Pragmatism as Post-Postmodernism

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Notes

Chapter One
Classical Pragmatism
Waiting at the End of the Road

1. An earlier version of this chapter was presented at a conference in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, in July 2001, sponsored by the Behavioral Research Council, a division of the American Institute for Economic Research. A revised version of that presentation was published as “Pragmatism as Post-Postmodernism,” in Dewey, Pragmatism, and Economic Methodology, ed. Elias L. Khalil (London: Routledge, 2004), 87–101. I am grateful to my conference respondent, Elise Springer, for the meticulous care with which she read this paper and her numerous helpful suggestions for its improvement.

2. Richard Rorty, Consequences of Pragmatism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), xviii.

3. Ibid., 207.

4. Ibid., 208.


6. Elise Springer has reminded me that Dewey did not subscribe to linear models of thinking, let alone linear models of progress, and that it is therefore important to emphasize that my characterization of his work as post-postmodern does not require any metaphor of this sort. My claim is a more modest one, namely that he anticipated and resolved some of the very problems now faced by postmodernist writers.


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10. Ermarth, “Postmodernism.”
11. Ibid.
15. Dewey, Correspondence, 1891.05.31 (00069).
16. Metaphysics as system, of course, takes many forms. One interesting interpretation of what this might mean can be found in the essay on the subject by W. H. Walsh, “Metaphysics, Nature of,” in the Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Paul Edwards (Macmillan, 1967), 5: 302. According to Walsh, there are “three main features in the projected science of metaphysics. It claims to tell us what really exists or what the real nature of things is, it claims to be fundamental and comprehensive in a way in which no individual science is, and it claims to reach conclusions which are intellectually impregnable and thus possess a unique kind of certainty.”
19. I am grateful to Stanley Fish for suggestions regarding this paragraph. He reminded me that there are in fact individuals who are temperamentally disposed to belief in a literal soul—one that can either be saved or lost for eternity—as a part of their pressing need to come to terms with the events of this world. This is of course a point that William James also made.
20. If liberals expect that philosophy should have anything to say about cruelty and kindness, then that “expectation is a result of a metaphysical upbringing. If we could get rid of the expectation, liberals would not ask ironist philosophy to do a job which it cannot do, and which it defines itself as unable to do.” (Rorty, Contingency, 94).
22. Dewey, Correspondence, 1939.03.05 (08613).
23. Dewey, Correspondence, 1940.07.10 (14016).
24. Dewey, Correspondence, 1940.07.18 (14017).
CHAPTER TWO
PRAGMATISM, POSTMODERNISM, AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP


2. The term “postmodernism” is, of course, notoriously vague. There is an important sense in which American Pragmatism is a type of postmodernism, if by that it is meant that its founders rejected some of the central theses of modernist philosophers such as Descartes and supplanted them with conceptual tools that they viewed as more productive. In this essay, however, “postmodernism” will be used to refer to a set of views that emphasize difference and discontinuity and embrace cognitive relativism, as those two positions have been characterized by their proponents, whose work will be appropriately cited. For more on this subject, see the first chapter of this volume.


4. This was in fact the model proposed by John Dewey in *The Public and its Problems* in 1927. (LW 2.235ff)


7. There is, of course, a good deal of debate regarding what, if anything, constitutes scientific method. Although most philosophers of science would probably agree that there is no one method that can be identified as “the” scientific method, according to the position of the founding Pragmatists it is nevertheless possible to identify a general method of inquiry that can be termed “scientific,” as opposed, for example, to methods of authority, tenacity, or a priori reasoning.


12. Peirce had characterized truth as opinion that converges toward reality over time as the result of the efforts of a community of inquiry.


14. Bertrand Russell had accused Dewey of attempting to substitute his notion of warranted assertibility for truth. Dewey replied that he did not wish to substitute warranted assertibility for truth, but to define truth as warranted assertibility (LW 14.168–88).

15. Stuart Sim, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 2001), 5. As Stuart Sim has noted, “There is what amounts to a commitment to finding, and dwelling on, dissimilarity, difference, and the unpredictability of analysis among poststructuralist thinkers.”


17. Ibid., 31.

18. The 1896 volume of the *Psychological Review*, for example, under “Studies from the Psychological Laboratory of the University of Chicago” contains several reports on experimental work by Dewey’s departmental colleagues. In addition, Dewey was drawing on the experimental work of colleagues in other departments of the University of Chicago, such as the neurologist C. L. Herrick. See Thomas Dalton, *Becoming John Dewey: Dilemmas of a Philosopher and Naturalist* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 65.


24. David Wong, “Relativism,” in *A Companion to Ethics*, ed. Peter Singer (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 442–50. David Wong reminds us that “almost all polemics against moral relativism are directed at its most extreme versions.” He advocates a position that holds that there is no single true morality, but
at the same time he “does not deny that some moralities might be false and inadequate for the functions they all must perform.” The position of this essay is that cognitive relativism is a form of moral relativism, since morality requires judgments. Moreover, it is an extreme form of relativism, since it provides no methodological basis for making such judgments. Wong, “Relativism,” 446.

25. I am hardly the first to point out that the cognitive relativist appears to adopt a standpoint that he or she treats as privileged.

26. That true judgments are warranted means that substantive work has been done in the past to support them against challenges. That they are assertible means that they have a generality of application over relevant cases in the future. Their universalizability means that they are applicable anywhere, under relevant conditions, until successfully challenged. The judgment that a sample of pure tin melts at 232°C at one standard atmosphere is thus universalizable in the sense that it would be applicable anywhere regardless of cultural differences, even if it is not universalized, that is, actually practiced in a particular culture. That some cultures do not melt tin does not, therefore, militate against the universalizability of the judgment. The Pragmatists identified judgments of this type as habits of action in the sense that they provide the basis for future activities until replaced with something more appropriate.


CHAPTER THREE
CLASSICAL PRAGMATISM, POSTMODERNISM, AND NEOPRAGMATISM

1. An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the World Congress of Philosophy, Istanbul, Turkey, August 13, 2003. It develops some of the themes of my earlier essay “Art, Technoscience, and Social Action,” published as the fourth chapter of Philosophical Tools for Technological Culture: Putting Pragmatism to Work (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

2. Rorty’s address was published as “Pragmatism, Relativism, and Irrationalism,” in Consequences of Pragmatism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 160–75.

3. The term postmodernism is, of course, notoriously vague. See the first and second chapters of this volume for a discussion of some of the meanings of the term.
5. Ibid., 207.
7. Ibid.
8. It could also be argued that Pragmatism is a “post-postmodernism,” that is, that it has come to terms with many of the problems that continue to bedevil official postmodernism. See chapter 1, “Pragmatism as Post-Postmodernism” for an extended discussion of this issue.
15. See chapter 4 of this volume for an extended Pragmatist critique of the work of Habermas.
25. Ibid., 88.
26. Ibid., 89.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., 94.
30. Ibid., 93.

CHAPTER FOUR
CLASSICAL PRAGMATISM AND COMMUNICATIVE ACTION
Jürgen Habermas

3. Ibid., 92.
5. Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964) as quoted by Habermas, Toward a Rational Society, 86.
6. Habermas, Toward a Rational Society, 87.
8. Ibid., 316.
9. Habermas sometimes seems to sense that he may have gone a bit too far in championing this breach between scientific technology and the human sciences. He attempts to backpedal in a footnote to his essay “Reconstruction and Interpretation in the Social Sciences.” “I should add,” he writes, “that by distinguishing sciences based on hermeneutic procedures from those that are not, I am not advocating an ontological dualism between specific domains of reality (e.g., culture versus nature, values versus facts, or similar neo-Kantian dichotomies introduced chiefly by Windelband, Rickert, and Cassirer). What I do advocate is a methodological distinction between sciences that gain access to their object domain by understanding what is said to someone and those which do not. All sciences have to address problems of interpretation at the metatheoretical level. . . . Yet only those with a hermeneutic dimension of research face problems of interpretation
already at the level of *data generation* [emphasis in original].” Jürgen Habermas, “Reconstruction and Interpretation in the Social Sciences,” in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), 41–42n. Habermas thus seems to want to avoid a dualism of fact and value by replacing it with a dualism of theory and metatheory.


16. Ibid., 310.


19. Ibid., 101.

20. Ibid., 102.


22. Hilary Putnam and Ruth Anna Putnam have also noted the fact that experimentation does not seem to play much of a role in Habermas’s account of communicative action. See Hilary Putnam and Ruth Anna Putnam, “Education for Democracy,” in *Educational Theory* 43, no. 4 (Fall 1993): 371: “Although Habermas does not actually deny the need for experiment in the establishment of norms, he rarely mentions it. His picture is one in which communities arrive at norms by mere discussion, while they arrive at ‘facts’ by experimentation. Moreover, (although Habermas has been moving away from this of late), the methodology that is supposed to guide the norm-producing discussion is itself derived *a priori*, via a ‘transcendental pragmatics.’
Dewey, we believe, would welcome Habermas’s notion of an ‘emancipatory interest,’ but he would wish to break down all of the dualisms and reject all of the apriorism implicit in Habermas’s scheme.”

23. Antonio and Kellner, “Communication, Modernity, and Democracy in Habermas and Dewey,” 280. “[Habermas’s] Pragmatism is partial and contradictory, because of his nonhistorical standard of communicative rationality.”


CHAPTER FIVE
FROM CRITICAL THEORY TO PRAGMATISM
Andrew Feenberg


3. Andrew Feenberg, Questioning Technology (London: Routledge, 1999), 136. Hereinafter in text and in notes as QT. Feenberg devotes about a half page to Dewey, but dismisses his view as exhibiting a “rather uncritical confidence in science and technology.”

4. Since Horkheimer and Adorno identify technology with instrumental rationality, they see an unbridgeable gulf between technology and the values of the human sciences. The same is true for Heidegger and Habermas. Marcuse’s version of this position was considerably more flexible. He thought that scientific technology might be reformed under the proper conditions. A necessary condition for such reform would be the reform of political life.


10. Ibid., 10.
11. Ibid.

CHAPTER SIX

A NEO-HEIDEGGERIAN CRITIQUE OF TECHNOLOGY

Albert Borgmann

1. An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the Workshop on Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life, in Jasper National Park, Alberta, Canada, September 1995, as “Devices, Focal Concerns, and the Reform of Technology: A Pragmatist Looks at Albert Borgmann’s Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life.” A revised version of that presentation was presented at the Meeting of the Central Division of the American Philosophical Association, New Orleans, Louisiana, May 8, 1999, as “Opening Borgmann’s Black Box.”


4. Ibid., 178.
5. Ibid., 179.
6. Ibid., 220.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 221.
9. Ibid., 198.
10. Ibid., 141.


15. Ibid., 30.
16. Ibid., 11.
17. Ibid.


21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 347.
23. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DOING AND MAKING IN A DEMOCRACY

John Dewey


2. Dewey devoted no single work to his analysis of technology. His treatment of the subject is diffused throughout the thirty-seven volumes of his published work. For this and other reasons, the secondary literature of this field is scant. One of the first essays to call attention to this strain in his work was Webster F. Hood’s, “Dewey and Technology,” in Research in Philosophy and Technology, ed. Paul T. Durbin (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1982), 5.189–207.

3. As Hannah Arendt pointed out in her classic essay “The Vita Activa in the Modern Age,” in The Human Condition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 7–11, Aristotle’s Metaphysics had placed the sciences of fabrication above the practical sciences but below the theoretical ones. She thought that this was so because for the Greeks the contemplation of the theoretical sciences was thought to be an inherent element in fabrication, that is, what allowed the craftsman to judge the finished product. The point of Dewey’s critique of the Greeks was not that they did not give techne some of its due, but that they thought it secondary to grander technical forces, viz., supernature for Plato, and nature for Aristotle.

5. Plato, Timaeus and Critias, 19.
Notes to Pages 117–133


13. This quotation is from Bertrand Russell, *Religion and Science* (New York: Henry Holt, 1935), 12. Although the statement serves Dewey’s purpose in this essay, there remains an underlying disagreement with Russell. There is something of the “mental mirror” in Russell’s epistemology. Dewey rejects this view out of hand.

Chapter Eight

Nature as Culture

John Dewey and Aldo Leopold

1. This is a revised version of an essay by the same name published in *Environmental Pragmatism*, ed. Andrew Light and Eric Katz (London: Routledge, 1996), 50–72.

2. Dewey’s British critics, including Bertrand Russell, and his German critics, including Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer read, or more properly misread, him in this way. Even George Santayana took up the refrain when he characterized Dewey as “the devoted spokesman of the spirit of enterprise, of experiment, of modern industry” and claimed that his philosophy was “calculated to justify all the assumptions of American society.” See George Santayana, “Dewey’s Naturalistic Metaphysics,” in *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. P. A. Schilpp and L. E. Hahn, 3rd ed. (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1989), 247.


6. John Dewey, “Experience, Knowledge and Value,” 534. The term “emanates” was Santayana’s. Dewey allowed its usage in connection with his
own view, provided that the “aura that clings to the word” be eliminated. See LW 14.19.


11. Dewey freely admits his debt to William James’s for his notion of radical empiricism. “Long ago I learned from William James that there are immediate experiences of the connections linguistically expressed by conjunctions and prepositions. My doctrinal position is but a generalization of what is involved in this fact” (LW 14.18, note 16). Dewey’s own term for this was “immediate empiricism,” but I use James’s term here to emphasize the provenance of the idea.


13. Ibid., 206.

14. Ibid., 216. See Bryan G. Norton, *Toward Unity among Environmentalists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), especially 39–60, for an account of Leopold’s development that differs slightly from that of Oelschlaeger. Norton thinks that Leopold’s position was better integrated than Oelschlaeger and I believe it to have been. Norton does, however, make an interesting comment that relates to the notion of “nature-as-culture” that I am attempting to develop in this essay. He sees Leopold’s work as “guiding the search for a culturally defined value in nature” (Norton, *Toward Unity among Environmentalists*, 58).


17. Leopold withheld “Some Fundamentals of Conservation in the Southwest” from publication during his lifetime.


24. See, however, the argument of Bob Pepperman Taylor that Dewey’s view of nature represents no advance over that of Locke. Bob Pepperman Taylor, “John Dewey and Environmental Thought,” in Environmental Ethics 12, no. 2, (Summer 1990): 183. Dewey was in fact quite critical of Locke’s view of nature. Locke, Dewey writes, “was completely under the domination of the ruling idea of his time: namely, that Nature is the norm of truth.” Further, “Nature is both beneficent and truthful in its work; it retains all the properties of the Supreme Being whose vice-regent it is” (MW 8.59). The irony here is that if Dewey’s reading of Locke is correct, then his (Locke’s) view of nature is much closer to that of the idealistic environmentalists such as Paul Taylor than it is to Dewey’s view. This is a point that Bob Pepperman Taylor apparently misses.

25. See Oelschlaeger, The Idea of Wilderness, 226 for an account of this.

26. Ibid., 228.

27. Dewey apparently did not know of Koehler’s work with apes, and so he denies choice to nonhuman animals. Since self-reflexive communication is the basis of his account of responsible action, however, he might well have wished to have included nonhuman animals, such as chimps who have learned sign language and entered into communication with themselves and humans by its means, as moral agents and thereby the bearers of rights. In any case, Dewey was enough of an evolutionist that he was acutely aware of transitions within nature, and that the history of evolutionary development is more or less continuous, if not in the temporal sense, then at least in the functional sense. For more on Koehler, see W. Koehler, Mentality of Apes (London: Kegan, 1924).
28. The question of legal (as opposed to moral) rights is, of course, a different matter. Legislators have in fact given legal rights to entities that are not moral agents. But legal rights are normally extended on the basis of human interests, and not on the basis of some putative status independent of human interests.

29. This tension is clear in Leopold’s 1933 essay “The Conservation Ethic,” where he writes of ethics as “possibly a kind of advanced social instinct.” Whereas Leopold seems to think that there is already an ethics at work at the level of the aesthetic, Dewey would have argued that the primitive aesthetic response furnishes a platform for working out an ethical response to nonhuman nature. In the next paragraph, however, Leopold takes another tack. He suggests that the ethical dimensions of the human relation to the land is still in the formative stage, and that “science cannot escape its part in forming them.” Dewey would have argued that if a robust land ethic is to be developed at all, then science will have to play a part. See Aldo Leopold, “The Conservation Ethic,” 182.


33. Ibid., 21.

34. Ibid., 24.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid., 31.


CHAPTER NINE
GREEN PRAGMATISM

Reals without Realism, Ideals without Idealism

1. This is a slightly revised version of an essay by the same name published in Research in Philosophy and Technology 18 (1999): 39–56.

6. Ibid., 143.
7. Ibid., 142.
8. Decisions concerning which of two invaluable goods to sacrifice under conditions in which they become incompatible can precipitate profound personality disorders. Just such a case is presented in William Styron’s novel *Sophie’s Choice*.
12. Ibid., 21.
13. Ibid., 22.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. This is ironic, of course, because one of the great antagonists of the idealists of this period was G. E. Moore. “Eaton,” Dewey’s name for the character who presents the Pragmatist position, is also significant. It is probably a reference to the fact that we must eat to live.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 187.
23. Ibid., 197.
24. Ibid., 198.
26. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.

**Chapter Ten**

**What Was Dewey’s Magic Number?**


2. This observation is from a private correspondence with Michael Eldridge. I am grateful for his characteristically insightful analysis of an earlier version of this paper.


4. The term “mediation” is ambiguous in Peirce’s work. In the context of his theory of inquiry, mediation is associated with the “middle” phase of deliberation that succeeds doubt and precedes resolution. In the context of his semiotic, mediation is associated with something standing to some sign-user in some way, which is to say that it is associated with a Third.

**Chapter Eleven**

**Cultivating a Common Faith**

*John Dewey’s Religion*

1. An earlier version of this chapter was published as “Cultivating a Common Faith: John Dewey on Religion and Education,” in the *Korean Journal of Religious Education* 18, no. 6 (2004): 59–77 (in English); 79–95 (in Korean).


**Chapter Twelve**

**Beyond the Epistemology Industry**

*Dewey’s Theory of Inquiry*


2. There is a good deal more to say about this issue. Dewey discusses the “excluded middle” further in his 1930 essay “The Applicability of Logic to Existence” (LW 5.203–9). Here is Dewey, responding to Ernest Nagel: “Fixing context, defining a set of operations, is just the work of thought. Upon its product, then, the excluded middle can be directly brought to bear. This was my point. And as I explicitly pointed out, the resulting definition—the reflectively defined object—is of use or avail in dealing with actual existence. What was denied was that apart from this work of reflection in fixing context and defining meaning, the properties designated by the excluded middle characterize existence. Mr. Nagel has given a valuable explicit statement of what I called ‘the ideational and ideal character of ”open” and “shut”’” (LW 5.205–6). Instead of the difficulty being due to “failure to define operationally” the ideas used, the reverse is true. This operational definition is precisely what constitutes the object of thought, and its absence from prior existence is just why the properties of excluded middle do not characterize, and may not be assigned to, the strictly existential door (LW 5.205–6).


**Chapter Thirteen**

**The Homo Faber Debate in Dewey and Max Scheler**

1. An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the annual meeting of the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, March 1987.

3. Ibid., 7.


7. Ibid., 138.

8. Ibid.


14. Ibid.


17. Ibid., 36n.

18. Ibid., 36.

19. What I offer as key to the different accounts of human uniqueness in Scheler and Dewey is that Scheler was ultimately a religious thinker who, despite his prescient attempts to devise a phenomenology of experience, found it impossible to break with the traditional language of transcendent Being which, he thought, gives meaning to the human project. In *Man’s Place in Nature* he wrote of “Being, absolute in itself, that transcends all finite contents of experience and the central being of man himself, and that commands an awe-inspiring holiness.” Scheler, *Man’s Place in Nature*, 89. These remarks stand in stark contrast to those of Dewey six years later in his 1934 book *A Common Faith*. He there rejected supernaturalism and transcendent entities of all types, especially for explanatory purposes. He characterized religion as a class of activities that is internally inconsistent, and he suggested, quite consistently with Scheler’s phenomenological project, that religious experience is not *an experience* in itself, but rather a quality of many types of experience.


21. Ibid., 74.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., 78.

24. Ibid., 80.

25. Ibid., 81.
CHAPTER FOURTEEN
HABITS AS ARTIFACTS IN DEWEY AND PEIRCE


3. Max Horkheimer, Eclipse of Reason, (New York: Seabury Press, 1974 [1947]), 42ff. “The core of this philosophy [Pragmatism] is the opinion that an idea, a concept, or a theory is nothing but a scheme or plan of action, and therefore truth is nothing but the successfulness of the idea.”


8. Heidegger, too, makes much of poietike, but his emphasis is quite different. For Heidegger it is as if language itself absorbs other forms of poietike, and language becomes actor instead of tool.

9. 5:512. “Every decent house dog has been taught beliefs that appear to have no application to the wild state of the dog.”

10. Peirce explicitly rejects the view advanced by William James in The Principles of Psychology that the production of a habit must involve repetition. “[I]t is noticeable that the iteration of the action is often said to be indispensable to the formation of a habit; but a very moderate exercise of observation suffices to refute this error. A single reading yesterday of a casual statement that the ‘shtar chindis’ means in Romany ‘four shillings,’ though it is unlikely to receive any reinforcement beyond the recalling of it, at this moment, is likely to produce the habit of thinking that ‘four’ in the Gypsy tongue is ‘shtar,’ that will last for months, if not for years, though I should never call it to mind in the interval. To be sure, there has been some iteration just now, while I dwelt on the matter long enough to write these sentences; but I do not believe any reminiscence like this was needed to create the habit; for such instances have been extremely numerous in acquiring different languages. There are, of course, other means than repetition of intensifying habit-changes. In particular, there is a peculiar kind of effort, which may
be likened to an imperative command addressed to the future self. I suppose the psychologists would call it an act of auto-suggestion” (5:477).


15. “I need not repeat that I do not say that it is the single deeds that constitute the habit. It is the single ‘ways,’ which are conditional propositions, each general” (5:510).


18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., 143.