Philosophy in America is enjoying a period of unprecedented pluralism. The gradual erosion of the hegemony of Anglo-American analytic philosophy that began in the late 1970s has created enlarged spaces for new interests, new ideas, and new debates. New research programs in French postmodernism, phenomenology, Frankfurt School Critical Theory, Heidegger studies, analytic philosophy, neopragmatism, and classical Pragmatism are now happily (and energetically) engaging, challenging, and informing one another. New fields such as the philosophy of technology, environmental philosophy, biomedical ethics, feminist philosophy, and the philosophy of geography—to name but a few—have established themselves as legitimate participants in the great philosophical debates of our time.

The essays in this volume are offered as a contribution to these ongoing debates. They are premised on the conviction that the innovations of the founding Pragmatists—introduced and refined over some eighty years, from Charles Peirce’s *Popular Science Monthly*
publications of the 1870s until the final essay John Dewey published before his death in 1952—have still not been sufficiently understood or appropriated by contemporary philosophers.

I. Postmodernism

Chapter 1, “Classical Pragmatism: Waiting at the End of the Road,” identifies some of the main advances of French-inspired postmodernist philosophers over their modernist predecessors. But it also documents the fact that well over a half century before the term “postmodernism” came into currency as a philosophical idea, classical Pragmatism had already adopted most of those advances, including antifoundationalism and a deflationary attitude toward traditional metaphysics that amounted to a rejection of what Jean-François Lyotard would later call a “grand narrative.” From the vantage point of classical Pragmatism, however, postmodernism continues to suffer from two great difficulties that the Pragmatists had already resolved: how to account for and use objectivity; and how to terminate processes of infinite self-referentiality, redescription, and reinterpretation in ways that can produce reliable platforms for action. The founding Pragmatists are thus presented as “waiting at the end of the road”—to use Richard Rorty’s felicitous phrase—that postmodern philosophy is traveling. It is in this sense that I cast classical Pragmatism as a form of post–postmodernism.

These matters receive further development in the next two chapters. Chapter 2, “Pragmatism, Postmodernism, and Global Citizenship,” argues that some of the key ideas of the classical Pragmatists are ideally suited for application to problems of knowledge and valuation that are related to defining and promoting global citizenship. For one thing, Pragmatism claims to discover a strain of human commonality that trumps the postmodernist emphasis on difference and discontinuity. For another, when classical Pragmatism’s mature theory of truth is coupled with its moderate version of cultural relativism, the more skeptical postmodernist version known as cognitive
relativism is undercut. On the surface, cognitive relativism might appear to oppose ideas and practices that militate against global citizenship by allowing that no standpoint is uniquely privileged above all others, thus leveling the cross-cultural playing field and fostering pluralism. The actual consequences of cognitive relativism have been the opposite: Postmodernist relativism has in fact been used to provide cover for various forms of religious fundamentalism and racist politics, including the Hindu fundamentalist defense of the caste system in India and the racist programs of the political Right in France. Pragmatism, on the other hand, by holding that there are objective results of inquiry in the social sciences as well as in the physical sciences, would not provide cover to oppressive ideas. Even though these results may not have been universalized, they are nevertheless universalizable in ways that provide firm platforms for the development of global citizenship at the same time that they honor cultural pluralism.

Chapter 3, “Classical Pragmatism, Postmodernism, and Neopragmatism,” continues the discussion of Pragmatism and postmodernism begun in the two previous chapters by examining the postmodernist themes that have been taken up and woven into some forms of neopragmatism, such as the one advanced by Rorty. I argue that Rorty’s neopragmatism differs from Dewey’s classical Pragmatism in several important ways—ways that reveal neopragmatism’s debt to postmodernism. Whereas Dewey honored the distinct roles that the arts and the sciences can play in social reconstruction, for example, Rorty tends to alternate between blurring that distinction, on the one hand, and maintaining the distinction but privileging literature over the technosciences, on the other. It also appears that the type of relativism found in neopragmatism—a type that is also found in the writings of some postmodernists—does not allow us to hope for anything more solid than personal and cultural preferences. Neopragmatism of this variety thus appears to be an attempt to displace classical Pragmatism’s thick program of active experimental analysis and social reconstruction with thinner projects that present hoping and coping as the best available outcome.
II. Technology

In the next four chapters I turn to a discussion of some of the major themes in the philosophy of technology. Chapter 4, “Classical Pragmatism and Communicative Action: Jürgen Habermas,” presents a Deweyan critique of the work of Jürgen Habermas. Despite his important contributions as a major public intellectual, from the vantage point of his Pragmatist critics Habermas’s project appears to rest on an unstable dualism of strategic action versus communicative action. In the view of his Pragmatist critics, Habermas’s project places so much weight on the noninstrumentalist side of the breach that it consequently fails to give experimentation its proper place in human doing and making. Dewey’s project, in contrast, being richer and more flexible than Habermas’s, avoids some of its pitfalls by avoiding its explicit dualism as well as the quasi-transcendentalism nested within it. I close this chapter with an invitation to Habermas to engage Dewey’s work more systematically.

Chapter 5, “From Critical Theory to Pragmatism: Andrew Feenberg,” engages one of the most insightful and productive philosophers of technology working today. I present the trajectory of Andrew Feenberg’s career as moving away from the Critical Theory of his teacher, Herbert Marcuse, toward the critique of technology advanced by Dewey. I argue that in Questioning Technology Feenberg follows Dewey on several important points: he moves from an essentialist to a functionalist understanding of technology; he develops a vigorous form of social constructivism; he rejects a Heideggerian type of romanticism in favor of a naturalized technology; he rejects the Critical Theorists’ notion of technology as ideology; he accepts the idea that the project of Enlightenment rationality is not as much of a threat as the Critical Theorists had imagined; he proposes the idea that technical decisions are made within a network of competing factors in which one weighs various desired ends against one another; he warns against the reification of the results of inquiry as if they had existed prior to inquiry (Dewey’s “philosophic fallacy”); and he recasts technology in a way that bridges the traditional split between
artifacts and social relations. In all this, I suggest, Feenberg's progress toward a Pragmatic reading of the philosophy of technology is the right move at the right time.

Chapter 6, “A Neo-Heideggerian Critique of Technology: Albert Borgmann,” continues a conversation that I have had with Albert Borgmann for some fifteen years. Borgmann’s books, including Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life, Across the Postmodern Divide, and Holding On to Reality, advance what is arguably one of the best neo-Heideggerian critiques of technology currently available. Whereas Borgmann’s arguments against hyperconsumerism and commodification are unassailable, I suggest that his project suffers from the same sort of dualism that has plagued the projects of the first and second generations of the Critical Theorists. For both Borgmann and Heidegger, technology tends to distract us from the great embodiments of meaning. For both Borgmann and Heidegger, technology has been responsible for a diaspora of focal things and practices. For both Borgmann and Heidegger, the vacuity of technology provides the grounds for a negative kind of hope, for an opening or clearing where focal things can once more be clearly and purposefully engaged. To his credit, however, Borgmann also parts company with Heidegger on a number of points, including Heidegger’s apparent desire to return to a kind of pretechnological romanticism and (of course) Heidegger’s disastrous social and political ideas. Borgmann attempts to introduce an agenda of social and political reform that is in many ways quite salutary. Nevertheless, to Borgmann’s Pragmatist critics he appears to be enmeshed in a fatal dualism and an uncritical acceptance of what he terms “ultimate concerns.”

Chapter 7, “Doing and Making in a Democracy: John Dewey” goes beyond the oblique presentations of Dewey’s critique of technology presented in the previous three chapters. In this chapter I present Dewey’s critique directly. I present his reading of the history of philosophical treatments of technology and his proposals for “naturalizing” technology, that is, locating it in a realm that is neither supernatural nor extranatural and in which the only telic elements are the natural ends of objects, individuals, and events, all of which
in turn may become means to further ends. Dewey rejected the notion that technology is no more than applied science and argued that technology is prior to science historically and functionally. In Dewey’s view, technology can form a buffer between the forces of antiscience and science and function as a means by which science can be appropriated by the scientifically uninformed. He had little sympathy for those who attack technology in the name of humanism for usurping a place that is more legitimately held by abstract moral precepts. For Dewey, unlike Heidegger and the first- and second-generation Critical Theorists, technology was never the problem. Instead, he thought that what is called for in a world of constant change is intelligence, especially as it is exhibited in democratic practices. What is called for is no more or less than determined and systematic inquiry into our tools and techniques, or in his words, technology.

III. The Environment

The two essays in this section locate Dewey’s work within the past and present of environmental philosophy. Chapter 8, “Nature as Culture: John Dewey and Aldo Leopold,” argues that Dewey’s environmental naturalism allows him to accept and defend the central tenets of Leopold’s land ethic without the appeal to an idealized, nonhuman nature that occasionally surfaces within Leopold’s work. I argue that Leopold’s attempt to provide a foundation for his ethic by that means is the least workable and the least defensible feature of his otherwise excellent project. Dewey’s alternative locates itself in the thick of current debates regarding the relations between human beings and non-human nature. It offers the promise of continuing insights within this arena of human experience.

Chapter 9, “Green Pragmatism: Reals without Realism, Ideals without Idealism,” builds on the material presented in the previous chapter. I discuss the relevance of Dewey’s ideas to more recent philosophical debates among environmental philosophers such as Bryan Norton, Holmes Ralston III, J. Baird Callicott, and Michael Zimmerman. I argue that Dewey’s work anticipated some of the central concepts of the work of Callicott and Norton, such as source versus locus
of value and felt versus considered values. On the other hand, Dewey’s Pragmatism stands in sharp contrast to Ralston’s idealism and some of the mystic strains encountered in the work of Zimmerman. I suggest that a careful reading of Dewey’s 1909 essay “Nature and Its Good: A Conversation” provides an interesting and informative foil against which to read the works of these four environmental philosophers and serves as a wedge by means of which Dewey is able to enter into their conversation. When taken with the 1896 essay “Evolution and Ethics,” it bears witness to Dewey’s concern, almost a century ago, with matters that today we term environmental.

IV. Classical Pragmatism

The final section comprises six essays devoted to some of the central ideas and figures of classical Pragmatism. Chapter 10, “What Was Dewey’s Magic Number?” probes the substructure of Dewey’s philosophical method. Taking my cue from Abraham Kaplan, who once suggested that Dewey’s “magic number” was two, I suggest that he thought more basically in terms of threes, even though the titles of Dewey’s books—such as Experience and Nature, The School and Society, and Human Nature and Conduct—and his goal of reconstructing disparate elements into new wholes might support Kaplan’s thesis. Some of his cases seem to be inspired by Hegel’s dialectic, while others recall Peirce’s categories, especially as they are related to Peirce’s method of fixing belief. In order to make my case, I discuss Dewey’s treatments of three areas of philosophical interest: the arts, ethics, and inquiry.

Chapter 11, “Cultivating a Common Faith: Dewey’s Religion,” takes up the highly controversial matter of Dewey’s analysis of religious belief. Dewey argued that there is no such thing as religion in general—that there is nothing that all religions qua religions have in common. Moreover, given the wide variety of the world’s religions, he argued, and given differences in cultural background and temperament, how is it possible to choose a religion from among them? What sort of criteria are available? Rejecting claims that ideals must be
grounded in absolutes, justified by objects and events that transcend experience, or warranted by history or tradition, Dewey invites us to exhibit a particular type of religious faith. This religious faith—this common faith—would be one that takes experience seriously as a source of values, that tests values and ideals experimentally, and that honors the religious qualities of experiences of many types, including aesthetic, ethical, scientific, and educational types. It is this religious attitude that Dewey thinks can drive, inform, and refresh religious institutions. It is this common faith that can insure the continuing relevance of religious institutions in a changing world and provide a platform for their cooperation on matters that transcend narrow sectarian interest.

Chapter 12, “Beyond the Epistemology Industry: Dewey’s Theory of Inquiry,” presents a succinct overview of Dewey’s theory of inquiry. I discuss his criticisms of what he termed the “epistemology industry” and his notion of warranted assertibility. Topics discussed in this essay include Dewey’s idea of inquiry as organic and instrumental behavior, the role of the a priori in inquiry, the relation of common sense and science, the status of logical objects, the nature and function of abstraction, the relation of matter and form in inquiry, the role of judgments in inquiry, propositions and their relations, and the social dimensions of inquiry. Dewey rejected the idea that logic, or the theory of inquiry, is a strictly formal discipline complete in itself and devoid of relevance to the affairs of public life.

Chapter 13, “The Homo Faber Debate in Dewey and Max Scheler,” begins by identifying some of the significant personal and professional differences between Dewey and Max Scheler. One of these differences was that Dewey accepted the homo faber thesis as it had been advanced by Henri Bergson, according to which intelligence is the faculty of manufacturing artificial objects, especially tools to make other tools. Scheler, on the other hand, rejected what he regarded as the primary features of the homo faber thesis, namely that human beings can make signs and tools because they have a larger and more powerful cortex than other animals. Scheler opted instead for a “discontinuity thesis,” according to which human life possesses a
uniquely new characteristic best termed “spirit.” Despite these and other differences, however, and despite Scheler’s attacks on the Pragmatists, he and Dewey articulated remarkably similar views regarding the function of tools in intelligent adaptation. The fact that Dewey held a version of the *homo faber* thesis that Scheler rejected should not obscure their fundamental agreements regarding the issues that vitalize that thesis.

Chapter 14, “Productive Pragmatism: Habits as Artifacts in Peirce and Dewey,” returns to a question that was central to the first section of this book: To what extent can we expect the outcome of inquiry to provide anything more than infinite processes of redescription and reinterpretation? Critics of the Pragmatists, including Bertrand Russell, Max Horkheimer, and Theodor Adorno, have accused Pragmatism of making action an end in itself. If this criticism were justified, then one of the key differences between classical Pragmatism and neopragmatism would evaporate. In this chapter I argue that neither Peirce nor Dewey thought that action—except incidentally—is the end of inquiry. The function of inquiry is instead the production of new artifacts, including new habits. It is true that early in his career Peirce held the view that there is an infinite continuum of signs, and that there is neither a first nor a last object that is not a sign of something further. But he eventually abandoned this view and began to write of logical interpretants that are “ultimate,” “final,” and “verifiable.” When Peirce’s later doctrine of signs and Dewey’s Instrumentalism are taken together, I argue, then it becomes clear that these versions of classical Pragmatism should not simply be termed “praxis” philosophies. They are philosophies of production.