideal a philosophy of instrumentalism had been looking for, a chance to see its ideas implemented directly in the aid of a common national purpose.

In an unsigned editorial (written probably by Lippmann) in the same month, the editors of the New Republic claimed authorship of the war. "Credit" for the war, and presumably for its benefits, should be given to the class that had taken America into it, that is, not the "bankers or capitalists" but the intellectuals themselves.
The effective and decisive work on behalf of war has been accomplished by an entirely different class—a class which may be comprehensively described as “intellectuals.” . . . The American nation is entering the war under the influence of a moral verdict reached after the utmost deliberation of the more thoughtful members of the community.  

Even at a time when intellectuals were beginning to assert a sense of class identity and social importance, the claim was audacious. Bourne replied in “The War and the Intellectuals”:

A war made deliberately by intellectuals! A calm moral verdict, arrived at after penetrating study of the inexorable facts! . . . An intellectual class, gently guiding ideas into what other nations had entered only through predatory craft or popular hysteria or military madness.

It was a polemical response, but the essay voiced an American intellectual’s skepticism over the myth of the (political) independence of intellectuals. “The American intellectuals, in their preoccupation with reality have forgotten that the real enemy is War rather than imperial Germany. There is work to be done to prevent this war of ours from passing into popular mythology as a holy crusade.” Had they wanted to mold public opinion, they might have “spent the time in endeavoring to clear the public mind of the cant of war, to get rid of old mystical notions that clog our thinking. We might have used the time for a great wave of education, for setting our house in spiritual order.” If they wanted to “lead the administration, they might conceivably have tried to find some way of securing peace by making neutrality effective. . . . They might have failed. The point is that they scarcely tried.” Throwing off the difficult task of pragmatically preparing the nation for peace, they formed an alliance with “the least democratic forces” in society, those “primitive” interests that advanced the notions of a national state and the doctrines of economic privilege. Rather than take credit for the war, he recommended that they ask how “intelligent service” had replaced critical intelligence.
He blamed their education, the new progressivist education, for their inattention to political ends or values worthy of pursuit.

Their education has not given them a system of large ideas, or a feeling for democratic goals. . . . They are vague as to what kind of society they want, or what kind of society America needs. But they are equipped with all the administrative attitudes and talents necessary to attain them.

They were “liberal, enlightened, aware,” but their thought had become “little more than a description and a justification of what is going on.” They threw their energies into implementation, and the “admirable adaption of means to ends” replaced experimentation. Turning the boast back on itself, he argued that the war had, in effect, created them.

The war has revealed a younger intelligentsia trained up in the pragmatic dispensation, immensely ready for the executive ordering of events, pitifully unprepared for the intellectual interpretation or the idealistic focussing of ends. . . . Practically all of this element is lined up in service of the war-technique. There seems to be a peculiar congeniality between the war and these men. It is as if the war and they have been waiting for each other. 42

The idea that the intellectuals had been, in effect, created by the war recalls Foucault’s genealogy of the discourses of modern power/knowledge, where the discourse (practices) of the disciplines (the social sciences, administration, advertisement, intelligence, and surveillance expertise) not only manage, medicalize, and discipline subjects as objects—patients, criminals, soldiers, and so on—but also the experts themselves. 43 For Foucault, however, the idea of human agency as a force moving history was an illusion; for Bourne, it became an illusion in modern times.

Part of Bourne’s effort, of course, was to return the young intellectuals to their pragmatic roots by urging them to be more pragmatic or more true to pragmatism’s standard of testing ideas in terms of their consequences in the material world. As a student
and an ardent believer in pragmatism, he had maintained that it emphasized the importance of social experimentation rather than rational proof as the ground for the truth of an idea and the importance of recognizing the intersubjective (not objective) nature of truth.

Truth to James is thoroughly comprehended experience, it is created as we go along, it is what proves its verity by being verified. We thus speak of more truth or less truth, not of Truth and Error. Relativity is thoroughly scientific; it is the absolutest way of thinking that is theological, and my quarrel with the rationalist is that . . . he is fundamentally unscientific.44

Pragmatism’s appeal was in the emphasis on the role of subjectivity in the construction of truth and on social experience as the testing ground of ideas in which continent, workable truths could be articulated. Pragmatism did not lead to a set of fixed truths but to a flexible set of contingent truths, to be tried out in one’s shifting alliances and encounters with other people. Its promise was in its ability to neutralize the orthodoxy of any philosophy to which it was affixed.

By September and October 1917, Bourne had explicitly named Dewey as leading the intellectual class to embrace “militaristic values and new tastes for power.” His “Twilight of Idols,” triggered by Dewey’s tolerance for the suspension of civil liberties’ protections, reflected the “war and laughter” of Nietzsche’s original, exposing the cultural damage caused by the war at home as well as the consequences to pragmatism itself.

To separate the issue of pragmatism from its role in the war, Bourne raised two objections. First, he noted that the subordination of vision to technique in Dewey’s pragmatism was an abandonment of the philosophy that had inspired young radicals during the prewar years to become actively involved in social change. It is worth quoting the essay at length:

To those of us who have taken Dewey’s philosophy almost as our American religion, it never occurred that values could be subordinated to technique. We were instrumentalists, but we
had our private utopias so clearly before our minds that the means fell always into its place as contributory. And Dewey, of course, always meant his philosophy, when taken as a philosophy of life, to start with values. But there was always that unhappy ambiguity in his doctrine as to just how values were created, and it became easier and easier to assume that just any growth was justified and almost any activity valuable so long as it achieved ends. . . . It is now becoming plain that unless you start with the vividest kind of poetic vision, your instrumentalism is likely to land you just where it has landed this younger intelligentsia which is so happily and busily engaged in the national enterprise of war. You must have your vision and your technique. The practical effect of Dewey’s philosophy has evidently been to develop the sense of the latter at the expense of the former.

If pragmatism “worked,” it did so as long as one had one’s “private utopia” in hand. Without it, it was a philosophy of mere strategy. In a modern wartime instrumentalism, Bourne found

no provision for thought or experience getting beyond itself. If your ideal is to be adjusted to your situation, in radiant cooperation with reality, then your success is likely to be just that and no more. You never transcend anything. You grow, but your spirit never jumps out of your skin to go on wild adventures.

Moreover, bureaucratic pragmatism made no provision for the personal point of view that James wrote about because it required conformity and routinized responses to hierarchical command. “There is nothing in the outlook that touches in any way the happiness of the individual, the vivifying of the personality, the comprehension of social forces, the flair of art—in other words, the quality of life.”

But, of course, pragmatism’s emphasis on the ability to judge consequences told one nothing about how to select among them or order them. Pragmatism had nothing to offer with regard to the criteria needed to judge political values. There were only private
values. Moreover, in a liberal society, where private values are valorized, pragmatism accommodates them. For Bourne pragmatism had “worked” because it was a philosophy guided by (radical) social principles, which preceded and informed one’s pragmatic adjustments. It was a philosophy with fundamental precepts and ethical principles to substantiate one’s pragmatic orientation toward experience. But the pragmatism of Dewey and James required nothing of the kind of centered, principled orientation that Bourne now insisted was a part of it. Pragmatism, as Dewey and James had formulated it, was expressly designed to do away with a priori principles. It looked to experience as a guide. It employed the criterion of consequences to bypass the recurrent questions of philosophical or moral principle. It was designed to demonstrate the practical value of certain social truths, to democratize authority through collective inquiry and education, and to resolve personal anxiety and philosophical doubt by emphasizing the authority of the subjective experience.

Yet the reminder was that pragmatism in theory promised a choice of ends as well as means, a choice guided by one’s political values. “Dissatisfied with the given means or ends, one chooses another to effect.” To many philosophers and political theorists today, it is precisely this tolerance toward ends that constitutes its appeal. It is agnostic with respect to values, and even to ranking them. Ethical judgments or evaluations of merit are left to others. As a pragmatist, one can be foundationalist or antifoundationalist, humanist or deconstructionist. One can select among a variety of private utopias—democratic, liberal, or feminist. This tolerance has attracted some philosophers and theorists to pragmatism and driven others away from it.

Bourne’s second objection to the arguments of the social reconstructionists was that pragmatism ultimately did not work in times of war. It was a philosophy suitable for times of peace and prosperity, when there was a “fund of progressive good will” and a “strong desire for progress,” when it could promote experimentation and social reform because institutions were flexible and human resources were plentiful. Schools could be turned into laboratories for educational reform because technicians could control the conditions under which they worked. The means and the
practical working out of ideas as an experiment were part and parcel of the ends achieved. But because war “determines its own ends and means,” even the old pragmatism was ineffective. In a war administration, where the military environment was not controllable, pragmatism was useless. “War is just that absolute situation which is its own end and its own means, and which speedily outstrips the power of intelligent and creative control. . . . Once entered upon, neither means nor ends can really be revised nor altered.”50 The “inevitables” of total war swept along all other ends in its wake. Hence, the boast of the “realists” that they could direct the war and Dewey’s optimism that the war could be turned to democratic ends Bourne viewed with deep skepticism. “If the war is too strong for you to prevent, how is it going to be weak enough for you to control and mould to your liberal purposes?”

His second criticism was different from his earlier, more principled objection to the bureaucratic pragmatism of the younger intelligentsia. Initially Bourne had argued that the pragmatism of “intelligent service” and “adjustment” had become instrumentalism: it had failed to test ideas or to establish its own (independent) ends. In short, pragmatism failed because it was not principled enough. Now he argued that pragmatism would not work even if it were tried because it was ineffective, that is, unable to stop the war or change its course; and it was unable to mount a program of social reform because institutions were no longer subject to popular control. This objection was more pragmatic, perhaps, if by that one means that it was an inquiry into pragmatism’s “workability.” Bourne’s argument was a claim that the testing of an idea’s truth, and therefore merit, through its practical consequences—the principal pragmatic method—was useless, particularly during wartime.

These objections to an instrumental pragmatism have been criticized as unpragmatic distortions of the pragmatic philosophy. Daniel Levine, for instance, defended Dewey against the first charge of an empty, visionless politics by claiming that Dewey’s ends were individual freedom; the means he advocated were also individual freedom. Rick Tilman, by contrast, argued that Dewey’s ends were progress and that his means vacillated between “welfare state capitalism and genuine socialism.”51 If Dewey’s ends are difficult to pin down, the lack of clarity may be due, as C. Wright Mills
has argued, to the lack of values in liberalism itself, or in the corporate liberalism of the early century. Because Bourne ultimately linked pragmatism to the politics of the liberal state, which conducted war on the premise of progress and spreading the cause of freedom, it seems clear that he, too, concluded that liberalism had derailed his preferred philosophy.

This conclusion led to a break with the old pragmatism. “I come to . . . a sense of being left in the lurch, of suddenly finding that a philosophy upon which I had relied to carry us through no longer works.” He called for a reconceived pragmatism, one that dealt with the realities of power—corporate power, the power of war’s imperatives—and recognized that everyone was implicated in them. The pragmatism he proposed understood that knowledge was interested and that the knower was embedded in a complex of social relations that shaped an idea’s knowledge and what was known. It was a pragmatism that required a “more skeptical, malicious, desperate, mood” to replace Dewey’s optimism. It made the powerlessness to affect events a place for the “vigorous assertion of the values in which the war has no part.” Avoiding orthodoxy and propaganda, it began the reconstruction of social values. “It is creative desire more than creative intelligence that we shall need if we are ever to fly.”

If Bourne’s dispute with Dewey had concerned only the failures of pragmatism in practical affairs or the limitations of progressivist social reform policies, it might be of interest primarily to Dewey scholars or contemporary pragmatists. But their debate was also about the political responsibility of intellectuals in times of peace and war and the nature of war in the liberal state. It raised another question: to what extent can intellectuals be expected to remain independent of the imperatives of war when their participation is so essential to its conduct? Bourne seemed to think that the idea of intellectual independence was an illusion. He did not ask the young intellectuals to be independent; indeed, he asked that they not hide behind the veil of independence. Put differently, his dispute with Dewey and Lippmann was not on the grounds that they were interested or had political objectives but that they had been
false to their own standards of independently testing ideas in the real world.

The veil of independence was the disguise of Nietzsche’s ascetic priest. Every culture was engulfed in a cloud of ideology about itself and its own spiritual principles, Nietzsche wrote, and the ascetic ideal, the scientific philosophy, was the dominant ideal of the modern age. Its priestly disguise was that of the disinterested intellectual. Nietzsche viewed the ideal as a mere dodge by which philosophers expressed their own inverted wills to power. The myth enabled them to engage in strenuous intellectual activity, but it carried a corresponding sacrifice of animal energy. Modern philosophers, assuming the ascetic countenance and a belief in ascetic values, tried to escape the wrath of priests in ascetically oriented religious cultures, who had the prestige the intellectual lacked. As the natural enemy of the priest, the intellectual assumed the priestly disguise. The disguise itself became a new ideology, however, replacing the desire to be free of religion with its own religion, as cruel in Nietzsche’s view as the one against which it had originally risen. The triumph of the disinterested ideal signaled the death of life-serving philosophy.54

The “realists” at the New Republic were Nietzsche’s ascetic priests, enchanted by science and technocracy and interested in power in the form of expertise. Their new science of pragmatism assumed a priestly aura, enchanting them with the allure of technique and of process. In the desire to apply progressive ideas about social control to military ends, the realists represented the moment of unmediated apollonianism, the will to form, in the guise of service to the state.

The idea of intellectual independence was also embedded in the first use of the term “intellectual” in 1898. The intellectuals were the novelists, philosophers, and publicists who took up Alfred Dreyfus’s cause, branded by their enemies as critics of society. They defined themselves, however, as the conscience of France. Their moral authority derived from the intellectual vocation itself, as Romaine Rolland argued, from the life of the mind as necessarily distanced from the larger society and immune to its moral degeneration. William James, privately identifying with the defenders of Dreyfus, began to appropriate the term and its political implications of independence to the American context:
We “intellectuals” in America must all work to keep our precious birthright of individualism and freedom from these institutions [of church, army, aristocracy, royalty]. Every great institution is perforce a means of corruption—whatever good it may do. Only in free personal relations is full ideality to be found.

He also suggested in a lecture to college professors that the intellectual center of activity was shifting from the universities to the cafes and literary clubs where the young intellectuals gathered, a move he welcomed as an expansion of intellectual freedom.55

Dewey also helped credential the term for American radicals, suggesting in 1908 that he saw glimmerings of an organized intelligentsia forming, which, drawn from all classes and lifting itself above its origins, was capable of solving the riddle of the common good. Seeing intellectuals primarily as catalysts of democratic change, his definition nevertheless carried the implication that the intellectual’s freedom from traditional class affiliations produced a superior form of critical consciousness, a disinterested or objective ability that other, class-bound minds could not achieve. Dewey’s sense of the intellectual, it can be said, was similar to Mannheim’s category of a detached, “free-floating” intelligentsia that formed a substratum in society, as both Dewey and Mannheim located the basis of intellectual authority in the absence of bias or interest in the search for knowledge.56

Bourne’s theory of the role of intellectuals was different from several contemporary theories of the intellectual’s political role and responsibility: from Dewey’s emphasis on rational or disinterested activity, from Rolland’s idealization of the intellectual vocation, and even from Julien Benda’s approach and its requirement of fidelity to universal or disinterested values. Where Benda chastised the European intelligentsia for its engagement with politics, especially nationalist politics, because it was detrimental to an appropriately disinterested role, Bourne argued that the intellectual was most himself when he was a meddler, much like the Sartrean intellectual who was most profoundly intellectual when he was politically involved.57 And where Benda argued provocatively that an intellectual’s thought should have no practical utility, singling out James,
among others, with favor, for the new “religion” of utility, for Bourne, just the opposite was required of the intellectual, who addressed the day-to-day, practical questions of modern life.\footnote{58}

The meddling of the intellectual was a negative role, or perhaps more accurately, a counterhegemonic role, aiming to demystify official values.\footnote{59} Recommending that the “malcontented” intellectual take a position “below the battle,” that is, outside the dominant frame of public discourse, Bourne argued that the intellectual could entertain political options that were not posed in terms of either/or alternatives: pacifist/interventionist, Anglo-American sympathizer/Germanophile, active/passive. To position oneself “below the battle” was not a means of lying low, contrary to some interpretations, but a disruptive act, a way to redefine the terms of the debate and deliberately to avoid the orthodoxies of current social thought.\footnote{60} It was not a stance of political independence; quite the contrary, it was a position of social and political embeddedness, \textit{from which the self emerged}. The modern self was a product of its practices, its discourse, perhaps, who was, as with Nietzsche’s pathos, always in the process of becoming.

Ross Posnock has read convincingly Bourne’s conception of the self emerging from society’s inexorables as social text written by one’s environment. This conception is consistent with Bourne’s early view of the self as a contingently constructed, decentered self, the product of family upbringing, friendships, membership in “beloved communities,” corporate environments, and neighborhood politics. “The self is a network of representations of the various codes and institutions of society,” as Bourne wrote.\footnote{61} It was indeterminate at the same time that the self was multiply embedded.

Indeed, the notion of the autonomous individual was a fiction that served as a social myth supporting a culture (of liberalism) that prized individualism. It was “group-will” and “group-desire” that existed first, as the new anthropology of Columbia University had taught him, and it was from group affiliation that a self was gradually individuated. But even the individuated self, common to the ideology of liberal societies, was an indeterminate self, following from Nietzsche as well as from James’s idea of a multiple self, which was revealed discursively and was constituted by its actions and relations in the material world. Thus, the “glowing” and “vibrant”
personality Bourne often embraced was a regulative ideal, a denaturalized, socially constructed identity able to deal with the complexities of the modern world. The idea of personality was a performative self unfolding its inner divisions in its external or social practices.

It was precisely this kind of contingently constructed, fragmented self that the pragmatic liberals of the early twentieth century seemed to have feared. They conceived of the liberal self as an autonomous, preexisting subject, exerting its will on the world as a rational agent. The young intellectuals had entered the war, both as individuals and as a class, with a particular point of view, on the premise that they as political subjects could shape events. In a remarkable profile of their psychology, often overlooked, Bourne argued that this new class, in their aspirations to power and adulthood, which the war gratified, became the product of its larger forces. Uncertain of their status and vaguely committed to the idea of social reform, they escaped into war as an arena for personal ambition and class power. Their “itch to be in the great experience that the rest of the world was having” propelled them into seizing “in a great healing wave of release some doctrine that can immediately be translated into action,” and they “regressed” to the “primitive” idea that became a craving for action. And it was action quite literally that they embraced.

War was seen as the crowning relief of their indecision. At last, action, irresponsibility, the end of anxious and torturing attempts to reconcile peace-ideals with the drag of war towards Hell. An end to the pain of trying to adjust the facts to what they ought to be! . . . The thankfulness with which so many intellectuals lay down and floated with the current betrays the hesitation and suspense through which they have been. The American university is a brisk and happy place these days. Simple, unquestioning action has superseded the knots of thought. The thinker dances with reality.62

The language of “regression” and “irresponsibility” suggested the childlike nature of the intellectual class. In joining the rush to war, in Bourne’s analysis, they became children again, fulfilling fantasies
of being swallowed up by the larger processes, avoiding responsibility, avoiding adulthood. They signed on with a war administration as a way of avoiding responsibility but enjoying a (reflected) power. “A people at war have become in the most literal sense obedient, respectful, trustful children. . . . In this recrudescence of the child, there is great comfort, and certain influx of power.” The psychic rewards of avoiding responsibility made the intellectual class among the most enthusiastic supporters of the war.

The significance of the psychological language should not obscure its political content. Bourne’s argument was that the state created children by denying them a role to play as citizen-rulers, and they, in turn, fetishized the state, “full of the most naive faith in the all-wisdom and all-power of the adult who takes care of them.” Nations required adults, “with a measure of autonomy and power, and with an achieved maturity,” but war demanded uniformity of action and opinion, so that even adults, convinced of the necessity of unity, overthrew their “indifference” toward the state and identified with it.

You feel powerful by conforming, and you feel forlorn and helpless if you are out of the crowd. While even if you do not get any access of power by thinking and feeling just like everybody else in your group does, you get at least the warm feeling of obedience, the soothing irresponsibility of protection. 63

As Marx wrote, “The political state is as spiritual in relation to civil society as heaven is in relation to earth.” During war, Bourne argued, the state’s idealism was magnified. It took on dangerous mystical powers, able to compel consent without force, making democratic accountability irrelevant. “War is the health of the state,” a refrain he invoked to reinforce the idea of totality and absolution. War became a permanent and ongoing activity of the state, and the “individual as a social being” reached his/her “apotheosis” in total surrender of being to it. Identification with the state “blotted out” the distinction between the individual and society:

At war, the individual becomes almost identical with society. He achieves a superb self-assurance, an intuition of the right-
ness of all his ideas and emotions, so that in the suppression of opponents and heretics he is invincibly strong; he feels behind him all the power of the collective community.\textsuperscript{64}

The myth of the autonomy of the individual becomes complete in total war; eclipsed by the political agenda, it becomes a means to its end.

The inexorables of total war even blotted out the idea of democratic consent. Testing popular support for the war in February and March 1917, Bourne endorsed a referendum on the question of military involvement, standing by the idea that a war fought for democratic ends must take account of democratic authority. With Max and Crystal Eastman, Winthrop Jordan, Amos Pinchot, and other members of the Committee for Democratic Control, he took out two advertisements in the \textit{New Republic}: “1917—American Rights—1789” and “Do the People Want War?” urging a referendum. The referendum was dismissed in court. But he had begun to suspect that referenda were inadequate means to test democratic sentiment and were irrelevant, in any case, in a modern, technological, total war. “The kind of war which we are conducting is an enterprise which the American government does not have to carry on with the hearty co-operation of the American people but only with their acquiescence.”\textsuperscript{65} With their “acquiescence,” the state could render a philosophy of “creative intelligence” useless and dissent dangerous. Where freedom of choice was impossible, intelligence ceased to have a function, and the prospect of individual responsibility became an illusion.\textsuperscript{66} Posnock’s reading glosses Bourne’s “embrace of the inexorables,” ignoring the psychic damage Bourne diagnosed that resulted from the state’s infantilization of its citizens. But Posnock’s conclusion, that from the radical contingency of the self a “politics of nonidentity” was formed, fully comprehends the engaged political nature of the intellectual position Bourne proposed in being “below the battle.”\textsuperscript{67}

In “The State,” an unfinished manuscript published after his death, Bourne treated the crisis as one of institutions and not of individuals, focusing less on the pragmatists and the liberal intel-

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lectuals and more on the state. In the essay he analyzed the institutional, social, and psychological support for the state and its principal activity of international military conflict. He focused on the inner workings of the relationship between the state and war, and their support under capitalism, concluding that "war is the health of the state," that is, that war is the state’s profit and prestige and the activity in which it finds its purpose and raison d’être. He theorized that war was a function of the state system, an international network of “military-industrial” dynasties (a phrase first used by Bourne) competing with one another for economic and military supremacy.

In the fragment he also put forward an understanding of the state as a builder of social cohesion or a unifier of the ruling classes. Anticipating the state theories of Gramsci and Nicos Poulantzas, Bourne’s analysis, less systematically, examined the means by which the state forged class alliances and built social cohesion, a strategy that at times exacerbated class antagonisms and at other times frustrated them, depending largely on the democratic nature of the state coalitions. Although the state often acted as an instrument of class rule, relying on the traditional methods of force or coercion, it sometimes acted as a builder of hegemony, relying on traditional intellectuals, extracting democratic concessions through a combination of force, fraud, and consent that Gramsci described. In this role, it was a builder of social coalitions and of ideological consensus. The combination of those strategies enhanced not only its own prestige but also the social and intellectual prestige of the groups that supported it.

Although the Bourne legend holds that he discarded the unfinished manuscript in his final days and that it was discovered by friends after his death, there is nothing in the essay that was inconsistent with the direction of his thought in his final essays on war and the mystification of the state. Underlying its widely ranging, discursive exploration was the thread that connected all his writings, namely, the question of democratic change: was it possible in an age of bureaucratic institutions and impersonal, “herd-like” social forces and, if so, what form would it take? What were the preconditions and possibilities for social revolution in America and in the international arena?
In an essay he wrote as a student at Columbia, he first addressed the question of social democratic change and concluded that the prospects of a new “Socialist Industrial Democracy” were encouraging, as the successes of the syndicalists in France and the growing militancy of the IWW in the United States demonstrated. In a move similar to Gramsci’s recommendation that revolution need not attack the institutions of government directly—in a “war of maneuver”—it could target the industrial sector, the shop floor, the corporate bureaucracies, and the centers of cultural production—in a “war of position”—because control over social and economic productivity was in the hands of the industrial sector. Further, in Gramsci’s view, power resided in culture, articulated most clearly in hegemonic common sense. In Bourne’s analysis, modern revolution should be industrial rather than political, and an “industrial democracy” would be the goal because “the industrial is . . . more powerful” than the political state.

But by 1917, something had happened in American society to threaten substantially the prospects of revolution. That something was the war, enhancing the state’s prestige and making any potential alignment of the “possessing classes” and the “working classes” impossible.

We cannot expect, or take measures to ensure, that this war is a war to end war, unless at the same time we take measures to end the State in its traditional form. . . . With the passing of the State, the genuine life-enhancing forces of the nation will be liberated.

Bourne drew a then-common distinction, probably influenced by Rousseau, between the nation, state, and government to make his case about the compatibility of war and the state. The country or nation, Bourne explained, was a peaceful if not homogeneous community of people; it pertained to the “non-political aspects of a people, its ways of living, its personal traits, its literature and art, its characteristic attitudes toward life.” The state, on the other hand, was “the country acting as a political unit,” acting “as a repository of force, determiner of law, arbiter of justice.” The government was simply the political apparatus, or the current administration of the
country’s political institutions, for carrying into effect the state’s functions. “Government . . . is the machinery by which the nation, organized as a State, carried out its state functions.” Rather than a locus for democratic participation, government was simply “the idea of the State put into practical operation.” As the concrete “framework” for the state’s powers, “it is the visible sign of the invisible grace.”

The distinction between states and governments was based on their real and ideal aspects. “Government is the only form in which we can envisage the State,” Bourne wrote, suggesting that government is a sign but that the state itself was a “mystical conception” whose reality (materiality) was hidden, operating covertly to “direct . . . [the] activities of Government.” States are then mystical or ideal but real in the manifestations of their power. They became real, moreover (although remaining mystical), in time of war because, ironically, their ideal or mystical power reached its highest “power and glory.” Their reality is a function of their capacity to enchant and deceive. The nation was the counterpoint; it was real, concrete, geographical, organic. It was material because it was part of the people, and the people instantiated it. Nations could be seen as materially and ideally distinct as well. Nations had no motive for war. As Rousseau noted, only states fought wars; nations never did (because, as Rousseau put it, “it is the link between things rather than men that constitutes war”).

Bourne concluded similarly that war was the inevitable by-product of a state system. “War is a function of this system of States, and could not occur except in such a system.” The state promised universality, as did Hegel’s liberal state, the full integration of the citizen into the service of a collective ideal, uniting his particularity (as consciousness) and his universality (as a social being). But only during war could states deliver on the promise and then only to particular classes. Warfare constituted the necessary condition and mediation for the unity of the state’s real and ideal capacities. “The more terrifying the occasion for defense, the closer will become the [state’s] organization and the more coercive the influence upon each member. . . . War sends the current of purpose and activity flowing down to the lowest level.”

Yet the state’s promise of universality was partial and strictly class-bound. Like Hegel’s bureaucrat, only the middle classes in America
could attain universality because they were able to turn “from their selfish and predatory ways” and “become loyal servants of society or something greater than they.” The “possessing classes” were permitted to “direct industry and government and all the institutions of society pretty much as before,” gaining the “pragmatic satisfaction of governing” even while being stripped of “the psychic burden of adulthood.” Thus the propertied classes that had been attempting to forestall the challenges from labor and radical political movements gratefully joined forces with the state, moving from “the direction of a large business in New York to a post in the war management industrial service in Washington,” their economic stability ensured by the war’s military demands and glorified by the political campaign of state propaganda (or a simulacra, i.e., by symbols of a symbol). 76

But the economic security of the propertied classes was never threatened seriously, showing the influence of Beard’s political history. Having gained for themselves the political, legal, and representational mechanisms necessary to ensure their continual economic and political health, their security, Bourne argued, was fortified by a party system that they controlled, enabling them to make democratic concessions to universal suffrage when it would no longer make a difference to the orderly transfer of power. Although political and social coalitions constituting the American state changed several times, a democratic state was never an actuality in his analysis. Even in the last decade, he wrote, the state coalition “was not likely to crumble before the anger of a few muck-rakers, the disillusionment of a few radical sociologists, or the assaults of proletarian minorities.” 77 As the state system succeeded, so did the public schools, the universities, and professional institutions; journals and industries prospered. The information, commodities, and expert specialists that the system produced were designed to fit the system as it operated so that even the psychic gains were illusory. A herd-instinct, always latent, extinguished the “gregarious-instincts,” and the state began to hum like a well-oiled machine.

But the unity of state and society was tenuous, Bourne argued, even as the war tried to rationalize and consolidate their activities. “War, which should be the health of the State, unifies all the bourgeois elements and the common people, and outlaws the rest.”
With each instance of the state’s policy of “white terrorism . . . against pacifists, Socialists, enemy aliens, and a milder unofficial persecution against all persons or movements that can be imagined as connected with the enemy,” the “disaffection of labor increased,” the “tension intensified.”

Ethnic loyalties that ordinarily in peacetime are maintained as a “luxury,” “tend to be strengthened” as the state’s “invidious policy of Americanism” challenged their identities and intensified the “herd-feeling” within the “sect.” And unlike “highly skilled workers who habitually identify with the owning and the significant classes,” the “revolutionary proletariat showed more resistance to this unification” than any other social group, even when its “vanguard, as the I.W.W. is,” was “remorselessly pursued.” The majority of workers remained “notoriously” unpatriotic because their condition was altered only slightly by military production. “From [industrial] servitude, military conscription is not so great a change,” so they entered “the military enterprise . . . with the same apathy with which they enter and continue in the industrial enterprise.” Because the “opportunity to regress” to “these primitive childlike attitudes” was never offered to them, they gained none of the psychic rewards of irresponsibility that the “significant classes” enjoyed by surrendering to the state voluntarily. “Having never acquired social adulthood, they cannot lose it.” The workers viewed the war as “an upper-class sport” played out in the international arena and a “sport between the hunters and the hunted” in the domestic. The type of manufactured patriotism compelled by a wartime state—manifested in sedition laws, military conscription, and War Issues courses—did not extinguish dissent; it merely drove it underground.

It was in the unstable equilibrium of the social coalitions that traditionally supported the state apparatus, which even in war were not united, that Bourne found hope for a democratic resistance. “The country must be dotted with dissatisfied people who must . . . be appealed to to desire certain things mightily.” In “this class of malcontents,” Bourne saw as late as 1918 a prospect for a postwar revival of social life. It was a dim hope. Indeed at the same time he anticipated the red scare of the 1920s, a campaign of intimidation and violence waged by “sensational editors, archaic radicals,
Referring to the novel crime of seditious conspiracy, he warned:

the punishment for opinion has been far more ferocious and unintermittent than the punishment of pragmatic crime. . . . Even to attempt such a paralysis [of military conscription] is a crime equal to a successful stroke. The will is deemed sufficient. . . . The guardians of the State do not ask whether any pragmatic effect flowed out of this evil will or desire.  

The confusion and resignation of subordinates would give way to a more virulent form of social control and would lead, he believed, to a permanent “semi-military State-socialism.”

If the war revealed an affinity with pragmatism, it was made possible by a pragmatism that was not self-correcting. It chose one point of view and one political goal, and the liberal state enforced it. Thus the rejection for instrumentalism was more fundamentally a rejection of liberalism, or the absence of guiding values in a political philosophy and culture whose goal became the victory of the liberal state at war.

In Bourne’s call for a new kind of pragmatism, the idea of testing several irreconcilable points of view was proposed. This pragmatism (a “post-scientific ideology”) would keep these viewpoints alive as contradictory but equally valid truths, rather than resolving them, as the old pragmatism would have done. These contradictory values can be seen in his own alternating appeals, on the one hand, to pursue the “values in which the war has no part” and, on the other, to support the idea of a “moral equivalent” to war offered by William James, in which the virtues of military service (camaraderie, engagement, and commitment) were preserved in the idea of a mass-based mobilization of civilian reformers. For some readers, the contradiction may be grounds for dismissing Bourne’s politics as those of an “impossibilist,” or alternatively, as the views of a politically quiescent critic removed from the fray, or “above the battle.” In my view, his unwillingness to affiliate politi-
cally was a strength rather than a weakness, a means of providing the necessary antidote to a feverish political climate. In the escalation of the political during the war, he held back from committing to the “official” point of view.

The war has brought an immense and terrifying inflation to the political sphere, so that for most people non-governmentalized activity has ceased almost to have significance. But this cult of politics has been inherent in the liberal intellectual’s point of view long before the war. Instead of politics taking its place in the many-sided interests of the modern mind, it had the dominant position. 85

Wartime politics eclipsed the private realm, intimidated cultural production, and suppressed the individual and the idea of human agency.

An analysis of the “politics of nonidentity”—or, more appropriately, the politics of multiple identities—reveals Bourne’s concern to theorize a “trans-national” American culture, a patchwork of ethnic and political communities in which individuals expressed multiple loyalties and affiliations. The idea of a transnational America was a counternarrative to the dominant themes of assimilation and Americanization. It constituted a new kind of democratic politics, in which the political and cultural affiliations of America’s new immigrants in particular were acknowledged and validated. It was an expression of Bourne’s participation in a “vigorous assertion of the values in which war has no part.”