

## BOOK REVIEW:

### Richard Bernstein's Dewey in Spanish

(*Filosofía y democracia: John Dewey* (Spanish translation of *John Dewey* and related essays) by Richard J. Bernstein; Translator: Alicia García Ruiz; Introduction: Ramón del Castillo. Barcelona: Herder Editorial, 2010. 304 pp. €21.15 softcover, 978-84-254-2661-2.)

To publish a translation of Richard Bernstein's work on John Dewey, most of which was originally published as a book in 1966, may seem strange given the passage of nearly fifty years. But we are living in strange times. Many scholars have come to acknowledge the "resurgence," "revival," or "renaissance" of pragmatism in the 1990s after it was "eclipsed" by analytic philosophy beginning in the 1940s.<sup>1</sup> And given that Dewey was the only person *prominently* developing the pragmatic tradition before its "eclipse," the recent surge of interest in Dewey's philosophy seems only natural.<sup>2</sup> However, as Nancy Fraser perceptively warns us: "The most important lesson for those proposing to revive pragmatism today is this: There is not one, but several different pragmatisms. We had better know which of them we want to revive."<sup>3</sup> In fact, a parallel point could be made concerning Dewey: not one but several Deweys circulate, even among Dewey scholars themselves.<sup>4</sup> As evidenced in part by the inaugural volume of *Contemporary Pragmatism*, the most widely known pragmatism across the globe today is

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<sup>1</sup> The classic essay on pragmatism's "resurgence" is Richard J. Bernstein, "The Resurgence of Pragmatism," *Social Research* 59 (1992). Reference to pragmatism's "revival" occurs, for example, in Morris Dickstein, *The Revival of Pragmatism: New Essays on Social Thought, Law, and Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998). For a discussion of pragmatism's "renaissance" see John J. McDermott, "Epilogue: The Renaissance of Classical American Philosophy," in *The Blackwell Guide to American Philosophy*, ed. Armen T. Marsoobian and John Ryder (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004). The word "eclipse" is widely used to characterize pragmatism's marginalization, which has also been provocatively linked to the McCarthy era in John McCumber, *Time in the Ditch: American Philosophy and the McCarthy Era* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 90.

<sup>2</sup> Simply enumerating, to say nothing of reviewing, even the last fifteen years of worthwhile scholarship on Dewey is a daunting task. In striking contrast, Bernstein began writing his book on Dewey as a dissertation in the 1950s when "interest in Dewey and pragmatism seemed to be at an all-time low among academic philosophers." Richard J. Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), ix.

<sup>3</sup> Nancy Fraser, "Another Pragmatism: Alain Locke, Critical 'Race' theory, and the Politics of Culture," in *The Revival of Pragmatism: New Essays on Social Thought, Law, and Culture*, ed. Morris Dickstein (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 173.

<sup>4</sup> These different Deweys often seem to arise based upon a variety of thematic interpretive centers. We might say that there is an ethical Dewey, an aesthetic Dewey, a pedagogical Dewey, a scientific Dewey, a metaphysical Dewey, a religious Dewey, a technological Dewey, etc.

probably the brand of neo-pragmatism popularized by Richard Rorty, who attributed many of his own central philosophical doctrines to Dewey. This is not the place to consider the deep reservations expressed by prominent scholars of the classical American pragmatists concerning Rorty's interpretations of Dewey and pragmatism more generally,<sup>5</sup> but it is the place to insist that Bernstein's alternative visions of both Dewey and pragmatism are worth publicizing.

Spanish is the second most natively spoken language in the world, and insofar as Rorty, Rorty's Dewey, and Rorty's pragmatism are iconic among many Spanish-speaking scholars, the translation of Bernstein, Bernstein's Dewey, and Bernstein's pragmatism into Spanish is crucial to the continuing vitality of a tradition so committed to pluralism. Indeed, Bernstein's own philosophy is exemplary in this regard. Characterizing the best of the pragmatic tradition as "an *engaged fallibilistic pluralism*" in his Presidential Address to the APA in 1988, Bernstein has contributed to the contemporary florescence of pragmatism precisely by putting it into dialogue with other philosophical traditions.<sup>6</sup> Rejecting the simple Anglo-American/Continental split as "unilluminating and unfruitful," Bernstein's scholarship bridges philosophical traditions in an attempt "to deal with the multiplicity of perspectives and interpretations in a decentered world."<sup>7</sup> While never abandoning the pragmatic tradition, Bernstein has consistently sought to understand other traditions on their own terms, which sometimes "requires what Alasdair MacIntyre characterizes as learning a second first language where we come to recognize the ways in which rival traditions are and are not translatable."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The production of literature on Rorty's misuse of Dewey has become a cottage industry. For a list of articles spanning from 1980 to present, see Christopher J. Voparil and Richard J. Bernstein, *The Rorty Reader* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 2 n. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Richard J. Bernstein, "Pragmatism, Pluralism, and the Healing of Wounds," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 63, no. 3 (1989): 17.

<sup>7</sup> Richard J. Bernstein, "Metaphysics, Critique, and Utopia," *The Review of Metaphysics* 42, no. 2 (1988): 271.

<sup>8</sup> Bernstein, "Pragmatism, Pluralism, and the Healing of Wounds," 15.

This quote from Bernstein brings us to the tremendous service Ramón del Castillo has performed in providing such a learned and painstakingly documented historical introduction to this edited volume, which includes two additional essays on Dewey from 1986 and 2010, thereby gathering all of Bernstein's writings on Dewey into a single Spanish edition for the first time. Throughout each of his three introductory sections, del Castillo demonstrates that he has succeeded brilliantly in learning the pragmatic tradition as a second first language. Even his choice of title—*Derivas pragmatistas*—conveys the carefulness evident throughout his attempt to provide a *pragmatic* look at the origins of Bernstein's pragmatism. In other words, del Castillo is concerned with origins precisely because he is concerned with the various drifts and future directions of the pragmatic tradition. It is an intellectual history, but never a *merely* intellectual history, for he recognizes what is practically at stake given the ways in which “the conflict of narratives” (Bernstein's phrase) defines philosophy itself, especially in the United States.<sup>9</sup> We thus return to the importance of asking not just which pragmatisms, but also which Deweys we want to revive—two questions that raise the stakes of intellectual history.

Del Castillo begins his narrative in the 1930s, when John Dewey was still considered a model intellectual in the U.S., and tells a laboriously footnoted story of how Dewey's philosophy came to be seen as passé, in ways that were often contradictory (e.g., analytically inclined philosophers Dewey denounced for being a speculative metaphysician in the grand tradition of Hegel while a number of critical theorists rejected him as a crass positivist). In contrast, del Castillo paints an inspiring portrait of Dewey as a multi-faceted philosopher who wrote “about psychology and culture, about history and society, a theorist of education and politics, but also a journalist and an activist, an itinerant observer and engaged polemicist—all while the social

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<sup>9</sup> Richard J. Bernstein, *Filosofía y democracia: John Dewey*, ed. Ramón del Castillo, trans. Alicia García Ruiz (Barcelona: Herder Editorial, 2010), 9.

sciences and philosophy were veering towards a much more professionalized and scientific model.”<sup>10</sup> Today, after the crisis of analytic philosophy, and in the midst of the crisis of the humanities, a return to this Dewey—who Bernstein champions as a great teacher of “the perennial task of seeking a comprehensive vision and understanding of man and his place in the universe”—is anything but passé.<sup>11</sup>

The second section of del Castillo’s introduction leaves little doubt that Bernstein’s *John Dewey* (1966)—the book that constitutes the bulk of the present volume—was instrumental in keeping this Dewey (and the pragmatic tradition itself) alive. Del Castillo details how Bernstein studied Dewey at Yale under John E. Smith, from whom Bernstein appropriated a methodology that treats the interpretation of the history of philosophy as *internal* to the practice of philosophy itself, so that a dialogical engagement with multiple philosophical traditions becomes a critical dimension of developing one’s own philosophical voice.<sup>12</sup> Hence, it is no surprise that Bernstein attempts “to present a sympathetic, comprehensive statement of Dewey’s intellectual vision” in relation to both Dewey’s own intellectual development and the works of the other classical pragmatists. In later essays, Bernstein also relates Dewey’s philosophy to other thinkers including (but not limited to) Kant, Hegel, Marx, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Sellars, Gadamer, Habermas, MacIntyre, Taylor, Arendt, Levinas, Derrida, and Rorty.<sup>13</sup> The picture of Bernstein (and Bernstein’s Dewey) that emerges is that of a pragmatist with a talent for recognizing the potential for philosophical cross-fertilization, precisely as a way of *practicing* the Deweyan ideal

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 11; translation mine.

<sup>11</sup> I have quoted the original English phrase from Richard J. Bernstein, *John Dewey* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), 184-85; [p. 217 in the Spanish volume under review].

<sup>12</sup> John E. Smith is another scholar of the pragmatic tradition whose work deserves more attention. Unfortunately, scholars working primarily from the analytic tradition are often unaware of just how deep the living tradition of scholarship on pragmatism runs, since their knowledge of secondary literature on pragmatism is often limited to scholars like Richard Rorty or Hilary Putnam. For a discussion of this phenomenon, see Douglas Anderson, “Old Pragmatisms, New Histories,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 47, no. 4 (2009): 491.

<sup>13</sup> Bernstein, *John Dewey*, vii; [p. 37 in the Spanish volume under review].

of democracy. Even as the philosophical context and interlocutors have shifted, Bernstein continues to show how “Dewey could inspire something different, given that he had understood democracy not simply as a process of deliberation, but above all else as a way of life, as community.”<sup>14</sup> Del Castillo therefore presents Bernstein’s 1986 essay, “John Dewey on Democracy: The Task Before Us”—printed as Chapter 13 in the present volume—as the hinge of Bernstein’s corpus, a follow up to his *John Dewey* designed to show that Dewey’s pragmatism was still very much alive and relevant to present philosophical disputes and everyday problems.

Indeed, as del Castillo shows in the final section of his introduction, Bernstein continues to advocate for the value of the pragmatist *spirit* or *ethos* as a method of conducting oneself in a pluralistic philosophic universe. While Bernstein’s interlocutors became more postmodern in the 1990s, and even as Rorty treated him as an unliberated pragmatist suffering from nostalgia, Bernstein sought to demonstrate the incongruences of Rorty’s ethnocentric ironism while arguing that much still might be gained from Dewey’s reflections on *experience*.<sup>15</sup> Most recently, Bernstein’s will to reconstruct has led him back to the history of pragmatism given how it has become a pretext for revisiting (and revising) U.S. history. *The Pragmatic Turn* (2010) unites pragmatism old and new in a penetrating chronicle, as Bernstein expertly performs his role as a mediator while simultaneously adding tension to the relations between the distinct versions of contemporary pragmatism, which often express themselves through differing versions of Dewey. All of which brings us back to the question of *which* versions of the pragmatic tradition we want to revive, a question that Bernstein addresses in “John Dewey’s Radical Democracy,” which constitutes the final chapter of the present volume. Bernstein’s return to Dewey in this work is

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<sup>14</sup> Bernstein, *Filosofía y democracia: John Dewey*, 24; translation mine.

<sup>15</sup> In fact, Bernstein argues that “[Dewey’s] theory of experience and the ways in which experience is related to nature” constitutes “the heart of Dewey’s philosophic vision.” Bernstein, *John Dewey*, vii; [p. 38 in the Spanish volume under review].

not surprising, given that Bernstein concluded his *John Dewey* with a discussion of Dewey's claim that "the task of democracy is forever that of the creation of a freer and more humane experience in which all share and to which all contribute."<sup>16</sup> For over forty years, Bernstein has continued to maintain: "Nothing that has occurred since Dewey wrote this vitiates this ideal. It is still our task to work toward this ideal. Recent events, both national and international, make this task more vital."<sup>17</sup> Bernstein's career, no less than Dewey's, has been marked by a "life-long preoccupation" with the theme of democracy understood not just as a problem for philosophers, but as a task for humanity.<sup>18</sup>

When Bernstein published his first book on Dewey, it had only been fifteen years since Dewey's death, but as the twentieth century passed, Bernstein became increasingly convinced that the philosophical reports of pragmatism's demise were greatly exaggerated, since philosophers have continued to "'return' to what was a point of departure for the pragmatic thinkers."<sup>19</sup> This is perhaps Bernstein's most provocative claim with respect to the pragmatic tradition: "that Peirce, James, Dewey, and Mead were really ahead of their time—that they were initiating a sea change in philosophy [...] that many twentieth and twenty-first century philosophers—some of whom had little or no knowledge of the classical pragmatic thinkers—were dealing with similar themes and coming to similar conclusions."<sup>20</sup> Likewise, Bernstein claims that pragmatism "began as a distinctive American philosophical movement, but it has had a global reach," so that today "there is much more vigorous, extensive, and illuminating global discussion of the multifaceted aspects of pragmatism than at any time since its origins."<sup>21</sup> What

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., qtd. on 184.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 184; [p. 217 in the Spanish volume under review].

<sup>18</sup> Richard J. Bernstein, *Philosophical Profiles: Essays in a Pragmatic Mode* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 20; [p. 221 in the Spanish volume under review].

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>20</sup> Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn*, ix.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., x, 31.

remains to be seen—and this is undoubtedly the task before *us*—is *which* pragmatisms will continue to emerge. The contemporary vitality of the pragmatic tradition seems utterly contingent upon its ability to generate a philosophical discussion that is *genuinely* cosmopolitan, and this is precisely what is so encouraging about the publication of Alicia García Ruiz’s excellent Spanish translation of Bernstein’s work on Dewey, complete with an exceptionally elucidating introduction by the Spanish Americanist Ramón del Castillo. A variety of readers across Spain and Latin America will undoubtedly find this book worth reading both as an introduction to Dewey and as an introduction to Bernstein.<sup>22</sup> We can only hope that these readers will go on to challenge and contribute to Dewey’s legacy “as the thinker for whom democracy is the central theme in virtually all his works.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Bernstein recently wrote that “the themes I first explored in my first book on John Dewey (1966) have pervaded all of my writing since that time.” Sheila Greeve Davaney and Warren G. Frisina, *The Pragmatic Century: Conversations with Richard J. Bernstein* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 187.

<sup>23</sup> Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn*, 71; [p. 238 in the Spanish volume under review].

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