

SUSAN DIELEMAN, DAVID RONDEL, AND CHRISTOPHER (EDS.):
PRAGMATISM AND JUSTICE
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Introduction

In the introduction to *Pragmatism and Justice*, the editors, Susan Dieleman, David Rondel, and Christopher Voparil, note that, surprisingly, there are “no distinctly pragmatist theories of justice.”¹ They elaborate that this claim is only true if having a theory of justice means offering a set of necessary principles plus conclusions as to what institutions are needed to realize justice. In contrast, they argue that pragmatists offer various types of responsiveness to injustice. So why is there so little pragmatist writing on justice as a concept? The editors claim that this is because of pragmatism’s prioritization of concrete problems and injustices and distrust of apriori theorizing combined its emphasis upon pluralism, fallibilism and experiment. Given these aspects of pragmatism, a theory of justice is not central to the project, even if concrete issues of justice are thought central. Further, as opposed to ideal theory or the aim of a completely theorized conception of justice, pragmatists are, according to the editors, “comparativists” and are therefore comfortable with vagueness and indeterminacy in areas that are not amenable to tight line drawing.

Pragmatism and Justice is divided into three sections: (1) “The Pragmatist Turn to Justice”; (2) “Resisting Oppression and Injustice”; and (3) “Pragmatism, Liberalism and Democracy.” This organizational strategy was somewhat frustrating. One salutary aspect of pragmatism is its organic quality with a concomitant resistance to easy conceptual distinctions. I found it informative for this review to rearrange the articles in terms, first, of a set of earlier and previously

published articles thinking of them as initial constructions and then looking at the new chapters in the book as offering challenges to these articles as well as responses useful for constructing an up to date pragmatist theory that can engage fruitfully with contemporary issues of justice.

Initial Constructions of Pragmatism and Justice

The earliest article in the book is Peter T. Manicas’s 1981 piece, *Dewey and the Problem of Justice*. As is appropriate given its date, Manicas places Dewey’s social theory in relationship with John Rawls’s theory of justice, indeed he rightly claims that Rawls created a veritable theory of justice industry and therefore his theory should be explicitly compared with Dewey’s.

How does Dewey deal with the issue of justice? Manicas notes the surprising lack of justice theorizing in Dewey’s voluminous writings. He identifies the reasons for this lack as the following. First, Dewey aimed at offering a method rather than a doctrine. And second, Dewey tried to displace justice as central issue because of the baggage he thought it carried from past theories. Manicas argues that prior to Dewey there were two prevailing conceptions of justice - the organic and the atomistic or contract conception. But Dewey could not accept either. The liberal or atomistic based contract ideas were too narrow – ignoring all the social aspects of human life and self-construction. Not only does this tradition underestimate the social embeddedness of the individual, but it is often based upon ideas of individual desert and Manicas describes this aim or conceptual foundation as unworkable because issues of social position, of opportunities and abilities, cannot be disentangled from issues of production and desert.

Manicas explicitly contrasts Rawls’s difference principle with a somewhat similar aim seen in Dewey and Tuft’s *Ethics*. Whereas Rawls finds that justice demands equality unless inequality makes everybody better off, Dewey and Tufts argue for equality unless inequalities will allow each individual to develop their own powers as far as possible. Therefore, Manicas

¹ 1.

argues that for Dewey the main target is distribution of wealth. For Rawls, on the other hand, income is the crucial factor. Further, for Dewey the aim is a working program responsive to issues of injustice, whereas for Rawls the aim is a foundational theory of justice. Indeed, because for Dewey method and a working program are the preoccupations, the content of justice seems to disappear. But for Manicas to see this as a problem is to make the mistake of thinking that theory aims at a complete concept of justice that then just gets applied to various issues whereas a working program gets investigated and developed through inquiry experiment. That is, it is to accept the Rawlsian project's presuppositions – presuppositions that Dewey and the pragmatists find wanting. Instead, the Deweyan working program is a social project that necessarily involves democratic and contextually rooted experience. Here the philosopher has no special expertise – is not in a position to bring special expert insight or conceptual closure. The only way to pursue justice is through the practice of pragmatic inquiry as a working program implemented democratically – through listening to testimony of concrete experiences.

Ruth Anna Putnam's article reinforces Manicas's analysis.² She notes that when pursuing justice, the project can be thought of either as one where you apply an a priori concept or, as William James characterized it, alternatively as a practice of responding to the cries of the wounded. Indeed, instead of a philosophical expertise, that latter conception requires that the disadvantaged, those experiencing the wound, press the situation. This process does not start from readymade content, such as an elaborated conception of justice, but rather starts from concrete experience that then requires symbolic formulation of the problem and construction of an end-in-view and then the further creation of a hypothesis as to solution. Indeed, even for the cries to be seen as a public problem requires construction. Common features must be developed so as

to demand public attention. Furthermore, the end-in-view combined with a hypothetical solution functions to form a plan, a goal. But a successful solution to a specific problem often, in turn, becomes an obstacle to further ends because of new demands.

Putnam develops this pragmatist theory of justice in relationship to judging. She notes that traditionally formalism is thought more stable for judges to adopt as an interpretive strategy. But she implores us not to confuse practical certainty with purported theoretical certainty. Because pragmatism understands the judge has rooted training and practice in a professional and institutional context, she argues that real world stability is possible through pragmatist judging even in the face of new demands and challenges. Instead of a concept to be applied, the judge has a working set of tools to inform inquiry of even the most novel situation. Formalism, on the other hand, cannot handle the demands of the novel situation in any stable manner and will have to resort to ad hoc strategies. Putnam, that is, places the pragmatist judge in the context of a social practice of inquiry rather than in a realm of conceptual theory.

In the third earliest article in the book, Hilary Putnam develops what he labels Dewey's "epistemological justification of Democracy."³ Putnam claims that Dewey argued successfully that democratic practice is a "precondition for the full application of *intelligence* to the solution of social problems."⁴ That is, full human flourishing requires the use of scientific method which, in turn, requires democratic practices. Democracy is, according to Dewey, "simply the method of experimental inquiry combined with free and full discussion-which means, in the case of social problems, the maximum use of the capacities of citizens for proposing courses of action, for testing them, and for evaluating the results."⁵

As in the previous two chapters, to pursue solutions to social problems does not require overarching

² *Justice in Context*.

³ *Reconsidering Deweyan Democracy*, 249.

⁴ 249.

⁵ 254.

theories, therefore, but rather requires an understanding of how to solve problems. Putnam notes that Dewey's theory is not that effective in acts of individuals where individuality is at stake, and that Dewey was too attached to a narrower idea of human goods than can be justified (here he turns to William James to develop a more pluralistic and open theory). He claims, nevertheless, that Dewey's theory of democracy is an excellent philosophy of democratic social practice. Indeed, because it requires experiment and open communication to be embodied, Putnam notes that it also requires oppressed and marginalized groups be given opportunity to develop their capacities. Therefore, though it is not a great theory for individual choices it is an effective theory for constructing and understanding quite thick requirements of social justice.

In this Putnam notes that Dewey had a clear awareness that democracy demands the social conditions necessary for ensuring democratic capabilities far beyond those characterized in theories offering "negative" or minimalist ideas of freedom. That is, full and developed capacities are a necessary precondition for democracy. Therefore, education is central to democratic aims. Indeed, Putnam concludes poignantly, "Education must be designed to produce men and women who are capable of learning on their own and of thinking critically. The extent to which we take the commitment to democracy seriously is measured by the extent to which we take the commitment to education seriously. In these days, saying these words fills me with shame for the state of democracy at the end of the twentieth century."⁶ One can only wonder what he would think today as educational support has dwindled further from the time his article was written.

Interestingly, Richard Rorty's version of pragmatism seems to pretty much eliminate the very epistemic justification of democracy that Putnam deems central. In *Justice as a Larger Loyalty*, Rorty notes that it is standard

to see a conflict between social loyalties and the demands of justice. He argues that it is better to see this as a matter of conflicting loyalties rather than choice between loyalty and justice. As an example of this he asks that if democratic government requires affluence, then what happens between nations if a choice between alleviating world poverty and protecting affluent democracy becomes necessary? Rorty argues that rather than a conflict between loyalty and justice this is just a question of competing loyalties. Under this description, justice might be described as just the loyalty to our largest group, that is, our broadest loyalty. In this sense justice is not a difference in kind with loyalty, just a broader perspective. Further, Rorty argues that all morality is thick, socially embedded, and determined by group membership. Dilemmas of loyalty are, therefore, actually choices between alternative selves, meanings, and groups. But as loyalties get more abstract and less concrete they also get broader. Therefore, descriptions such as "citizen of world" become very abstract, detail is lacking and therefore loyalties are more tenuous.

Rorty contrasts this analysis with Rawls's theory of justice which he sees as resting on a trans-cultural conception of what is reasonable. This Rorty describes as an attempt to identify reasonable people outside of ethnocentric stories. He argues that this view from outside of culture is not available. Indeed, just as loyalties are "thick" and culture-bound, so are conceptions of reason. Therefore, there is no question-begging position from which to judge justice or reasonableness. Just as Rorty offers a description of justice as competing loyalties, he offers a redescription of rationality as inclusive conversation based upon offers rather than threats. Reason should be seen simply as "reaching agreement through persuasion."⁷ Ultimately, he hopes that this brings about an attempt to bridge differences and enlarge loyalties through attempting to build a "community of trust" via the telling of instructive stories.

⁶ 263.

⁷ 32.

Nancy Fraser builds upon another of Rorty's ideas in her article, *Abnormal Justice*. Drawing on Thomas Kuhn's work on paradigm shifts in science, Rorty famously argued that intramundane or normal discourse contrasted with non-normal discourse. Normal discourse was discourse where the understandings were standardized and mutually understood. Non-normal discourse was discourse that could not assume mutually understood assumptions.

Fraser extends this distinction to the discussion of justice. Normal justice discourse, therefore, rests upon mutually accepted assumptions. But this is problematic, she asserts, because such agreement very well might rest upon "suppression or marginalization of those who dissent from the reigning consensus."⁸ Therefore, the traits of abnormal justice discourse must be investigated. Indeed, Fraser finds that the contemporary situation is one where most justice discourse is abnormal because most often there is no shared understanding of what justice claims should look like, who and what should get redressed, who should be included in the conversation and who should get consideration.

Fraser goes on to identify "three principle nodes" of abnormality in justice discourse. First, there often is no shared view of the what of justice is. Second agreement might not be available on "who" should be considered. Finally, a shared understanding of "how" is not always available. She notes that an earlier normalized justice debate was centered upon distributive issues, but this went along with an exclusion of the issues of recognition and representation. Because of this, it is important to be suspicious of normalizing assumptions. The positive side of non-normal justice debate is that it offers a more inclusive and expanding field of contestation.

But not all is positive. For Fraser the negative aspect is that non-normal contestation without a background of stable frameworks and institutional agencies cannot be effective. Therefore, Fraser thinks that non-normal justice debates need a common measure that

"overarches them all."⁹ To serve this overarching framework she proposes a "parity of participation" principle. All effected, that is, must participate as peers. This is described as a "multidimensional social ontology with normative monism."¹⁰ In terms of who is considered she offers an "all-subjected" principle requiring that "all those who are subject to a given governance structure have moral standing as subjects in relation to it."¹¹ This is to be interpreted broadly and includes nonstate agencies. Subjection is to be interpreted broadly as well. Further, it must be ensured that this overarching structure offers fair procedure and representative structure with the capacity to make binding decisions. On the other hand, this structure must have reflexive self-problematizing capacities and treat every closure as provisional therefore preserving the positive side of non-normal justice discourse. Of course, this seems to commit Fraser to an overarching normalized frame within with non-normal discourse must function, perhaps threatening the openness that noting the non-normal aspects of justice theorizing requires.

In the final reprinted paper, *Social Inequality, Power, and Politics: Intersectionality in Dialogue with American Pragmatism*, Patricia Hill Collins argues that pragmatism and intersectionality analysis have a lot to offer each other. Most basically, Collins argues that conceptions of freedom are less central to contemporary thought as compared to issues of inequality and power. She argues that earlier versions of pragmatism were not sufficiently engaged with power and inequality. More specifically, Pragmatists did not give enough attention to race, gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, or nationality. This made the classical pragmatists unable to imagine concrete black lives or female human beings, and "As a result, social inequality, power, and politics were defined out of the *center* of American pragmatism."¹² But, Collins

⁸ 38.

⁹ 48.

¹⁰ 49.

¹¹ 52-53.

¹² 150.

admits, of course individual pragmatists became important in these areas. Further, for her pragmatism overly emphasizes rationality to the detriment of emotion. Her conclusion as to pragmatism's weaknesses; "In essence, the discourse lacked a self-reflexivity on its own universalistic assumptions."¹³

Importantly, Collins does admit that this analysis of pragmatism's weaknesses may be unfair, as I would argue her picture of emotion and reason in pragmatism is, but properly argues that much more important is the constructive project of utilizing pragmatism in support of intersectionality analysis. According to her, pragmatism offers intersectionality a helpful and demanding analysis of community and the socially situated and constructed self. This thick conception of self and community to can be used as a "template" to understand power relations. In addition, pragmatist analysis is aware of the importance and centrality of symbolism's function in the creation of community. Indeed, for Collins the notion of community itself functions as a powerful and flexible symbol that can combine appeal to emotions, values, and action. Community is therefore always in the physical and symbolic making. Indeed, as also noted by Putnam, Collins emphasizes that community and participatory democracy are "always bundled together."¹⁴ Further, Collins offers that pragmatism's robust concept of experience can help intersectionality analysis and help highlight the connections between social structure and the various knowledges of communities.

Challenges and Responses

It is informative to treat the articles newly published in the *Pragmatism and Justice* anthology as responding to the reprinted articles outlined above. For example, in *A Pragmatist Account of Legitimacy and Authority: Holmes, Ramsey, and the Moral Force of Law*, Cheryl Misak

follows up and elaborates upon the themes that Ruth Anna Putnam wrote about – law and pragmatism. Misak rightly notes that the common law has much in common with the theory of inquiry offered by Wittgenstein, Dewey and Frank Ramsey. And David Rondel, in *William James on Justice and the Sacredness of Individuality*, furthers the turn to William James seen in Hilary Putnam when the need is to emphasize the importance of the specific individual. Rondel links James's radical subjective inwardness and "cosmic egalitarianism" with democratic individuality.¹⁵ Rondel also notes, though, that this Jamesian aversion to bigness renders social structures, negative or positive, somewhat invisible thus giving a somewhat mirror-image analysis to that offered by Hilary Putnam.

Robert Talisse's Chapter, *Pragmatism, Democracy, and the Need for a Theory of Justice*, can be read as a counterpoint to Manicas's analysis of Dewey's take on justice theory. Talisse agrees with Manicas that it is surprising that there is not more justice theory from the earlier pragmatists. But he disagrees on the import of this lack. For Talisse, Dewey was good at analyzing democracy as intelligence in Putnam's sense of epistemological justification. But for him the lack of justice talk is why "Dewey takes no account of the ways in which socially and economically entrenched forms of exclusion, marginalization, and homogenization block access to membership in publics; similarly, he provides no analysis of the social mechanisms that would be required in order to assure citizens of the kind of equality necessary to make democratic participation effective. And, further, he gives no analysis of the multiple ways in which material disadvantages are causally connected to democratic deficits."¹⁶

According to Talisse these all are ultimately issues of justice. The epistemic view of democracy needs therefore, he claims, a concept of justice to enable an understanding of the necessary aspects constitutive of

¹³ 150.

¹⁴ 153.

¹⁵ 310, 313.

¹⁶ 283.

democracy. Indeed, “it is the role of a theory of justice to examine how the material and social resources of society must be apportioned if democracy, here understood as shared social inquiry, is to commence.”¹⁷ Dewey, that is, needs a theory of justice to be able to understand the necessities of democracy without which his theory is fatally incomplete. Talisse offers his own conception – “democratic egalitarianism” - where citizens are treated as equal participants and stakeholders, as a conception of justice that would properly inform Dewey’s democratic theory. Talisse is explicit in his claim that a just democratic society requires a basic structuralist answer. That is, certain specific and identifiable agencies of government such as courts, education, etc., are required in any just democracy. Furthermore, if democracy is justified epistemologically, he concludes that its scope must be cosmopolitan. But this renders quite explicit the problem of the need for shared experience versus the Deweyan emphasis upon the uniqueness of local experience.

But here Talisse ignores important points made by Manicas. Further, he overstates his own claims and conclusions. In terms of the analysis Manicas offers, Talisse ignores the fact that for Dewey the aim was to develop a working program, not to develop a concept of justice. Dewey thought theorizing justice rather than developing democratic tools of analysis was to make the mistake of thinking that theory aims at a concept of justice that then just gets applied to various issues. To the contrary, a working program develops content through actual concrete experience, inquiry and experiment. Here the philosopher has no special expertise –therefore the only way to pursue justice is through the practice of democratic inquiry. Furthermore, Talisse argues that democracy to be legitimate must be evaluated through the lens of justice which he claims he shows is necessarily required. To the contrary, if the epistemic justification of democracy is correct, it is just not the case that Dewey cannot critique material

disparities or account for the ways in which social and economic exclusion, marginalization, and homogenization block access to membership in publics. In fact, thick democratic practice requires proper critique of these forms of epistemic blockage, just as scientific practice would require proper openness and sustaining conditions to be properly practices. Ultimately, it is not clear what work adding the word “justice” to the mix really adds. And, of course, it might - if too normalized - help exclude inquiry in to further necessities for full democratic society.

Indeed, the articles by Jose Medina and Paul C. Taylor go a long way in showing how pragmatism can be understood to react to just such inequalities and structural experiments without invoking anything near a thick theory of justice. In *Pragmatism, Racial Injustice, and Epistemic Insurrection: Toward an Insurrectionist Pragmatism*, Jose Medina argues that to be considered legitimate, pragmatism needs to face the tragedy of injustice and satisfy the need for insurrectionist potential. Therefore, the question becomes how to justify insurrectionist action in light of the pragmatist requirements of experimentalism and meliorism. If it is the case that pragmatism needs insurrectionist ability to handle United States racism and white supremacy, can it provide the necessary tools? Medina argues that bringing together Dewey, Jane Addams, Alain Locke, and Maria Stewart, especially Stewart’s concept of full personhood and human flourishing, pragmatism does indeed carry insurrectionist potential.

Medina, once again, asks how the standard pragmatist meliorism and demand for evidence of effectiveness or duty can be compatible with insurrection in the face of grave exploitation or abuse. Would not an obsession with prediction and control get in the way of uncertain acts in service of an unknown future? He claims, quite plausibly, that “*the epistemic requirement of predictability and controllability must be given up in situations of radical exclusion and oppression*

¹⁷ 285.

that call for insurrectionary actions and practices.”¹⁸

Required are reasons that allow for “insurrectionary action.” But, of course, one only has to think of William James and his will to believe to show that pragmatism has the ability to offer such tools. As Medina states, concrete lived experience and a commitment to human flourishing are sufficient sources of motivation when faced with injustice. While one might argue with the soundness of such statements as, “the more radical the injustice in question, the more radical the response needed.”¹⁹ Certainly rephrased as, “the more radical the injustice the more urgent the effective response” is warranted. And clearly one proper response is his epistemic resistance defined as the “epistemic self-empowerment of oppressed subjects and groups.”²⁰

Paul Taylor’s “friendly amendment” of Medina’s theory adds another tool to the pragmatist quest for democratic society.²¹ He argues that in addition to Medina’s epistemic resistance the aesthetic can serve as an effective tool of resistance. He notes that Dewey’s *Art as Experience* properly and importantly highlights the “ubiquity of the aesthetic.” Therefore, it is important to realize the areas of aesthetic practice that are habitual and that can be intervened on with “counterhabituation.” Taylor gives as an example black aesthetics, which he describes as a pluralist area where aesthetic creation has been expressly utilized to develop tools of resistance. If, he concludes, “social life and aesthetic experience are reciprocally constitutive” then story and other aspects of the aesthetic become areas of powerful possibility.²²

Gregory Fernando Pappas expands upon Taylor’s point in that he highlights the radical experiential resources that pragmatist thought makes available to problems of injustice.²³ For instance, he critiques

Elizabeth Anderson’s theory because she overly focuses upon the evidence available from the social sciences. It is not that this does not count as evidence. Rather, the evidentiary resources go well beyond social science. For instance, he notes the way Jane Addams gained experience because she “put herself in to the world.” Pappas argues that a broadly mixed-methods research agenda avoids the vice of allowing theory to become a blinder. And, as with Taylor, the realm of evidence and action goes well beyond the epistemological. Further, Pappas finds it essential to emphasize that Dewey always started with a specific problematic situation where a concrete problem of injustice is identified. He analogizes this to the clinical situation of doctor with patient. This, he argues, parallels the radical singularity of each instance of injustice. As well as the provisional aspect of any diagnoses.

This emphasis upon radical singularity is challenged in Matthew Festenstein’s *Ideal and Actual in Dewey’s Political Theory*. Rather than focus upon the radical singularity of the problematic situation, Festenstein focuses upon the question of where the ideal fits in to Dewey’s theory of inquiry. He claims that therein, the ideal is best conceived of as a tendency viewed as completed and perfected. The role of ideals in inquiry is not as an abstract goal separate from means. Rather, they must have effective role in thinking. With Pappas he accepts the “methodological priority of injustice” and of the aim of local improvements rather than perfect justice. But, he argues that pragmatism is not as particularist as Pappas because “Generalization is ineliminable” and there is the requirement of ideality.²⁴ This is because the quest for a more just world is an activity rooted in problems, but the problems are seen in terms of more general goals. Ideals are, when properly understood, tools helpful in this quest. As Festenstein puts it, “ideality is not dispensable but a feature of a

¹⁸ 206.

¹⁹ 207.

²⁰ 207.

²¹ *An Aesthetics of Resistance: Deweyan Experimentalism and Epistemic Injustice*

²² 224.

²³ *Empirical Approaches to Problems of Injustice:*

Elizabeth Anderson and the Pragmatists

²⁴ 110.

reflective response to a problem.”²⁵ As such, ideals should be judged in terms of their fruitfulness to generate analysis and construction. Take, for instance, Dewey’s ideal of democracy. Democracy is offered as the ideal of community life. But this concept is not utopian, and not just an a priori regulative assumption, but rather “a heuristic formed in nonideal circumstances which suggest possibilities for action and for how our values may relate to one another.”²⁶

Christopher Voparil’s chapter, *Pragmatism’s Contribution to Nonideal Theorizing: Fraser, Addams, and Rorty*, expands upon Fraser’s investigation of non-normal justice theory. While he agrees with her overall highlighting of the seemingly ubiquitous non-normal aspects of justice, he argues that “Fraser’s prioritizing of conceptual clarity risks granting temporal priority to theorizing (abnormal) justice at the expense of addressing current injustices.”²⁷ That is, it seeks conceptual clarity over the project of understanding and solving pressing and concrete problems of injustice. Voparil argues for a turn towards the work of Jane Addams and that “creating a democratic moral community attainable only through sympathetic knowledge and mutual understanding” is needed to remedy injustice.²⁸

Many other chapters are written in the spirit of Collins, that is, either pointing out areas that were not covered sufficiently in the writings of the classical pragmatists or with the intent of showing how pragmatism can help contemporary justice centered projects. This is quite proper for pragmatist theory to do and these chapters offer some of the most interesting and challenging aspects of the anthology.

For example, in *Realism, Pragmatism, and Critical Social Epistemology*, Susan Dieleman investigates whether social epistemology needs a realist foundation. This is thought important because any such

epistemological tool seemingly must diagnose the lack of correspondence to the real and make the injustice concrete. Her chosen example is the theory of Charles Mill and the epistemology of ignorance. Mill, she argues, shows a fear of postmodernism because he requires that there must be a way to see rightly or wrongly and postmodern thought seems to eliminate this possibility. Indeed, what would a claim of structural ignorance consist of if not founded on a distinction between true and false? Dieleman claims, contrary to the purported need for realism, that pragmatism works just as well. First, she claims that we must follow Rorty and realize that there is no independent test for accuracy. Once this limitation is accepted, instead of looking for a real that transcends perspective, we must use changes in vocabulary and pragmatist tools to reconstruct justice. Rortian resdescription is “a pragmatist account of social progress-and by extension, of justice” and “provides us with a nonrealist framework in which to theorize and practice critical social epistemology.”²⁹ Pragmatist tools, as emphasized by multiple authors, also allows the use of various types of evidence – such as the testimonial and hermeneutical. Dieleman shows, briefly, how this broader set of tools has worked in the trans community. Ultimately, she argues that the tools of resdescription and redefinition are more helpful than realist assumptions because contingency must be embraced and new possibilities must be constructed.

V. Denise James offers an important analysis of pragmatism’s ability to be radical.³⁰ She argues that putting Dewey and Du Bois together helps to find some often unnoticed radicalism in pragmatic philosophy. James further argues that Dewey’s lack of racial frame creates a significant lack in his analysis of freedom and justice. Therefore, Du Bois’s analysis of oppression and need for change is an essential corrective. Reading Dewey and Du Bois together, it is claimed, shows that the distinction between freedom and justice cannot be

²⁵ 103.

²⁶ 108.

²⁷ 66.

²⁸ 72.

²⁹ 137.

³⁰ *Pragmatism and Radical Social Justice: Dewey, Du Bois, and Davis*

sustained – that freedom and justice are intertwined in a messy and inseparable complex. James then adds Angela Davis’s thought to the mix to create a properly radical pragmatist notion of justice and social change.

A distinction is made by James between radicalism and revolutionary thought. Revolutionary thought requires both willingness to risk life and limb (as does radical thought) but also a “conviction that the whole of society needed to be made anew, at once.”³¹ This the pragmatists see as a form of absolutism. But, James continues, Dewey’s conception of social justice was too abstract, too attached to freedom rather than justice, was all too white. Even so, James concludes that we should keep his inclusive view of democracy and his radical democratic commitment, but more concrete descriptions of the conditions necessary for their realization must be offered.

Indeed, James claims that because for Dewey freedom was seen as distinct from justice, “Dewey subscribes to a notion of freedom that is fraught with historical and experiential problems.”³² Here James seems absolutely correct. James is on dubious grounds, though, when she goes on to claim that is because, “Dewey...often treated effective or negative freedom as a priority without due consideration of his own subject position.”³³ This seems patently false, if anything Dewey was clear on the substantial positive requirements for freedom, even if mistaken on specifics. But it is surely correct that Deweyan social theory can greatly benefit from a “black radical corrective.” The theory of Du Bois can indeed bring together in much more concrete terms issues of justice and emancipation as well as the radical importance of group-based social justice claims. James also combines Dewey’s theory with Davis’s. Both see the aims of freedom as constructed through poetic knowledge. But, “Where Davis differs from Dewey, at least in emphasis, is in her insistence that freedom is a collective enterprise that requires we constantly attend

to history.”³⁴ This seems correct as long as we argue more specifically that Dewey was insufficiently inclusive of the history of groups. Certainly, Dewey knew we needed to attend to history, but the invisibility of historically important groups (in his theory if not his actions) is a notable and troubling feature of his work, and one that requires rectification in current pragmatist thought.

In *Contesting Injustice: Why Pragmatist Political Thought Needs Du Bois*, Colin Koopman asks whether or not pragmatism can motivate when “shining ideals” are needed. Koopman focuses upon the “challenge to contestation.” That is, can pragmatism motivate contestation in the face of injustice? Koopman thinks that in Dewey’s case the answer is maybe not. But, importantly, Dewey’s thought is not the only resource. Therefore, a turn to Du Bois and William James is helpful. From James, Koopman takes the emphasis upon the clinical case rather than conceptual application. He argues that James’s thought offers a “double-barreled pragmatism.” One aspect of his ethics is just like physical science, but the other acknowledges victory and defeat as well as social struggle. James, he argues, faced the sometimes tragic aspect of social conflict whereas Dewey tried to avoid conflict. Indeed, Koopman finds important, “James’ attentiveness to the butchering involved in moral and political contestation.”³⁵ For Koopman this aligns with “Du Bois’s patient acknowledgement of strife as constitutive of the political.”³⁶ Also important is Du Bois’s emphasis upon the importance of discontent and struggle combined with a lack of moralistic tone. This is because, “contestation must become cunning, strategic, and politicizing in intent.”³⁷ Importantly in light of the critique of Dewey’s social theory as too abstract, Koopman notes that Du Bois offers a theory that analyzes six different forms of social interaction;

³¹ 164.

³² 167.

³³ 168.

³⁴ 174.

³⁵ 183.

³⁶ 183.

³⁷ 183-184.

“physical proximity, economic relations, political relations, intellectual contact, social contact, and religious enterprise.”³⁸ Under this type of pragmatic social thought, instead of an overly harmonious picture of social progress, democratic contestation and “contestatory pragmatism” is emphasized. Tragic strife and tools necessary for “sustaining contestation amidst perilous conflict” are also emphasized.³⁹ Indeed, as opposed to Dewey, for Koopman, Du Bois understands that progress is “necessarily ugly.”

Of course, it is possible that the “shining ideals” or even the tools for contestation chosen might be ineffective or even detrimental. Or, as Ruth Anna Putnam noted, they might have been very serviceable in one context and now have become obsolete or impediments. Shannon Sullivan, in *Setting Aside Hope: A Pragmatist Approach to Racial Justice*, argues for the need to look for strategies “beyond liberal faith in civil rights and white people’s good intentions to cooperate with racial change.”⁴⁰ She argues that fixation on “hope” as that faith in civil rights has got in the way of the necessary task of expanding the number and types of tools available. Indeed, according to her analysis, in contemporary culture black hope is a type of cruel and dysfunctional optimism. To support this, Sullivan uses some results of social science as evidence that hope as defined is actually physically harmful to black people. Instead of following Cornel West and believing that the right thing will happen in the end, she argues that it would be better to realize with Derrick Bell that is contemporary society racism is permanent and indestructible. Hope is, therefore, a farce, indeed a political fantasy. As she puts it succinctly, what is needed is coping rather than hoping skills.

Conclusion

Pragmatism and Justice is a challenging anthology on many levels. As can be seen by the overview above, the anthology is wide-ranging and somewhat idiosyncratic. The relationship between pragmatism and justice needs systematic treatment and Dieleman, Rondel, and Voparil’s efforts certainly have made a stride towards a better understanding of the tools pragmatism offers for issues of justice, or perhaps better, injustice. The articles are ultimately somewhat uneven, with many offering what I would consider somewhat confused pictures of the theories they are critiquing. For instance, I do not think Shannon Sullivan’s description of Cornel West’s hope is accurate. Portraying him as having certainty that “the right thing will happen in the end” seems to ignore the explicit aspect of human tragedy that West accepts. But this is a somewhat trivial criticism of her important point that the specific hope seen in civil rights discourse might have its own avoidable limitations and that greater tools must be developed for progress in race relations in the United States to happen. More problematic are incomplete portrayals of pragmatism’s tools and tenants such as treating Dewey’s theory as allowing negative views of rights or as frustrating urgent reform. Also strange is the relative lack of responses to the Rawls, et al, theory of justice industry. While I think it is true that pragmatism offers a salutary alternative to the Rawlsian tradition of conceptual theories of justice, emphasizing the identification of particular injustices and experimental and constructive melioristic responses to concrete experience, the relative invisibility of other philosophical responses to the issue of justice is somewhat troubling none the less. The justice industry in philosophy is long and wide – surely some of the tools it offers could be put to good use in pragmatist philosophy.

More important, though, are the positive aspects of the anthology. *Pragmatism and Justice* offers three helpful sets of writings. First there are the reprinted articles that help construct a basic set of pragmatist

³⁸ 184.

³⁹ 187.

⁴⁰ 231.

tools for issues of justice. Particularistic and experimental pragmatist inquiry, the epistemic justification of democracy and the idea of non-normal justice discourse are three important tools among the many offered that can help build a workable pragmatist response to injustice. Second, there are chapters that properly extend the list of authors and theories that count as pragmatist. The ever-greater inclusion of figures such as Jane Addams, Du Bois, Angela Davis, etc., in the core set of pragmatist theorists is important and very helpful in understanding what the greater working project of pragmatism offers. Also important here are the chapters that help fill out theories of pragmatist inquiry and search for a greater breadth of tools than the narrowly progressivist cliché version of pragmatism would seem to allow. Third, there are articles that bring pragmatist analysis in to contact with contemporary issues and theories. As a working program that is supposed to be flexible, experimental and issue-driven, it should not be surprising that earlier pragmatists did not develop the necessary tools for contemporary issues. Of course it is striking the absence of acknowledgement of issues that were obviously pressing in their times such as the ubiquity of white supremacy. But it is important to acknowledge that given a pragmatist understanding of philosophical inquiry new tools are always needed, and old tools often become obstructions (perhaps even more so due to their earlier success). Bringing pragmatist theory into greater contact with other tools and areas of inquiry is very important and this anthology offers a good start.

Susan Dieleman, David Rondel, and Christopher Voparil have done important work in bringing together the papers included in *Pragmatism and Justice*. The anthology offers an overview of many of the basic methodologies, figures and contemporary issues involved in a pragmatist investigation of justice. The relative absences from the anthology, for instance the before-mentioned absence of other theories of justice, but more importantly the absence of extended analysis of issues such as international relations, economic

structure, details of democratic process, etc., and the use and usefulness let alone application of pragmatist tools outside of the borders of the United States, are due less to faults in the anthology but rather more to do with the breadth of the urgent and pressing aspects of injustice that demand attention in the contemporary world. Certainly, the anthology provides tools and motivation for further action.