

**RUTH ANNA PUTNAM:  
A PRAGMATIC THINKER FOR OUR TIME**

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**ABSTRACT:** Ruth Anna Putnam is one of the most imaginative and vital pragmatic thinkers of our time. Unfortunately, her philosophical work has been overshadowed by her much more famous husband, Hilary Putnam. For many philosophers Ruth Anna's primary claim to fame is that she is responsible for getting Hilary to take pragmatism seriously—something that he has acknowledged on many occasions. But viewing her in this limited way does a great injustice to her own originality. The aim of this paper, the first scholarly study of Ruth Anna Putnam's work, is to challenge that view.

**Keywords:** Pragmatism, Ruth Anna Putnam, women in philosophy, women in pragmatism, Hilary Putnam

Ever since I wrote my dissertation on John Dewey's metaphysics of experience (1957), I have always taken "pragmatism seriously"—to use Ruth Anna Putnam's expression, but I have never focused on the outstanding contributions to the pragmatic tradition by women thinkers. "'Pragmatism'," as Richard Rorty wrote in his 1979 presidential address, "is a vague, ambiguous, and overworked word. Nevertheless, it names the chief glory of our country's intellectual tradition. No other American writers offered so radical a suggestion for making our future different from our past, as have James and Dewey" (Rorty 1982: 160). There is a traditional *narrow* sense of pragmatism where it is taken to be primary a "theory" of meaning and truth. If we think of pragmatism in this way, then we do a vast injustice to the richness and diversity of issues and problems treated by these pragmatic thinkers, which range from cosmological speculations to specific aesthetic, moral, social, and political questions. Furthermore, restricting the label "pragmatism" to this famous triad of thinkers neglects the important pragmatic contributions by black thinkers such as W.E.B. DuBois and Alain Locke—both of whom studied at Harvard when William James, George Santayana, and Josiah Royce were on the philosophy faculty. The emphasis—indeed overemphasis on Peirce, James and Dewey (and sometimes Mead)—also

relegates to the dark shadows the role of women thinkers who shaped the pragmatic movement. We tend to forget that Jane Addams had an enormous influence on John Dewey. And except for a few Peirce scholars, most philosophers are unaware of the brilliant correspondence between Peirce and Lady Victoria Welby where we find some of Peirce's most illuminating discussions of his theory of signs and how it is related to his version of pragmatism. Their exchanges are a model of philosophical dialogue. Even if we focus on the renaissance of pragmatism in the latter part of the twentieth century and the early decades of the twenty-first century, philosophers interested in the varieties of pragmatism normally direct our attention to such thinkers as Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam, and Robert Brandom. We neglect the many women philosophers who have developed pragmatic themes in their philosophical work. When I speak of "we" in this context, I include myself.<sup>1</sup>

Consequently, I want to dedicate this essay to a study of Ruth Anna Putnam's work. She is one of the most imaginative and vital pragmatic thinkers of our time. Unfortunately, the philosophical work of Ruth Anna Putnam has been overshadowed by her much more famous husband, Hilary Putnam. For many philosophers Ruth Anna's primary claim to fame is that she is responsible for getting Hilary to take pragmatism seriously—something that he has acknowledged on many occasions. But viewing her in this limited way does a great injustice to her own originality. David Macarthur has recently edited a splendid volume of essays by Ruth Anna and Hilary Putnam. *Pragmatism as a Way of Life: The Lasting Legacy of William James and John Dewey* consists of twenty-seven essays made up of those written separately as well as two co-written essays. This is the first time that most of Ruth Anna's essays on pragmatic themes have been collected in one place, although the purpose of this anthology is to display the mutual and interrelated interest in pragmatism by Ruth Anna and Hilary Putnam I plan, however, to concentrate

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<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of pragmatism, women, and feminist philosophy see Seigfried 1996.

almost exclusively on Ruth Anna's essays. I am interested in Ruth Anna's work because she is such an excellent philosopher, *not* because she is a "woman" philosopher. But the sad truth is that like so many women philosophers, past and present, her work has been frequently ignored or underrated precisely because she is a woman.

In his essay "Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity" Hilary Putnam indicates what he finds attractive about American pragmatism.

What I find attractive in pragmatism is not a systematic theory in the usual sense at all. It is rather a certain group of theses, *which can be and indeed were argued very differently by different philosophers with different concerns* [my italics—RJB], and which became the basis of the philosophes of Peirce, and above all James and Dewey. Cursorily summarized, those theses are (1) antiskepticism; pragmatists hold that doubt requires justification just as much as belief (recall Peirce's famous distinction between "real" and "philosophical" doubt); (2) fallibilism; pragmatists hold that there is never a metaphysical guarantee to be had that such-and-such a belief will never need revision (that one can be both fallibilistic and antiskeptical is perhaps the unique insight of American pragmatism); (3) the thesis that there is no fundamental dichotomy between "facts" and "values"; and (4) the thesis that, in a certain sense, practice is primary in philosophy (Putnam: 1994: 152).

Ruth Anna certainly agrees with all these theses at a general level. What I hope to show that she interprets and argues for these theses in a very *distinctive* manner that reflect her primary concerns.

The initial striking impression in reading Ruth Anna's essays is their lucidity, freshness and grace. Like James and Dewey, she is concerned to show that philosophers do not have to focus exclusively on the problems of philosophy but can deal in an illuminating fashion with the problems of human beings. "So what does it mean to turn away from the problems of philosophers? It means to me—and here I am using a phrase from David Hume rather than the pragmatists—that I seek a philosophy that I do not have to leave

behind in the study" (p.15).<sup>2</sup> She uses a minimum of technical jargon and only occasionally refers to academic articles in specialized philosophical journals. What makes her prose so vivid is that she frequently gives concrete examples from "real life" problems to illustrate her key points. Any intelligent reader, regardless of background, can read and learn from her. In this respect, she follows in the best tradition of James and Dewey—especially when they were addressing general readers. She manages to do this without a loss of precision or subtlety. She is in genuine dialogue with James and Dewey but clearly indicates when she agrees or disagrees with them—and why. In reading her essays, one has the experience of participating in a lively open-ended engaging conversation.

Let me illustrate her down to earth approach with reference to one of the most discussed issues in Anglophone philosophy during the past one hundred years: the issue of realism versus anti-realism, and the closely related issue of realism versus relativism. (Not all anti-realists are relativists.) Of course, one of the things that keep these debates going is specifying the precise meaning of these contested concepts. Take, for example, the work of Hilary Putnam. He has moved from a version of metaphysical realism to internal realism (realism with a small "r") to refining this to a form of pragmatic or common sense realism. Hilary Putnam staunchly defends realism with a small "r" because he believes that the alternatives—metaphysical realism or relativism—are self-defeating and ultimately incoherent. Hilary Putnam frequently characterizes Rorty as the chief contemporary advocate of anti-realist relativism. Rorty's responds that he is not a relativist and claims that the "relativist menace" is an invention of Hilary Putnam. There are good reasons why so much energy has gone into the debates about realism and anti-realism. On the one hand many philosophers (including Rorty and Hilary Putnam) reject metaphysical realism and have taken the linguistic

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all page references are to essays by Ruth Anna Putnam collected in *Pragmatism as a Way of Life* edited by D. Macarthur (2017).

turn. Both Rorty and Hilary Putnam are skeptical of the very idea that we can escape from language and from the descriptive functions of language. Both believe that we cannot make a sharp fixed distinction between descriptive language and nonlinguistic fact. They both reject the idea that we can somehow directly compare our ideas, concepts, thoughts, judgments or sentences with an independent reality to see whether or not they “correspond.” Both Rorty and Putnam are among those philosophers who think that it is incoherent to assume that we can take a “God’s-eye” point of view where we stand “outside” of language and reality in order to compare them with each other. Rorty thinks that the ineluctable conclusion of accepting these claims is that all we can do is play off competing descriptive vocabularies against each other. There is no world—consisting of a set of determinate facts—that is metaphysically independent of us language users. From Hilary Putnam’s perspective, Rorty’s denial that there is a world independent of us leads straight to “bad” relativism—despite Rorty’s protests and disclaimers. Since both Rorty and Hilary Putnam think of themselves in the pragmatic tradition, we may ask where the “classical” pragmatists stand on this issue of realism versus anti-realism. This question is not nearly as straightforward as it may seem. Initially, the best candidate to support the realist pole is Peirce because he asserts the reality of universals and asserts that there is an independent objective reality that we can come to know (although we can never claim to know it with absolute certainty). Given James’ nominalist proclivities and his striking claim that “the trail of the human serpent is thus over everything” it is much easier to fit him into the anti-realist camp. In both thinkers—as well as in the writings of John Dewey—there are passages (taken out of context) that support more realist and more anti-realist readings.

What is Ruth Anna’s stance on the realism-antirealism debate? The first point to emphasize is that she never rehashes the extensive and sometimes boring disputes that have filled academic journals. What she actually

does is recognize the basic insights or “intuitions” of the opposing positions and shows how from her pragmatic perspective they are compatible. We may say that the basic intuition behind realism is the necessity to recognize that there is a common objective world that constrains our warranted beliefs. On the other hand, the insight behind many forms of anti-realism is that, as finite human beings we are limited in knowing the world by our linguistic descriptions. We have no cognitive access to a world that is independent of our descriptions of this world. It is an illusion to think that we can—using Wilfrid Sellars’ expression—“break out of discourse to an *arché* beyond discourse” (Sellars 1997: 117). There is plenty of evidence that all the classical pragmatists hold that there is a world that is both independent of us and constrains what we can legitimately believe, know and do. This doesn’t mean that the world “speaks” to us—but it does mean that in carrying out inquiries we must be responsive to the stubborn bruteness of the world that we encounter. Ruth Anna also insists that there is a common world that constrains what we may know and do. Ruth Anna, who disagrees with Rorty on many issues, nevertheless defends him against the criticism that he “denies the existence of anything causally independent of human beings.” She notes how Rorty responds to such criticism.

[Rorty] responds “To say that the world is out there, that it is not our creation, is to say, with common sense, that most things in space and time are the effects of causes which do not include human mental events” [Rorty 1989: 5]. So when the critics say that “There are mountains in Jordan” is true “in virtue of the way things are,” Rorty agrees, provided that “in virtue of the way things are” is understood as “in virtue of the way our current descriptions of things are used and the causal interaction we have with these things”; he disagrees if it means “*simply* in virtue of the way things are, quite apart from how we describe them” [Rorty 1998: 86]. He rejects the latter because there is no way things are independently of describing them. No way to distinguish the role played by our language and the role played by the rest of the universe “in accounting for the truth of our true beliefs” [Rorty 1998: 87] (pp. 90-91.)

Ruth Anna—from her pragmatic perspective—defuses or deflates the ostensible issue that separates non-metaphysical realists like Hilary Putnam and Rorty's "ethnological" stance. She affirms, as realists insist, that there is a world out there that is independent of us. But at the same time we have no way of knowing this world except by the current descriptive languages that we now use (although these descriptions may well change in light of future inquiry). One reason why Ruth Anna can evade some of the epistemological and metaphysical issues that dominant discussions of realism and anti-realism is because she is committed the pragmatic thesis that gives primacy (but not exclusivity) to the agent rather than the spectator.<sup>3</sup>

So to take pragmatism seriously is to take one living in a world that one shares with others, others with whom one cooperates in inquiry, others with whom one may compete for scarce resources or with whom one may cooperate in seeking to achieve common goals. It is to see oneself not as a spectator of but an agent in the world. And that means that one often confronts the question "What is to be done?" (p.17)

Like other pragmatists, Ruth Anna challenges the fact/value dichotomy. But here again her approach is distinctive, although compatible with other pragmatic critiques of this dichotomy. She certainly does not want to deny that in many contexts we want (and need) to distinguish the "facts" of the case from our value judgments—although what count as facts will also vary in different contexts. This is just as true in legal contexts as it is in scientific contexts. What is being challenged is that there is some sort of deep semantic, epistemological or metaphysical dichotomy to be drawn in what she calls the "seamless web" of facts and values. The thesis that she defends is that "nonmoral facts and moral facts are so intimately interwoven," that such traditional distinctions as fact/value, science/morality,

description/ prescription " will bear hardly any philosophical weight at all; in particular, they will not support moral skepticism" (pp.71-72). She maintains that there are objective moral values, genuine moral knowledge and consequently there are moral facts. In short, she critiques the varieties of moral skepticism. Moral skepticism can take many different forms, both popular and more stringent philosophical forms. Some ordinary people claim to believe that all values are simply a matter of different people's fluctuating opinions. Old-fashioned logical positivists deny that there are any such entities as "moral facts." It is an empty set or class. Although, Wittgenstein, during his *Tractarian* period, was certainly not a moral skeptic, he did not think there were any *moral* facts. How does Ruth Anna understand the meaning of "facts" and "values? And what are moral facts? Facts, she tells us, are not just there in the "outside world" to be discovered by us. She argues, drawing on Nelson Goodman's *Ways of Worldmaking*, that facts are made-by-us. This does not mean that they are arbitrary or "merely" subjective. The ways in which we describe and individuate facts are dependent on us. '[F]acts are how we organize 'the blooming, buzzing confusion" of sensory inputs, of sensory of 'surface irritations'. Clearly, then, some facts will be quotidian, others will be esoteric, and most will lie in between, but even the most solid has been made by some human being" (p.393). One might grant her point that what we count as facts can vary in different contexts and situations but still wonder whether there "really" are *moral* facts. Moral skeptics, who insist on a sharp contrast between science and morality, emphasize that nature presents us with facts and but not with moral values. And from this they conclude there are really no such things as moral values or moral facts.

But we need moral values and moral rules to provide us with certain kinds of reasons—moral reasons—for choosing and acting, although there are other kinds of reasons and causes and motives as well. We need to appeal to moral rules as excuses when our moral actions have untoward consequences. We need to cite moral

<sup>3</sup> In using the word "evade" I am alluding to Ruth Anna's reference to Cornel West's *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, "by which he means the evasion by American philosophers of the problems of Cartesian skepticism" (p.15).

values when we want to exhort others to act in accordance with moral laws. More importantly, we need values to provide a foundation for the complicated moral-legal-political structure without which human society would be impossible: being both gregarious and political animals, we need human society both to live and flourish. (p.72)

What then is the source of these moral values, reasons, and laws? Ruth Anna agrees with moral skeptics when they claim that “unaided nature does not provide us with moral values.” Moral values like facts are *made* or *created* by us.<sup>4</sup> They are not given to us by “unaided nature.” Of course, we human beings are also natural beings—but when Ruth Anna speaks of “unaided nature” she is using this expression to refer to the natural world that doesn’t include human beings. We should not interpret this as meaning that we deliberately decide to create moral values. Most of the time we are thoroughly socialized to accept existing moral traditions—even when there are tensions and conflicts within these traditions. But it does mean that moral values are relative to us. They are not “revealed by God or implanted by Nature or discovered by a pure practical Reason”; they are made by us just as facts are made by us. Skeptics may want to claim that if you grant (indeed insist) that moral values are made by us, then that shows that they are “merely” arbitrary. Or as Ruth Anna phrases it: “There is a persistent nagging conviction that after all anything *we* make is, just because we *make* it, arbitrary” (p.394). But this is an unwarranted inference. There are many things that we create or make because we need them, but that doesn’t mean they are arbitrary, subjective or unreal. We make knives because we need to cut things, but they are certainly real and not arbitrary. And there are all kinds of objective factual and

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<sup>4</sup> Ruth Anna appears to agree with Rorty who also wants to insist that there is a sense in which all facts and values are created by us—by human beings. But Ruth Anna draws a conclusion which is the very opposite of Rorty’s. For her to insist that facts and values are made by us does not impugn the objectivity of moral facts and moral values but rather indicates that what is made by us (as distinguished from what is made-up by us) is objective.

evaluative claims we make about knives, for example this particular knife is a good knife for carving meat. When I make such a claim I am making an *objective* claim about the quality of the knife—a claim that I assert is *true*. Granted that moral values are not physical entities like knives, still we make objective judgments about better and worse values and decisions—taking into consideration their genesis and consequences. Ruth Anna gives the example of committed pacifists in the Second World War who had to decide what to do – whether to go to prison who to volunteer for non-combatant service. This, of course, presented itself as a difficult moral choice. There is no algorithm for making such a decision, but in justifying one’s moral decision, both actors and third parties can evaluate objectively better or worse reasons for making a specific decision—depending on the person involved, Reasonable persons can come to different decisions, but it certainly doesn’t follow that such decisions are arbitrary or “merely” subjective in the sense in which one’s preference for vanilla rather than chocolate ice cream express a merely subjective preference.

We make moral values because we need moral values, just as we make other things which we need and which unaided nature fails to provide. We make tools we design and build machines, we cultivate plants and domesticate animals. The characteristic of these things are not arbitrary. On the contrary, our needs generate the constraints within which these things are made and the standards by which these things are evaluated (p. 73).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Earlier I indicated that Ruth Anna agrees with Rorty that we make facts just as we make moral values. This does not mean or entail that we arbitrarily always *make-up* facts and values. And when someone does arbitrarily *make-up* facts and/or values there are procedures for showing that they are *made-up*. But she strongly disagrees with Rorty when he claims that the only constraints about what we can justify are conversational constraints. There are all kinds of constraints on the facts and moral values that we create or make—just as there are all kinds of constraints on making a good knife for carving meat or chopping vegetables.

Still one may wonder in what sense we can claim that there are *objective* moral values, especially if we *make* these moral values. Certainly, if one limits one's conception to what metaphysical realists take to be "objective"—what exists "out there" that is *completely* independent of what human beings do or make, then there are *no* objective moral values. But if we restrict the meaning of "objective" in this way, then we would also be forced to conclude there are no objective nonmoral facts. For we also make or create facts. Ruth Anna's thesis is "that even if there are not objective moral values in the sense explained (i.e. even if states of affairs are not morally good or bad, nor actions morally obligatory, permitted, or forbidden, independently of some human willing), there are sufficient constraints on human willing to produce values that are objective enough to take the place of the values we have 'lost'" (p. 389). Her positive thesis is that we need stable moral-legal-political structures in order to survive and flourish. In short, we need moral values. It is the stability of the facts and values that we create that is the source of their objectivity. In effect, Ruth Anna is challenging a limited and ultimately inadequate sense of "objective" for a more realistic and adequate sense of "objectivity."<sup>6</sup> It is more realistic in the sense of being more adequate to the way in which we *actually* live our lives. She hopes to allay the anxieties of those who worry that if we give up on a *narrow* sense of "objectivity," we are giving up on objectivity. "Just as fact-making and theory-making turn out to be intimately woven, but facts are nevertheless solid enough to allow us to navigate a perilous world, so basic values and detailed moral structures are intimately interwoven and solid enough to enable us to navigate the perils of human relationships" (pp. 402-403). "What makes for objectivity is the willingness to revise one's judgments in the face of discordant experience—that is fallibilism" (p. 429). And given the seamless web between facts and values, one can be (should be) a

fallibilist about value judgments, including moral judgments.

I have mentioned some of the ways in which Ruth Anna agrees and disagrees with Rorty. Her essay "Rorty's Vision: Philosophical Courage and Social Hope" is one of the best critical and sympathetic essays written about Rorty. She praises Rorty for his imagination and courage in trying to put an end to the endless debates between skeptics and their realist opponents. She also admires Rorty for imaginatively proposing "an active, reformist, social democratic, liberal left in place of the quietist academic left that fills our universities" (p.87). But at the same time she sharply criticizes Rorty for abandoning the pragmatic appeal to experience. For Ruth Anna, pragmatism does not make any sense without an appeal to experience. She doesn't think of experience in the way many traditional empiricists have conceived of it—as consisting of discrete sensory data. Nor is experience what Sellars calls "the myth of the given." Like Dewey (and Merleau-Ponty) she thinks that an epistemological concern with experience that has dominated so much of modern philosophy have distorted our lived experience. She agrees with Dewey that experience is not simply a "knowledge affair." Experience is an *interaction* between an organism and its environment. Lived experience has both a spatial and temporal dimension. It can be funded with emotion and meaning. It is not something limited to being "inside" our mental lives. For her, one of the main contributions of pragmatism is its wide conception of experience. She notes that for Rorty, the key words are "conversation" and "solidarity" whereas the key words for Dewey (and for Ruth Anna's version of pragmatism) are "interaction" and "inquiry." "Not that Dewey would not approve of conversation and solidarity—both are essential for inquiry—but he would insist that what prompts inquiry and what must be its ultimate upshot is *experience*, that is, interactions between a human organism and its environment" (p.13), This conception of experience and inquiry is fundamental for Ruth Anna's pragmatic orientation.

<sup>6</sup> For a similar critique of the narrow limited sense of "objectivity," see Cray 2016.

Ruth Anna's critique of the fact/value dichotomy, her thesis about the seamless web of facts and moral values, and her understanding of experience as an interaction between a human organism and its environment opens the way for a more direct approach to morality. Taking seriously the agent's perspective, the primary question when confronted with moral conflicts, dilemmas and hard choices is: *what is to be done?* Her approach to moral (as well as social and political issues) is very much in the spirit of James' meliorism and Dewey's advocacy of radical social reform. Like James, she is concerned with the individual choices that we need to make, and like Dewey she thinks that our moral values are shaped by and shape our social interactions. We draw on principles and traditions that have shaped us, but every time we make a moral choice we are also reshaping these traditions. To illustrate her point, she discusses the conflict (and options) that Brutus faced before the Ides of March. "Brutus must choose between his friendship for Caesar and his hatred of tyranny, between loyalty to a person and patriotism." Not only does Brutus confront a hard choice—a source of real anguish—he actually *creates* "a ranking of values . . . and he could have created a different ranking" (p. 401). Frequently there is a need for new values when old values clash. Sometimes we can reconcile moral conflicts and sometimes we cannot and have to live with tragic consequences of our forced choices.

Pragmatism, for Ruth Anna, is not just a philosophical orientation; it is a way of life that involves moral deliberation, choice and action. For all the "newness" of pragmatism with its emphasis on fallibilism and experimental scientific inquiry, it is also a "return" to a very old conception of philosophy exemplified by Socrates—a concern with how we live our lives in daily practices with others. Ruth Anna speaks of the "moral impulse" of philosophers—"the passionate desire to find a philosophy that makes sense of our moral lives, that would enable us to lead one life, to be consistent as is humanly possible in all our beliefs (p. 359). This is what motivates Ruth Anna just as it

motivates James and Dewey. And this is what she seeks to achieve in her own version of pragmatism.

To make sense of our moral lives, our choosings, our praisings and self-congratulations, as well as blamings and regrettings . . . we must believe that we are, indeed, choosing, that our choices make a difference, and that there are standards by which we judge and are judged, standards that are themselves of human making and subject to human critique. Implicit in these beliefs is another, the belief held by each of us, that one is not alone in the world, that one lives in a peopled world. (pp.354-55)

But this is not only what we *must* believe, but we are *justified* in believing it. Even more important, we can also succeed in having our choices make a difference—a difference for a better world. But as fallible human beings, we must also be prepared to reexamine the consequences (intended and unintended) of the choices that we make. "Fallibilism in any social arena demands that all relevant voices be heard" (p.433) If we take this seriously then we must also learn to listen—to really listen—to what others are saying, to properly evaluate other views, especially when they conflict with our own, and to have the courage to modify our opinions and beliefs when necessary. We should not fool ourselves about the difficulty of this task. This is why education, especially the education of the young is so vital for a pragmatic orientation. In an article written jointly with Hilary Putnam, Ruth Anna endorses Dewey's famous claim: "If we are willing to conceive education as the process of forming fundamental dispositions, intellectual and emotional, philosophy may be defined as *the general theory of education*" (Putnam 1994: 223). They also endorse Dewey's conception of the aim of education,

That the aim of education is to enable individuals to continue their education is an ideal which often fails to be realized. All education instills habits. Although we often think of habits as mere routine responses to stimuli, in Dewey's use of the term there are habits of judging and reasoning and experimentation, as well as using instruments for carrying out familiar activities.

Nevertheless, there is a constant danger that habits will become routine, and it is only by constructing a learning environment which teaches *the use of intelligence in forming habits* that this tendency can be counteracted. (Putnam 1994: 226)

The expression “pragmatism as a way of life” is an allusion to Dewey’s characterization of democracy as a way of life—an expression that he uses several times in his essay “Creative Democracy—The Task before Us.” In a typical passage, Dewey asserts:

Democracy is a way of life controlled by a working faith in the possibilities of human nature. Belief in the Common Man is a familiar article of the democratic creed. The belief is without significance save as it means faith in the possibilities of human nature is exhibited in every human being irrespective of race, color, sex, birth and family, of material or cultural wealth. This faith may be enacted in statutes, but it is only on paper unless it is put in force in attitudes which human beings display to one another in all the incidents and relations of daily life. (Dewey *LW* 14:226)

When Dewey adds that democracy is a *personal* way of life, he wants to emphasize the core of democracy is exhibited in our daily lives, the ways we actually treat people in our everyday practices. Democratic institutions, procedures, and government structures can become hollow and meaningless unless they are informed by a democratic ethos. Quoting Dewey, Ruth Anna declares: “‘The participation of every mature human being in formation of the values that regulate the living of men together’—this is what democracy is all about, and its justification rests precisely on this, that it ‘is necessary from the standpoint of both general welfare and the full development of human beings as individuals’” (p.440). Ruth Anna agrees with Dewey that individual development and general welfare are not two goals but a *single* goal. What is so appealing about Ruth Anna’s distinctive version of pragmatism is the way in which she blends both Jamesian and Deweyan insights and seeks to show their relevance for us today. Of course Peircean themes are also always in the

background: fallibilism, the importance of experimental inquiry and the appeal to the relevant community of inquirers in testing and evaluating our hypotheses and theories.

I began this essay by citing Richard Rorty who speaks of pragmatism as the “chief glory” of the American intellectual tradition and declares: “No other American writers have offered so radical a suggestion for making our future different from our past, as James and Dewey.” Ruth Anna’s personal and intellectual journey has been a fascinating one. She was born in Berlin in 1927 with a Christian father and Jewish mother. Both her parents were secular active anti-Nazis. At the age of five, Ruth Anna was sent to live with her Christian grandparents and managed to survive living in Germany during the Second World War as a “half-Jew.” She was reunited with her parents in the United States in 1948. She was an undergraduate at UCLA and majored in chemistry. She received her philosophy PHD at the same institution. At the time, UCLA was the center for the philosophy of science in the United States. Both Hans Reichenbach and Rudolf Carnap were members of the philosophy faculty. Ruth Ann first taught at the University of Oregon and then joined the faculty at Wellesley College in 1963 where she taught until she became a Professor Emerita in 1998. Initially, Ruth Anna’s graduate philosophical training had little to do with the classical American pragmatism, but, on her own, she discovered the richness of writings of James and Dewey. This was a philosophic orientation that spoke deeply to her and significantly influenced the shape of her philosophic career—a philosophy that reached beyond the academy and was relevant to the concerns and problems of ordinary people. In a fresh and creative way she has developed the moral and social themes in pragmatism. She passionately believes that “the pragmatic attitude is so fruitful, both in philosophy and life, that it will continue to have its enthusiastic proponents” (p. 109). Ruth Anna’s own enthusiasm and insight are evident in everything that she has written. She shows concretely and lucidly how a pragmatic

orientation can guide us in living our lives—how the practice of pragmatism is a way of life. She is an exemplar what is best and most glorious in the American pragmatic tradition.

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