

The American Evasion of Philosophy

A Genealogy of Pragmatism

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The Coming-of-Age of American Pragmatism: John Dewey

The endeavor to democratize the idea of God goes hand in hand with pragmatism, and both arise out of the spirit of "This, Here, and Soon."

– Johan Huizinga

American pragmatism reaches its highest level of sophisticated articulation and engaged elaboration in the works and life of John Dewey. To put it crudely, if Emerson is the American Vico, and James and Peirce our John Stuart Mill and Immanuel Kant, then Dewey is the American Hegel and Marx! On the surface, these farfetched comparisons reveal the poverty of the American philosophical tradition, the paucity of intellectual world-historical figures in the American grain. But on a deeper level, these comparisons disclose a distinctive feature of American pragmatism: its diversity circumscribed by the Emersonian evasion of epistemology-centered philosophy and the Emersonian theodicy of the self and America.

John Dewey is the greatest of the American pragmatists because he infuses an inherited Emersonian preoccupation with power, provocation, and personality—permeated by voluntaristic, amelioristic, and activist themes—with the great discovery of nineteenth-century Europe: a mode of historical consciousness that highlights the conditioned and circumstantial character of human existence in terms of changing societies, cultures, and

communities. Dewey is the first American pragmatist who revises Emersonian motifs of contingency and revisability in the light of modern historical consciousness.¹

For Emerson, history is a spatialized form of temporality awaiting occupation by a self that creates itself; hence, history is heroic autobiography. For James, history is an undifferentiated background against which heroic individuals fight and struggle. Similar to Emerson's, James's conception of the cosmos and nature celebrates plurality and mystery, yet in both of their views, history roughly amounts to temporal frontiers to be confronted and conquered by willful persons. For Peirce, history is an evolutionary process in need of human direction and communal guidance. He introduces a crucial social element that offsets the Emersonian and Jamesian individualisms. Yet this social element stresses the communal at the expense of the societal; that is, it takes seriously intermediate human associations and collectivities, but fails to consider the larger social structures, political systems, and economic institutions.

The grand breakthrough of Dewey is not only that he considers these larger structures, systems, and institutions, but also that he puts them at the center of his pragmatic thought without surrendering his allegiance to Emersonian and Jamesian concerns with individuality and personality. Like Hegel, Dewey views modern historical consciousness—awareness of the radical contingency and variability of human societies, cultures, and communities—as the watershed event in contemporary thought. To cross this Rubicon is to enter a new intellectual terrain—to shun old philosophic forms of dualism, absolutism, and transcendentalism and to put forward new social theoretic understandings of knowledge, power, wealth, and culture. Just as Marx conceives the *Aufhebung* of philosophy to be a social theory of society and history and of revolution and emancipation, so Dewey holds pragmatism to be a historical theory of critical intelligence and scientific inquiry and of reform and amelioration.

The privileged moral tropes in both Marx and Dewey are individuality, social freedom, and democracy. Yet Marx's vision and project are more ambitious than those of Dewey. This is so, in part, because as a more profound social theorist than Dewey, Marx sees and understands more clearly why and how early industrial capitalist conditions preclude individuality, social freedom, and democratic participation for the majority of the European and American populace. Furthermore, Marx theorizes from the vantage point of and in solidarity with the industrial working class of nineteenth-century Europe—an exploited, unfranchised, and downtrodden people—whereas Dewey writes from the vantage point of and in leadership over that rising professional fraction of the working class and managerial class that is in sympathy with and has some influence among an exploited yet franchised industrial working class in the United States.

True to the American pragmatic grain, Dewey rejects the metaphysical residues in Marx: the Hegelian-inspired penchant toward totalizing history, universalizing collectivities, and simplifying emancipation. These residues tend to overlook the vast complexities of history, the sheer heterogeneity of collectivities, and the various complications of emancipation. Therefore, for Dewey, Marxist perspectives (given his rather frail yet still noteworthy grasp of them)² tend toward premature totalities, and homogeneities that ignore uniqueness, difference, and diversity. Yet, like any other viewpoint, Marxisms have to be put to the tests of critical scrutiny, experimental consequences, and moral valuation. In the twenties (after his visit to Russia), Dewey celebrates the Soviet experiment in education, but by the mid-twenties he castigates Stalinism in quite harsh terms.³ For Dewey, the march of freedom in history is embodied in the best of American democracy, and the march of America in history is to be viewed critically in light of the best of American democracy. He puts pragmatism on the international historical stage, yet he still views history through an American lens. In this way, Dewey—like Hegel and Marx—historicizes philosophy; and, like Emerson, James, and Peirce, Americanizes history.

In short, Dewey tries to take history seriously as he creatively revises the Emersonian evasion of modern philosophy, carefully affirms the Emersonian theodicy, and critically enriches the American pragmatic tradition. John Dewey is not only the giant of this tradition and *the* towering force in American philosophy; he is also the sifting funnel through which much of the best and some but little of the worst of American culture flow. As Horace Kallen noted in 1939, “As I see it, it will be Dewey, not Ford, not Edison, not Roosevelt, who, when the last word has been said and the last vote has been counted, will figure as the pregnant symbol of what is best in the America of today and most hopeful for the Americanism of tomorrow.”⁴

Dewey on Historical Consciousness, Critical Intelligence, and Creative Democracy

John Dewey is the culmination of the tradition of American pragmatism. After him, to be a pragmatist is to be a social critic, literary critic, or a poet—in short, a participant in cultural criticism and cultural creation. This does not mean that Dewey provides panaceas for philosophical problems or solutions to societal crises. Rather, Dewey helps us see the complex and mediated ways in which philosophical problems are linked to societal crises. More important, Dewey enables us to view clashing conceptions of philosophy as struggles over cultural ways of life, as attempts to define the role and function of intellectual authorities in culture and society. For Dewey, to take modern historical consciousness seriously in philosophy is first and foremost to engage in metaphilosophical reflection, to reform

and reconstruct philosophy as a mode of intellectual activity. To reform and reconstruct philosophy is both to demystify and to defend the most reliable mode of inquiry in modern culture, namely, critical intelligence best manifest in the community of scientists. And to demystify and defend critical intelligence is to render it more and more serviceable for the enhancement of human individuality, that is, the promotion of human beings who better control their conditions and thereby more fully create themselves (i.e., advance creative democracy).

Dewey's fundamental concerns with the metaphilosophical implications of modern historical consciousness, the cultural ramifications of demystifying and defending critical intelligence, and the political consequences of expanding creative democracy are put forward in his poignant and poetic panegyric to Ralph Waldo Emerson. In this unusual Dewey essay, his typical bland sentences become lively sparks of expression; his glib formulations, vivacious evocations; his flat logical constructions, dancing, staccato metaphors and tropes. Like James and Peirce, Dewey could not avoid or candidly jettison Emerson. Like James—though unlike Peirce—Dewey implicitly acknowledges and explicitly celebrates his own debts to Emerson. In fact, his brief essay on Emerson is, surprisingly, far more insightful and revealing than the more renowned sharp treatments by William James, George Santayana, Robert Frost, and Maurice Maeterlinck (with whom Dewey fully agrees in regarding Emerson as “the sage of ordinary days”).⁵

Dewey begins the Emerson essay on a metaphilosophical note.

It is said that Emerson is not a philosopher. I find this denegation false or true according as it is said in blame or praise—according to the reasons proffered. When the critic writes of lack of method, of the absence of continuity, of coherent logic, and, with the old story of the string of pearls loosely strung, puts Emerson away as a writer of maxims and proverbs, a recorder of brilliant insights and abrupt aphorisms, the critic, to my mind, but writes down his own incapacity to follow a logic that is very finely wrought.⁶

The problem with “the critic”—or those who quickly dismiss Emerson as mere stylist and recorder—is that they look for a method separate from the lives and practices of human beings. They need a set of propositions or algorithms “separately propounded” from people’s intuitions and judgments. Dewey then unequivocally—and maybe exorbitantly—states:

I am not acquainted with any writer, no matter how assured his position in treatises upon the history of philosophy, whose movement of thought is more compact and unified, nor one who combines more adequately diversity of intellectual attack with concentration of form and effect.⁷

Of course, Plato, Montaigne, Pascal, and Nietzsche immediately come to mind as competitors here (to say the least!). But Dewey’s aim is not really

to “rank” Emerson as the greatest X or Y, but rather to force philosophers to take Emerson seriously as a challenge to their narrow conceptions of philosophy, conceptions that encourage them to devalue and debunk the Emersons of *modern* philosophical discourse. Dewey is claiming not that Emerson is first and foremost a philosopher but rather that Emerson’s evasion of philosophy has deep metaphilosophical implications.

Perhaps those are nearer right, however, who deny that Emerson is a philosopher, because he is more than a philosopher. He would work, he says, by art, not by metaphysics, finding truth “in the sonnet and the play.” “I am,” to quote him again, “in all my theories, ethics and politics, a poet”; and we may, I think, safely take his word for it that he meant to be a maker rather than a reflector. His own preference was to be ranked with the seers rather than with the reasoners of the race, for he says, “I think that philosophy is still rude and elementary; it will one day be taught by poets.”⁸

Dewey understands Emerson’s evasion of modern philosophy as neither a simple replacement of philosophy by poetry nor a sophomoric rekindling of the Platonic quarrel between poetry and philosophy. Instead, this evasion is to be understood as a situating of philosophical reflection *and* poetic creation in the midst of quotidian human struggles for meaning, status, power, wealth, and selfhood. The abstract dualisms, philosophic absolutisms, autonomous discourses, professional divisions, and academic differentiations are veiled efforts to escape from these struggles—efforts doomed to failure. The Emersonian evasion not only resituates these escapes within the contingent and revisable dynamics of power, provocation, and personality; it also views poetry and philosophy neither as identical nor as antagonistic but as different metaphor-deploying activities to achieve—by means of agon and struggle—specific aims. And what poetry and philosophy have in common is that both exemplify the heights of human intelligence at work, the best of conscious and reflective human activity.

The spirit of Emerson rises to protest against exaggerating his ultimate value by trying to place him upon a plane of art higher than a philosophic platform. Literary critics admit his philosophy and deny his literature. And if philosophers extol his keen, calm art and speak with some depreciation of his metaphysic, it also is perhaps because Emerson knew something deeper than our conventional definitions . . . Looked at in the open, our fences between literature and metaphysics appear petty—signs of an attempt to affix the legalities and formalities of property to the things of the spirit . . .

And for Emerson of all others, there is a one-sidedness and exaggeration, which he would have been the first to scorn, in exalting overmuch his creative substance at the expense of his reflective procedure. He says in effect somewhere that the individual man is only a method, a plan of arrangement. The saying is amply descriptive of Emerson. His idealism

is the faith of the thinker in his thought raised to its nth power . . . There are times, indeed, when one is inclined to regard Emerson's whole work as a hymn to intelligence, a paean to the all-creating, all-disturbing power of thought.⁹

Dewey is well aware of the various characterizations of Emerson (and pragmatism) as anti-intellectual, irrational, and vitalistic: and neither Emerson nor the pragmatists make a fetish of reason. But they also do not reject the intellect per se. Rather they view it as a distinctive function of and inseparable from the doings, sufferings, and strivings of everyday people. Dewey prefers "the word *intelligence* to *reason* because of the long anti-empirical history back of the latter word."¹⁰ And he praises Emerson for his transactional concept of intelligence, a conception which views mind as both a form of experience and a facilitator in experience. For Dewey, Emerson goes beyond the paltry ideas of experience in Locke, Berkeley, and Hume in that he views experience in terms of relations and interactions. There is an immediacy in this notion of experience, an immediacy that has little to do with vivacious mentalistic episodes or indubitable modes of awareness. Rather it is associated with the present, novelty, use, and projected futures.

And so, with an expiatory offering to the Manes of Emerson, one may proceed to characterize his thought, his method, yea, even his system. I find it in the fact that he takes the distinctions and classifications which to most philosophers are true in and of and because of their systems, and makes them true of life, of the common experience of the everyday man . . . The idealism which is a thing of the academic intellect to the professor, a hope to the generous youth, an inspiration to the genial projector, is to Emerson a narrowly accurate description of the facts of the most real world in which all earn their living.

Such reference to the immediate life is the text by which he tries every philosopher . . . I fancy he reads the so-called eclecticism of Emerson wrongly who does not see that it is reduction of all the philosophers of the race, even the prophets like Plato and Proclus whom Emerson holds most dear, to the test of trial by the service rendered the present and immediate experience. As for those who condemn Emerson for superficial pedantry because of the strings of names he is wont to flash like beads before our eyes, they but voice their own pedantry, not seeing, in their literalness, that all such things are with Emerson symbols of various uses administered to the common soul.¹¹

This passage reveals Dewey's own creative misreading of Emerson, even though it does highlight the experiential dimension of Emerson. More tellingly, the defensive and even apologetic tone shows just how desperate and determined Dewey is to convince his audience that a figure like Emerson is not alien to his own pragmatic perspective and project. We noted earlier Emerson's ambivalence toward the common folk and their experiences;

we also saw the contemplative and mystical aspects of Emerson, reminiscent more of Plato's Seventh Letter and Plotinus than of Dewey and the pragmatists. Yet Dewey presses on—with his strong insights and obvious blindnesses—to picture Emerson as not only a proponent of critical intelligence but also a poet of the ever-changing present. Dewey candidly acknowledges—though only implicitly—that Emerson's Heraclitean flux is far from modern historical consciousness. Yet the Emersonian themes of contingency and revisability are healthy swerves from the ossified concepts and petrified systems of so many European philosophers and Emerson's own American contemporaries.

The Idea is no longer either an academic toy nor even a gleam of poetry, but a literal report of the experience of the hour as that is enriched and reinforced for the individual through the tale of history, the appliance of silence, the gossip of conversation and the exchange of commerce . . .

Emerson's philosophy has this in common with that of the transcendentalists; he prefers to borrow from them rather than from others certain pigments and delineations. But he finds truth in the highway, in the untaught endeavor, the unexpected idea, and this removes him from their remotenesses. His ideas are not fixed upon any Reality that is beyond or behind or in any way apart, and hence they do not have to be bent. They are versions of the Here and the Now, and flow freely. The reputed transcendental worth of an overweening Beyond and Away, Emerson, jealous for spiritual democracy, finds to be the possession of the unquestionable Present. When Emerson, speaking of the chronology of history, designated the There and Then as "wild, savage, and preposterous," he also drew the line which marks him off from transcendentalism—which is the idealism of a Class.¹²

The last sentence of this passage inaugurates Dewey's misleading yet master stroke in his essay: the designation of Emerson as "the philosopher of democracy."¹³ Dewey rightly construes Emerson's conception of history in spatial terms, but he wrongly views this conception as somehow transcending Emerson's class. In fact, class is not the issue here, but rather the power and pervasiveness of the frontier myth that permeates all classes in America—especially in Emerson's day. His "pioneer" consciousness is neither the sole possession of the common man nor a perspective opposed by alienated middle-class intellectuals like the transcendentalists. Rather the Emersonian spatialized image of history fit well with the internal imperialism taking place despite Emerson's moral protests. Dewey's attempt to read Emerson in his own image remains incisive and revealing, but it fails at the point where Emerson emerges as somehow transcending his class and becomes an exemplary radical plebeian democrat in solidarity with peoples struggling against imperialisms. Emerson is indeed a kind of spiritual democrat (circumscribed by his "mild" racism); but he surely is no full-fledged democrat like Dewey himself. Yet Dewey strains to see

his own “creative democracy” in Emerson’s refusal to privilege authority.¹⁴ In this way, he not only authorizes his own project by deploying Emerson as authority, but also uses Emerson as a means of provoking his own self-creation—thereby valorizing a father figure in order to father himself. This Emersonian manner of reading Emerson reveals as much about Dewey’s pragmatism as does the obvious continuity of similar themes from Emerson, through Peirce and James, to Dewey.

Against creed and system, convention and institution, Emerson stands for restoring to the common man that which in the name of religion, of philosophy, of art, and of morality, has been embezzled from the common store and appropriated to sectarian and class use. Beyond any one we know of, Emerson has comprehended and declared how such malversation makes truth decline from its simplicity, and in becoming partial and owned, become a puzzle of and trick for theologian, metaphysician and litterateur—a puzzle of an imposed law, of an unwished for and refused goodness, of a romantic ideal gleaming only from afar, and a trick of manipular skill, of specializing performance.

For such reasons, the coming century may well make evident what is just now dawning that Emerson is not only a philosopher, but that he is the Philosopher of Democracy . . . thinking of Emerson as the one citizen of the world fit to have his name uttered in the same breath with that of Plato, one may without presumption believe that even if Emerson has no system, none the less he is the prophet and herald of any system which democracy may henceforth construct and hold by, and that when democracy has articulated itself, it will have no difficulty in finding itself already proposed in Emerson.¹⁵

This exorbitant enshrinement of Emerson is an apt description of Dewey—one of the best we have. For Dewey, Emerson signifies what Dewey himself actually tried to do. Dewey views Emerson as the founder and inventor of the American religion—of the Emersonian evasion, theodicy, and refusal—yet he delineates his own project as the authentic content and substance of it. In this way, Dewey implicitly rejects Henry James, Sr.’s, view of Emerson as John the Baptist, with an American messiah yet to come. Instead, Dewey plays Joshua to Emerson’s Moses, with Peirce a ground-breaking yet forgotten Aaron and James a brilliant and iconoclastic Eleazar.

Following Emerson, Dewey envisions the emerging reformist and professional elements of the middle class as the preferable historical agent of the American religion. Yet mere Emersonian breaks with ecclesiastical authorities and independent lecturing tours would not suffice in the Gilded Age and thereafter. Instead, Dewey participates in and exercises moral and intellectual leadership over the rising university culture and teaching profession. As an organic intellectual of the urbanized, professional, and reformist elements of the middle class, Dewey had far more immediate impact on society than Emerson, Peirce, or James.

The changing circumstances of the country during Dewey's lifetime partly account for this impact. Dewey was born on October 20, 1859, the day after the abolitionist John Brown was taken to jail for his famous raid on the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry, Virginia; Dewey died during the Korean War—at seven o'clock on June 1, 1952.¹⁶ During his long life span, America was transformed from a divided, rural, entrepreneurial capitalist country into a consolidated, urban, industrial, multinational capitalist world power. At his death, the United States was the most wealthy and mighty nation in the world. He was born and raised in Burlington, Vermont, a small yet growing town (second largest lumber depot in the United States) with a suffering Irish and French-Canadian working class (over 40 percent of the populace in 1870) and a Yankee bourgeoisie. His father, Archibald, was the first urban entrepreneur in a family of four generations on the farm. Clever, humorous, yet unambitious, Dewey's father was a patriot who reached his stride in life only after he volunteered for the Union army in 1861. Stationed in Virginia, Archibald served with valor. After three years, his wife, Lucina—twenty years younger than Archibald and a descendant of famous Vermont statesmen (her father a state legislator, and her grandfather a U.S. congressman)—brought Dewey and his two brothers to Virginia. They returned to Vermont in 1867. Owing to his mother's religious piety as well as that of his minister, Lewis Ormond Brastow, Dewey was bred a liberal, evangelical Congregationalist.¹⁷ He would not break with the church until he was nearly thirty years old; the reformist energies encouraged by the church would never leave him.

At the age of fifteen Dewey entered the University of Vermont—a solid and small college of eight faculty and less than a hundred students. He graduated in a class of eighteen with a mediocre record and limited exposure to the new intellectual developments: T. H. Huxley, Auguste Comte, and Herbert Spencer. After a two-year high school teaching stint in Oil City, Pennsylvania, and a year near Burlington, Dewey embarked upon a professional career in philosophy. Encouraged by William T. Harris, the renowned St. Louis Hegelian who edited the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* in which Dewey had published his first article, and supported by a loan from his aunt, Dewey enrolled in the first American secular institution of graduate studies, Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore in 1882.

Ironically, Dewey gravitated not toward Charles Sanders Peirce, then a visiting lecturer at Hopkins, but rather to the neo-Hegelian George Sylvester Morris and the experimentalist psychologist G. Stanley Hall. Both Vermonters, evangelicals in early life who attended Union Theological Seminary and German universities, Morris and Hall competed for Dewey's loyalty and outlook. Dewey's early exposure to German philosophy, principally owing to his undergraduate teacher, Henry A. P. Torrey, inclined

him toward Morris. Hall, who was a disciple of Wilhelm Wundt's physiological psychology and gained the first U.S. doctorate in psychology under William James at Harvard, attracted Dewey with his scientific approach. Yet Morris won him over with a right Hegelian defense of theism and idealism. Moreover, the works of an American Protestant theologian, Newman Smith, held out the possibility of synthesizing Hall's scientific empiricism and Morris's Hegelian idealism by means of an evolutionary biology shot through with moral teleological and theistic conclusions.¹⁸ After finishing his dissertation in 1884 on Kant's psychology (now lost), Dewey was invited by Morris to join him at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Here Dewey was to teach courses primarily in psychology and a few in the history of philosophy and ethics. In his first major book, *Psychology* (1887), Dewey's Hegelianism was heavy-handed and unconvincing to the leading psychologists of the day—especially to G. Stanley Hall and William James.¹⁹ Yet the book showed great skills and gave him international exposure. It was written as a textbook for classroom instruction and served this end quite well.

Dewey left for the University of Minnesota in 1888 but returned to Michigan upon the untimely death of his mentor, Morris. This return signaled not only a greater freedom in teaching but a shift in focus—from psychology to ethics. This shift was prompted by two new critical influences: the works of the neo-Hegelian liberal T. H. Green and Dewey's marriage to Alice Chipman. In an important essay, "The Ethics of Democracy" (1888), Dewey used Green's original conception of society, defense of self-realization, and support for democracy as the primary resource against Sir Henry Maine's influential attack on democracy in his *Popular Government* (1886). Green enabled Dewey to make explicit the moral teleology required by his psychology—and to support his growing democratic political convictions.

This increased sense of political engagement was largely due to Alice Chipman, Dewey's philosophy student at Michigan and wife. Raised by her maternal grandparents upon the early death of her parents, Alice acquired a strong social conscience and fervent political activism. Her grandfather, Frederick Riggs, was an adopted member of the Chippewa tribe ("learned their language so that an Indian could not tell by his voice that he was a white man")²⁰ and worked with them in their efforts to get justice from white people. Alice was a month older than Dewey, having studied music at a Baptist seminary and taught in Michigan schools before enrolling at the university. She and Dewey lived in the same boarding house. She took three advanced courses with Dewey, and must have impressed the young aloof bachelor. They were married two years later in July 1886.

Not only did Alice encourage Dewey's social activism by her example, but her deep belief "that a religious attitude was indigenous in natural

experience and that theology and ecclesiastical institutions had benumbed rather than promoted it”²¹ had great impact on Dewey. For example, in his various addresses to the student Christian association and in his energetic work in Ann Arbor’s First Congregational Church, Dewey had stressed that the church was “the highest product of the interest of man in man.”²² Yet a few years after his marriage, he held that the role of the church was to universalize itself and pass out of existence. By 1894, Dewey had stopped attending church and refused to send his three children to Sunday school—much to the chagrin of his pietistic mother who was then living with him. In short, Alice opened Dewey’s eyes to the social misery in industrial capitalist America. And there indeed was much to see and do.

Between 1860 and 1900 the population of the United States leapt from roughly 31 million to nearly 76 million.²³ Immigrants—mainly from southern and eastern Europe—accounted for some 14 million in this rapid growth. This population explosion resulted primarily from the tremendous economic boom in late-nineteenth-century America. In the same forty-year period, investments in manufacturing plants jumped from a billion dollars to \$12 billion; the annual value of manufacturing products from \$1.9 billion to over \$11 billion; and the number of workers employed in U.S. factories from 1.3 million to 5.5 million. With an apparently inexhaustible supply of raw materials, a friendly and receptive national government, a great domestic market guarded against foreign competition by tariffs and connected by rail and water transportation, remarkable technological innovation and effective subordination of cheap labor, America became the first manufacturing nation of the world.

The distinctive features of this economic growth were large-scale organizations (especially monopolies, trusts, pools, and holding companies in production) motivated by unregulated and unrestrained competition for unprecedented profits; the development of a downtrodden and despised industrial working class of different ethnic origins and religious loyalties; and intense, often bloody strife between profit-making industrialists and profit-producing laborers. In short, America underwent boomtown industrial class formation with the rise of the large-scale industrial and financial capitalists and the eclipse of the old southern planters and northeastern merchants; the managerial and professional sectors of the middle class replaced the commercial and yeoman groupings of the past petite bourgeoisie; and the industrial proletariat edged out the artisans and journeymen. Rural America certainly did not disappear, but it no longer was where the central action occurred. In 1860 agriculture represented 50 percent of the total national wealth, in 1900 only 20 percent; farmers received 30 percent of the national income in 1860, only 18 percent in 1910. And the South, still on the margins of much of this growth, lingered in colonial subjugation as white supremacy reigned supreme over helpless though far from hopeless Afro-Americans.²⁴

The social misery upon which Dewey opened his eyes in the late nineteenth century was principally that of economic deprivation, cultural dislocation, and personal disorientation. Although real wages increased in this period of falling prices and consequent decline in the cost of living, panics, depressions, and economic turndowns often punctuated the wage increases. Roughly 10 million Americans out of 76 million lived in abject poverty. The average workday was ten hours, for a six-day week, with an absolutely appalling accident rate. For example, one in every 26 railroad laborers was injured, one in every 399 killed annually. Unskilled and semi-skilled laborers were crowded into squalid slums where families huddled in one-room apartments with inadequate sanitary facilities. Epidemics killed thousands. And with little public monies and little concern with the common good, most cities lacked funds to dispose of their sewage and garbage, to ensure the purity of their water supply, and to fight deadly fires. In short, industrial capitalist America was a “distended” society—a society without a core, a society unhinged, a nation in a pathological state.²⁵

Dewey’s response to this situation took three major forms. First, he contemplated and almost executed a plan to “sell critical intelligence” to the literate masses by means of radical journalism. Second, he became associated with WASP-run humanitarian efforts to assimilate and acculturate immigrants into the American mainstream. Third, he decided to exercise leadership over the expanding teaching profession by means of practical example and writing.

Dewey’s first response was shaped by his own growing disenchantment with American life. Politically awakened by Alice and intellectually influenced by T. H. Green, Dewey was ideologically guided by his friend and classmate Henry Carter Adams. Adams studied political economy at Hopkins and was awarded the university’s first Ph.D. in 1876. After studying for a year in Germany, Adams returned an unorthodox socialist intent on building on aspects of American liberalism. In an 1881 essay in the *New Englander* entitled “Democracy,” Adams argued for a cooperative commonwealth of workers’ control that would “realize socialistic aims by individualistic means.” He went on to call for the abandonment of the wage system and the establishment of industries upon a cooperative basis. These radical sentiments made it extremely difficult for Adams to obtain a job in the academy. For instance, his public support for the Knights of Labor led to his dismissal from Cornell University—a dismissal led by the trustee Russell Sage. Adams finally did get a permanent position at Michigan but only after President James B. Angell severely questioned his political views including his “unwise” support of the Knights.

Adams’ guidance can be seen in Dewey’s 1888 essay “The Ethics of Democracy” when he states, “There is no need to beat about the bush in saying that democracy is not in reality what it is in name until it is industrial, as well as civil and political . . . ; a democracy of wealth is

a necessity."²⁶ Yet Dewey is much more cautious than Adams; that is, he is unwilling to risk his professional career for his political beliefs.

This is seen most clearly in Dewey's first major effort to intervene into politics: the journalistic *Thought News* affair with the iconoclastic Franklin Ford. Stimulated by Ernest Renan's notion of socializing intelligence and distributing scientific results as put forward in *The Future of Science* (1880),²⁷ Dewey and Ford decided to plunge into the world of journalism. What was needed was a newspaper that would provide the enlightenment requisite for intelligent social action. It would not be directed at any one class nor would it raise "the war cry of a false socialism," but rather, as Dewey stated, it would "show that philosophy has some use . . . Instead of trying to change the newspaper business by introducing philosophy into it, the idea is to transform philosophy somewhat by introducing a little newspaper business into it."²⁸

Dewey's prospective editorship of *Thought News* excited and stimulated him. He concluded that he lived in a world-historical period in which one must struggle to fulfill the promise of the "modern *Zeitgeist*." It was during this time that Dewey's two books on ethics appeared²⁹—responsive to Ford's Renanian viewpoint, William James's *Principles of Psychology* (1890), and the social psychology (and socialist sentiments) of his new colleague George Herbert Mead. These texts reveal a new departure for Dewey: the practical character of reflective intelligence looms large. William James, who had been thoroughly disappointed in Dewey's earlier *Psychology*, was one of the few to see this.³⁰

Yet preparation for the appearance of *Thought News* consumed Dewey's time. His scholarly production sagged; his writing became more hard-hitting, bold, and hortatory. He had to muster the courage to go through with a project that would surely have deleterious consequences for his professional career. As he confided to a former student, "These things would sound more or less crazy to a professor of philosophy in good and regular standing, but I intend henceforth to act on my conviction regardless."³¹

In his two major publications at this time, neither of which is scholarly, Dewey's passionate rhetoric and activist fervor echo that of the young left Hegelian Marx. In his commencement address entitled "Poetry and Philosophy" delivered at Smith College, Dewey proclaimed,

In the last few centuries the onward movement of life, of experience, has been so rapid, its diversifications of regions and methods so wide, that it has outrun the slower step of reflective thought. Philosophy has not as yet caught the rhythmic swing of this onward movement, and written it down in a score of black and white which all may read . . . But this movement, which has so escaped the surer yet heavier tread of critical thought, has in manifold ways danced itself into the poetic measures of our century . . .

. . . the same movement of the spirit, bringing man and man, man and nature into wider and closer unity, which has found expression

by anticipation in poetry, must find expression by retrospection in philosophy.³²

And in his contribution to the *Inlander*, a Michigan student magazine, entitled "The Scholastic and the Speculator," Dewey castigated the ivory-tower scholar frightened by the dirty world of politics and afraid of the consequences of active engagement. Aware of what his colleagues thought of his journalistic endeavor and political involvement, Dewey used harsh language to debunk his profession as a remake of medieval scholasticism.

The monastic cell has become a professional lecture hall; an endless mass of "authorities" have taken the place of Aristotle. *Jahresberichte*, monographs, journals without end occupy the void left by the commentators upon Aristotle. If the older Scholastic spent his laborious time in erasing the writing from old manuscripts in order to indite thereon something of his own, the new scholastic has also his palimpsest. He criticizes the criticisms with which some other Scholastic has criticized other criticisms, and the writing upon writings goes on till the substructure of reality is long obscured.³³

What was needed was not academic complacency but active engagement with the events and affairs of the world. In short, Dewey wanted a worldly philosophy and a more philosophical world, i.e., a world guided by intelligence. His rhetorical figure of the speculator—a market metaphor more pronounced than James's "cash-values"—was that of a philosopher who refuses to hoard his fund of knowledge and who takes risks owing to his political action in the world.

Intelligence must throw its fund out again into the stress of life; it must venture its savings against the pressure of facts . . .

. . . all the great philosophers have had something of this ruthless adventure of thought, this reckless throwing of the accumulated store of truth . . . Action upon truth marks the merchant of thought, who, though he both saves and spends, yet neither embezzles nor gambles.³⁴

As the deadline for the first issue neared, Dewey and Ford—along with Ford's brother, Corydon, and the young Robert Park (later to be a leading U.S. sociologist at the University of Chicago)—put out a circular announcing the newspaper. To Dewey's surprise, Ford published another announcement a few weeks later lauding "a new idea in journalism and education" that would, "by applying the historical method to the reporting of everyday life," bridge "the chasm between education and real life, between theory and practice."³⁵ This manifesto-like statement caught Dewey off guard; and the response of the daily press gave him cold feet. A lead editorial in the *Detroit Tribune* lashed out at the putdown of ordinary newspapers. Dewey was lampooned as the new Benjamin Franklin, with *Thought News* the "kite" with which "he proposes to bring philosophy down to life and make it, like the lightning, turn the wheels of society." It later

suggested that the first “mystery within the social organism” Dewey and company should try to solve was the interest of Michigan male students in Ypsilanti factory girls. In an article headlined “He’s Planned No Revolution,” Dewey recanted, backpedaled, and disassociated himself from *Thought News*. No issue of the newspaper ever appeared.

In his autobiography two years later, Corydon Ford put the matter this way regarding Dewey:

Clogged of the dead institution, he could not move; his salary meant that he was to keep quiet as to the overturning concepts. He must either forego his bribe and become the tramp upon the highway that he might have voice; or he could remain to take the sop of convention and upstew the old ideas with the new as the made-dish of apart theory.³⁶

Needless to say, this characterization of Dewey is unfair. Ford did break trust by failing to inform Dewey of his announcement, though, in all candor, Ford’s statement was not that far removed from Dewey’s initial intention. What becomes most clear—and is quite understandable—is Dewey’s refusal to risk his career (especially with an eccentric chap like Ford) or to be marginalized or even banished by the professional elements of the middle class. Instead, he would work with those reformers of his class serious about social change while preserving his own professional status and prowess.

Dewey’s second response to the deplorable state of industrial capitalist America took the form of securing a prestigious position in an urban environment, then joining forces with middle-class progressives and radicals forming links with the downtrodden. He moved in 1894 to John D. Rockefeller’s University of Chicago (a move engineered by his friend and former colleague James H. Tufts), where his work in Jane Addams’ Hull House became a focus of his activity. From then on, Dewey practiced professional caution and political reticence. He remained deeply engaged in civic affairs, but shunned controversy. As George Dykhuizen notes, Dewey failed to

touch upon any of the explosive issues of the day in any published article while at Chicago. Nothing among Dewey’s writings at this time is analogous to Thorstein Veblen’s *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Charles Zueblin’s *American Municipal Progress*, or to articles by Albion Small, Edward W. Bemis and W. I. Thomas which discuss vital and controversial issues. The closest Dewey came to a published statement about a social issue was his remark that the school is “the primary and most effective instrument of social progress and reform.”³⁷

I am suggesting neither that opportunism motivated Dewey’s behavior in Chicago, nor that he lacked the courage of other colleagues. Rather I am claiming that his highfalutin left-Hegelian rhetoric of a few years earlier had simmered back down into professional research and respectable

civic activism. This was so not only because he was slowly but surely shedding his neo-Hegelianism—as his famous 1896 essay “The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology” reveals—but also because his left sentiments devolved into public progressive sentiments. At Hull House, Dewey had the opportunity to meet a number of socialists, communists, and anarchists, and he preferred bourgeois progressives like Jane Addams and Henry George. He remained committed yet directed his energies into middle-class channels, especially education.

Dewey’s third response to industrial capitalist America, now that he was living in the exemplary city of a changing country, was to invest and involve himself in the new emerging structure of loyalty in the middle class: professionalism. Dewey was quite critical of various aspects of the rising professionalism; yet he remained its proponent and promoter. He was convinced that the only way in which America could acquire a core and cohesion was by producing and cultivating critical intelligence by experts. As head of the Department of Pedagogy (and Philosophy), he could focus on education, especially of children. As a professor, he could focus on his colleagues, i.e., occupational autonomy. The professional middle class was growing by leaps and bounds—with teachers increasing more than fourfold between 1890 and 1910 and then more than doubling again in the next decade.³⁸

Dewey’s shift to pedagogical practices was not a retreat from politics. Rather it proceeded from an acknowledgment of just how entrenched economic power was in America—seen quite clearly in the Pullman strike of 1894—and how circumscribed progressive action actually was. Moreover, Chicago’s school system was a national scandal as revealed by Joseph Mayer Rice’s muckraking pieces in the *Forum* (1892, 1893). After working with and supporting the renowned Colonel Francis Parker’s Cook County Normal School, including sending his kids there, Dewey emerged as the leading progressive pedagogue in the city. His laboratory school, known as the “Dewey School,” opened in January 1896.

The aim of the school was not only to serve as a model of how meaningful and enriching education could take place, but also to make a practical intervention into the national debate on education. This practical intervention was, for Dewey, a form of political activism in that the struggle over knowledge and over the means of its disposal was a struggle about power, about the conditions under which cultural capital (skills, knowledge, values) was produced, distributed, and consumed. In sharp contrast to curriculum-centered conservatives and child-centered romantics, Dewey advocated an interactive model of functionalistic education that combined autonomy with intelligent and flexible guidance, relevance with rigor and wonder. Of course, Dewey’s functionalistic education, a critical education for democratizing society, could easily be mistaken for a functional education, a fitting education that simply adjusts one to the labor market possibilities.

Unfortunately, Dewey himself failed to articulate a plan for social reform to which his progressive schools could specifically contribute. He was aware that schools by themselves could not bear the weight of a full-fledged reform of society; yet he also knew that the schools themselves were ideologically contested terrain, always worth fighting for and over. And in 1904 Dewey's school came to an end after a series of mergers and the subtle dismissal of Dewey's wife from its principalship by University of Chicago president William Rainey Harper. Dewey immediately resigned from the university. Luckily, Columbia University moved quickly and financed a new chair in philosophy for him. And the luck was American pragmatism's too, for it was in New York City, and maybe it had to be there, that Dewey emerged as a world-historical figure. At Columbia, Dewey put forward his mature formulations of the impact of historical consciousness on philosophy, the social function of critical intelligence, and the content and character of creative democracy. Dewey got his start in Michigan and excelled in Chicago, but in New York he became a giant.

The coming-of-age of American pragmatism occurs just as the United States emerges as a world power. There is no direct causal relation between these two phenomena, yet it also is no mere accident. Dewey's mature formulations of pragmatism were certainly encouraged by the entrée of America on the international stage of history. This entrée required not only "the end of American innocence," i.e., an end to America's naive optimism and uncritical penchant for romantic simplicity, or a "revolt against formalism," i.e., an engagement with a dynamic reality in a functional and contextual manner.³⁹ It also forced American intellectuals to develop a *particular kind* of international and historical consciousness, a consciousness open to other streams of thought yet rooted in the American experience and capable of nourishing, sustaining, and guiding America through its coming crises and challenges. The genius of Dewey is that he infuses a cosmopolitan and historical outlook into American pragmatism, remains open to Baconian, Enlightenment, and Hegelian sensibilities yet faithful to the Emersonian evasion and theodicy. In this sense, if Emerson is the inventor of the American religion, Dewey is its Luther—that is, he must seriously think through the implications of the notions of power, provocation, and personality, the themes of voluntarism, optimism, individualism, and meliorism in relation to the plethora of intervening intellectual breakthroughs and in light of the prevailing conditions in order to give direction as well as vitality to the American religion. We saw earlier how Dewey attempts to dress himself in Emersonian garb by dressing Emerson in Deweyan garb.

Dewey fights this battle—that is, develops and deepens American pragmatism with its Emersonian prehistory—on three basic fronts. As a professional philosopher, for reasons of conscience and status, he must address fellow professional philosophers—hence his preoccupation with

metaphilosophy. As a cultural critic, he has to come to terms with the major authority in the culture, and so we get his focus on scientific inquiry. And as a social critic, he must reflect upon the meaning and application of the dominant values in the national political tradition—hence his profound concern with democracy and individuality. Dewey's fight to keep alive the best of the American religion is not simply incisive and instructive; it also is awesome and inspiring. For too long it has lain dormant in the American unconscious, venerated by parochial epigoni, depreciated by myopic specialists, yet seriously interrogated by few. He deserves better. In fact, I believe a renaissance of Dewey is soon to come. I simply hope it is accompanied by a deeper sense of historical consciousness, a subtle and nuanced grasp of critical intelligence, and a profound commitment to the expansion of creative democracy.

On the philosophical front, Dewey articulates a conception of philosophy that gives professional expression to the Emersonian evasion of epistemology-centered philosophy. In fact, the dominant theme of his metaphilosophy is that philosophy is neither a form of knowledge nor a means to acquire knowledge. Rather philosophy is a mode of cultural critical action that focuses on the ways and means by which human beings have, do, and can overcome obstacles, dispose of predicaments, and settle problematic situations. He states this succinctly in his "Philosophy and Democracy" address to the Philosophical Union of the University of California (November 29, 1918), the place where James publicly put forward pragmatism in 1898 and Santayana mused about the genteel tradition in 1911.

There is, I think, another alternative, another way out. Put badly, it is to deny that philosophy is in any sense whatever a form of knowledge. It is to say that we should return to the original and etymological sense of the word, and recognize that philosophy is a form of desire, of effort at action—a love, namely, of wisdom; but with the thorough proviso, not attached to the Platonic use of the word, that wisdom, whatever it is, is not a mode of science or knowledge. A philosophy which was conscious of its own business and province would then perceive that it is an intellectualized wish, an aspiration subjected to rational discriminations and tests, a social hope reduced to a working program of action, a prophecy of the future, but one disciplined by serious thought and knowledge.⁴⁰

For Dewey, philosophy is a mode not of knowledge but of wisdom. And wisdom is conviction about values, a choice to do something, a preference for this rather than that form of living. Wisdom involves discriminating judgments and a desired future. It presupposes some grasp of conditions and consequences, yet it has no special access to them. Rather methods of access must be scrutinized in order to decide which ones are most reliable for the task at hand. In this way, Dewey does not devalue knowledge but only situates it in human experience.

Dewey's first mature reflections on the metaphilosophical implications

of American pragmatism are found in his seminal essay "The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy" (1917). This statement is to American pragmatism what the Theses on Feuerbach are to Marxism: the political presentation of a new world-historical perspective that both builds on and goes beyond modern philosophy. The setting is the entrance of the United States into World War I—the event that marks the real end of the nineteenth century for Europe—and the recent realist and idealist credos issued by American professional philosophers. This essay not only affirms the Emersonian evasion in professional terminology; it also constitutes the first of the three classic essays of twentieth-century American philosophy, the other two being W. V. O. Quine's "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" (1951), and Donald Davidson's "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" (1974).⁴¹

Dewey begins the essay bemoaning the fact that the cloistered and conservative character of modern philosophy has produced a cultural situation in which "direct preoccupation with contemporary difficulties is left to literature and politics."⁴² This has resulted, he claims, principally from the "professionalizing of philosophy" that fails to consider "what modifications and abandonments of intellectual inheritance are required by the newer industrial, political, and scientific movements."⁴³ At the outset, Dewey makes it clear that this is more an essay in cultural history about the ahistorical blindnesses of modern philosophy than an academic treatment of problems in modern philosophy.

This essay may, then, be looked upon as an attempt to forward the emancipation of philosophy from too intimate and exclusive attachment to traditional problems. It is not in intent a criticism of various solutions that have been offered, but raises a question *as to the genuineness, under the present conditions of science and social life, of the problems.*⁴⁴

Like Ludwig Wittgenstein and J. L. Austin decades later and his self-styled descendant Richard Rorty in our own time, Dewey notes,

It is a commonplace that the chief divisions of modern philosophy, idealism in its different kinds, realisms of various brands, so-called common sense dualism, agnosticism, relativism, phenomenalism, have grown up around the epistemological problem of the general relation of subject and object. Problems not openly epistemological, such as whether the relation of changes in consciousness to physical changes is one of interaction, parallelism, or automatism, have the same origin. What becomes of philosophy, consisting largely as it does of different answers to these questions, in case the assumptions which generate the questions have no empirical standing? Is it not time that philosophers turned from the attempt to determine the comparative merits of various replies to the questions to a consideration of the claims of the questions?⁴⁵

Dewey's aim is to evade the epistemological problematic of modern philosophy and thereby emancipate philosophy from its arid scholasticism

and cultural conservatism. Just as Peirce evaded Cartesianism, so Dewey calls into question the most fundamental project of modern philosophy: the bridging of the gulf between subject and object by means of epistemological mechanisms. Unlike Peirce—and similar to James—Dewey embarks on his critique by interrogating the notion of experience deployed by modern philosophers and suggests a deeper and richer conception of experience. His basic claim is that the marginal significance of modern philosophy in North Atlantic cultures results from paltry notions of experience derived from a “spectator theory of knowledge” and the “idea of invidiously real reality.” Dewey’s goal is to show just how poverty-ridden (and wrong!) these notions of experience are; to reveal the concomitant spectator theory of knowledge as a blinding philosophic fiction; and to blame the idea that philosophy somehow knows Reality more ultimately than other science for the cultural isolation and irrelevance of philosophy. In this way, Dewey’s metaphilosophy is a kind of counterepistemology; that is, a creative revision of Emerson’s evasion of epistemology-centered modern philosophy.

For Dewey, modern philosophy has five paradigmatic notions of experience: first, as a knowledge affair; second, as a psychical thing shot through with “subjectivity”; third, as registering what has taken place, with an exclusive focus on the past; fourth, as an aggregation of simple particulars; and last, as antithetical to thought. For Dewey, these five governing conceptions of experience constitute the pillars upon which rests the subject-object epistemological problematic of modern philosophy.

His own transactional conception of experience, buttressed by Darwinian biology and historical consciousness as well as rooted in Emersonian sensibilities, rejects each of these paltry ideas of experience. His three definitions of experience in the essay lay bare his rejection and threefold debt.

Experience is primarily a process of undergoing: a process of standing something; of suffering and passion, of affection, in the literal sense of these words. The organism has to endure, to undergo, the consequence of its own actions.

Experience, in other words, is a matter of *simultaneous* doings and sufferings. Our undergoings are experiments in varying the course of events; our active tryings are trials and tests of ourselves . . . Nothing can eliminate all risk, all adventure.

The obstacles which confront us are stimuli to variation, to novel response, and hence are occasions for progress.

If biological development be accepted, the subject of experience is at least an animal, continuous with other organic forms in a process of more complex organization. An animal in turn is at least continuous with chemico-physical processes which, in living things, are so organized as really to constitute the activities of life with all their defining traits. And experience is not identical with brain action; it is the entire organic

agent-patient in all its interaction with the environment, natural and social. The brain is primarily an organ of a certain kind of behavior, not of knowing the world. And to repeat what has already been said, experiencing is just certain modes of interaction, of correlation, of natural objects among which the organism happens, so to say, to be one. It follows with equal force that experience means primarily not knowledge, but ways of doing and suffering. Knowing must be described by discovering what particular mode—qualitatively unique—of doing and suffering it is.⁴⁶

Dewey's metaphilosophy is essentially an act of intellectual regicide; he wants to behead modern philosophy by dethroning epistemology. For too long, modern philosophy has deferred to the authority of "knowledge" in the name of science, without questioning this authority and demystifying science, i.e., bringing it down to earth, as it were. Therefore, the diversity, complexity, and plurality of experience have been "assimilated to a nonempirical concept of knowledge."⁴⁷ This impoverished empiricism "has said Lord, Lord, Experience, Experience, but in practice it has served ideas *forced into* experience, not *gathered from* it."⁴⁸

As I noted earlier, Dewey is demoting knowing without devaluing it. In fact, one can more fully appreciate the value of knowledge when it is viewed as an indispensable functional activity within the larger context of experience. Neglect of context leads toward gross distortion and truncation in epistemology-centered philosophy.⁴⁹

Like Peirce, Dewey rejects the subjectivist turn of Descartes. This turn undergirds the second narrow view of experience. Dewey refuses to get caught in the veil of ideas, to be imprisoned behind the bars of immediate awareness or within the confines of self-consciousness. Instead, he begins with intersubjectivity—the multiform interactions of human organisms with nature and with each other. The problem is not whether there is epistemic justification for the status or existence of an external world outside the veil of ideas, but rather how one goes about dealing and coping—less or more intelligently—with one's environment. The alternative is not between indubitable knowledge and full-fledged skepticism, but rather between critical intelligence and uncritical reflection, with genuine doubt and effective problem solving making the difference. For Dewey, the modern philosophic obsession with epistemic skepticism presupposes a subjectivist starting point; such skepticism is an inextricable parasite upon the epistemological problematic of modern philosophy. Dewey champions doubt—it is the very motor for provocation—yet he sidesteps modern skepticism. As he states in his masterful Gifford Lectures, *The Quest for Certainty* (1929):

It is always in place to be doubtful and skeptical about particular items of supposed knowledge when evidence to the contrary presents itself. There is no knowledge self-guaranteed to be infallible, since all knowledge is the product of special acts of inquiry. Agnosticism as confession of

ignorance about special matters, in the absence of adequate evidence, is not only in place under such circumstances, but is an act of intellectual honesty. But such skepticism and agnosticism are particular and depend upon special conditions; they are not wholesale; they do not issue from a generalized impeachment of the adequacy of the origins of knowing to perform their office. Theories which assume that the knowing subject, that mind or consciousness, have an inherent capacity to disclose reality, a capacity operating apart from any overt interactions of the organism with surrounding conditions, are invitations to general philosophical doubt.⁵⁰

Against the third conception of experience as retrospective, Dewey lauds anticipation and projection as distinctive features of human doings and undergoings. Cartesians and their empiricist, transcendentalist, and realist descendants tend to focus on knowing as recollection, a summoning of the past by means of memory. Following his Emersonian sentiments, Dewey highlights the future, the forward-looking character of human experience. This stress follows from pragmatism's shift away from first principles, self-evident truths, and epistemic foundations to effects, fruits, consequences. The contingency of the self, community, and world as well as the revisability of theories, knowledges, and moralities leads Dewey to quip, "What should experience be but a future implicated in a present!"⁵¹ In this sense, experience is experimental.⁵²

Therefore, Dewey rejects the obsession of modern philosophy with what has been or is "given."⁵³ Prefiguring much of Wilfred Sellars' classic attack "The Myth of the Given" nearly forty years later,⁵⁴ Dewey stresses the active, selective, and instrumental character of human experience. In his Gifford Lectures, he chides modern philosophy by cleverly noting:

The history of the theory of knowledge or epistemology would have been very different if instead of the word "data" or "givens," it had happened to start with calling the qualities in question "takens." Not that the data are not existential and qualities of the ultimately "given"—that is, the total subject-matter which is had in non-cognitive experiences. But as data they are *selected* from this total original subject-matter which gives the impetus to knowing; they are discriminated for a purpose:—that, namely, of affording signs or evidence to define and locate a problem, and thus give a clew to its resolution.⁵⁵

Like James, Dewey intends not to push empiricism aside but rather to deepen its understanding of experience. This deepening includes taking seriously the role of the future. We earlier saw Peirce struggling to come to terms with the status of the future in his perspective: in addition to the Emersonian theodicy, i.e., faith claims, he musters only an inadequate notion of continuity derived from modern logic. James and Dewey simply fall back on the Emersonian theodicy that accents the practical and moral character of reality—a reality always open to change and not excessively antagonistic to human aspirations. In one of his few historical reflections

on the origins and traits of pragmatism entitled "The Development of American Pragmatism" (1922), Dewey states,

Pragmatism, thus, presents itself as an extension of historical empiricism, but with this fundamental difference, that it does not insist upon antecedent phenomena but upon consequent phenomena; not upon the precedents but upon the possibilities of action. And this change in point of view is almost revolutionary in its consequences. An empiricism which is content with repeating facts already past has no place for possibility and for liberty . . .

Pragmatism thus has a metaphysical implication. The doctrine of the value of consequences leads us to take the future into consideration. And this taking into consideration of the future takes us to the conception of a universe whose evolution is not finished, of a universe which is still, in James' term "in the making," "in the process of becoming," of a universe up to a certain point still plastic.

Consequently reason, or thought, in its more general sense, has a real, though limited, function, a creative constructive function . . . Under these conditions the world will be different from what it would have been if thought had not intervened. This consideration confirms the human and moral importance of thought and of its reflective operation in experience.⁵⁶

Dewey's prospective instrumentalist viewpoint here is deeply indebted to Emerson, yet his pervasive historical consciousness leads him to take with more seriousness than Emerson the role of the past in the present and its use for the future.

Imaginative recovery of the bygone is indispensable to successful invasion of the future, but its status is that of an instrument . . . the movement of the agent-patient to meet the future is partial and passionate; yet detached and impartial study of the past is the only alternative to luck in assuring success to passion.⁵⁷

The fourth conception of experience as particularistic principally results from imposing a rather artificial and abstract epistemic notion of experience upon the fluidity, plurality, and diversity of experience. Of course, we have no unmediated access to the fundamental nature of the world, but it certainly is more complex and mysterious than is claimed by the empiricists' particularism (or the rationalists' monism). Influenced by James—and sounding much like the great metaphysician of experience Alfred North Whitehead—Dewey holds that connections, continuities, and relations are neither alien to experience (as Hume thought) nor supplemented by nonempirical sources (as Kant believed). Rather they permeate experience. In fact, their interaction, diversity, and changeability constitute "irreducible traits found in any and every subject of scientific inquiry."⁵⁸

The last notion of experience Dewey examines pits experience against thought. He associates this contrast with the philosophic device of the

modern subject, a device that undergirds the fictive spectator theory of knowledge. This modern philosophical view holds

that experience centers in, or gathers about, or proceeds from a center or subject which is outside the course of natural existence, and set over against it—it being of no importance, for present purposes, whether this antithetical subject is termed soul, or spirit, or mind, or ego, or consciousness, or just knower or knowing subject . . .

The essential thing is that the bearer was conceived as outside of the world; so that experience consisted in the bearer's being affected through a type of operations not found anywhere in the world, while knowledge consists in surveying the world, looking at it, getting the view of a spectator.⁵⁹

Dewey's account of this subject-object relation primarily mediated by epistemic mechanisms is more historical and concrete than that of Martin Heidegger and more materialist than that of Jacques Derrida. On the one hand, modern philosophers modeled their epistemological problematic upon an immaterial and supernatural soul or spirit (be it a transcendent God or immanent within humans) that knows and thereby exercises power over a material and natural world. With the marginalizing of religious dogma among modern philosophers, principally due to the influence of science, the only replacement for the immaterial, supernatural soul or spirit was a Cartesian nonextended substance, Kantian transcendental subject, or Hegelian *Weltgeist*. On the other hand, this problematic results in large part from the elevating of an intellectual form of knowledge, that of the eternal, universal, invariable, and the devaluing of another, practical kind of knowledge, that of the temporal, particular, and variable. This elevation is a cultural and ideological translation "into a rational form the doctrine of escape from the vicissitudes of existence by means of measures which do not demand an active coping with conditions."⁶⁰ For Dewey, this translation—quite attractive to those with much to lose from change by human action—simply "substituted deliverance through reason" for "deliverance by means of rites and cults."⁶¹ Even if activity is valorized, as with the Greeks, it is distinguished from action (making and doing), especially for those subordinated and subjugated.

For Dewey, philosophy emerged out of the human stock of religious, poetic, and dramatic practices—it, like them, told seductive lies-against-time. Modern philosophy simply tells its lies-against-time by elaborate and technical epistemological means. Emerson's evasion of modern philosophy constitutes a refusal to tell such European lies-against-time and thereby locates America (the self) at the beginning of time, i.e., history, and before open space, i.e., Indian and Mexican lands. Dewey's creative revision of Emerson's evasion historicizes all philosophic lies-against-time, yet he historicizes in an Emersonian manner. That is, he views America as the best exemplar in time. He wants to emancipate, recover, and reconstruct

philosophy, in part so that this can remain so and all reap the benefits of this shining example.

The epistemological problematic of modern philosophy now, in Dewey's view, stands in the way of American and world progress. Like religion, for him, it misdirects human powers and misleads human energies. Similar to the opiates of old, this problematic lingers on owing to cultural lethargy, academic entrenchment, and existential quests for certainty. To go beyond the epistemological problematic is to be a twentieth-century pioneer "wandering in a wilderness" (his self-description in his only autobiographical account)⁶² ready to reflect critically upon and realize new possibilities for a better future. Almost in exasperation, Dewey throws up his hands at his fellow professional philosophers and proclaims,

When dominating religious ideas were built up about the idea that the self is a stranger and pilgrim in this world; when morals, falling in line, found true good only in inner states of a self inaccessible to anything but its own private introspection; when political theory assumed the finality of disconnected and mutually exclusive personalities, the notion that the bearer of experience is antithetical to the world instead of being in and of it was congenial. It at least had the warrant of other beliefs and aspirations. But the doctrine of biological continuity or organic evolution has destroyed the scientific basis of the conception. Morally, men are now concerned with the amelioration of the conditions of the common lot in this world. Social sciences recognize that associated life is not a matter of physical juxtaposition, but of genuine intercourse—of community of experience in a non-metaphorical sense of community. Why should we longer try to patch up and refine and stretch the old solutions till they seem to cover the change of thought and practice? Why not recognize that the trouble is with the problem?⁶³

Dewey echoes these metaphilosophical sentiments in his 1919 lectures at the Imperial University in Tokyo, Japan, published as *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920).

Modern philosophic thought has been so preoccupied with these puzzles of epistemology . . . that many students are at a loss to know what would be left for philosophy if there were removed both the metaphysical task of distinguishing between the noumenal and phenomenal worlds and the epistemological task of telling how a separate subject can know an independent object. But would not the elimination of these traditional problems permit philosophy to devote itself to a more fruitful and more needed task? Would it not encourage philosophy to face the great social and moral defects and troubles from which humanity suffers, to concentrate its attention upon clearing up the causes and exact nature of these evils and upon developing a clear idea of better social possibilities . . . ?⁶⁴

Dewey's rejection of the epistemological problematic of modern philosophy leads him to cast aside all metaphysical inquiries into the "really Real."

For him, such inquiries promote the conception of philosophy as a form of knowledge with access to a more deep and fundamental Reality than that of the sciences and arts. This conception views philosophy as an autonomous discipline over and above other disciplines, a tribunal of reason with access to deep reality before which other disciplines (with only partial glimpses of reality) must be judged. Dewey associates this metaphysical pretension with the epistemological puzzles of modern philosophy. Therefore the “spectator theory of knowledge” and “the idea of invidiously real reality”—both linked to paltry notions of experience—go hand in hand. He acknowledges that to reject these fundamental pillars of modern philosophy “seems to many to be the suicide of philosophy,”⁶⁵ yet the uniqueness of pragmatism is precisely to make this denial without embracing skepticism or positivism.

It is often said that pragmatism, unless it is content to be a contribution to mere methodology, must develop a theory of Reality. But the chief characteristic trait of the pragmatic notion of reality is precisely that no theory of Reality in general, *überhaupt*, is possible or needed . . . it finds that “reality” is a *denotative* term, a word used to designate indifferently everything that happens . . .

The only way in which the term reality can ever become more than a blanket denotative term is through recourse to specific events in all their diversity and thatness. Speaking summarily, I find that the retention by philosophy of the notion of a Reality feudally superior to the events of everyday occurrence is the chief source of the increasing isolation of philosophy from common sense and science.⁶⁶

Dewey is often accused of going from the more plausible claim that there is no “Reality in general” to the objectionable claim that no general theory of reality is possible.⁶⁷ And those intent on simply incorporating Dewey into the tradition of modern philosophy point out Dewey’s own descriptive metaphysical project in his classic work *Experience and Nature* (1925). If these critics are right, my claim that Dewey evades and emancipates modern philosophy is exorbitant. And, I believe, these critics are partially right in that Dewey is ambiguous—especially as he reaches retirement at Columbia—about this evasion and emancipation. On the one hand, his commitment to historical consciousness, evolutionary biology, and Emersonian sentiments of contingency, revisability, and amelioration leads him to affirm evasion and emancipation. Needless to say, this affirmation entails not a negation or rejection of philosophy per se but rather a modest view of philosophy as social and cultural criticism. On the other hand, Dewey’s attraction to the naturalistic Aristotelian model in the Greek philosophical tradition—a model made more challenging and attractive by his influential Columbia colleague F. J. E. Woodbridge—and his allegiance to his professional identity and status leave him uneasy with his modest view of philosophy.⁶⁸ Dewey continually struggles with questions

such as: What are the detailed philosophical implications of a limited conception of philosophy as social and cultural criticism? Does not this conception itself require a tentative and provisional basis—a basis which a descriptive metaphysics might provide? But does not an emancipation of philosophy result in a setting aside of such philosophic talk about “basis”? Yet, if this is so, what is an academic philosopher to teach and write—how to preserve one’s sense of profession—when the whole enterprise rests upon the conception of philosophy one rejects?

These queries are both serious philosophic ones and intensely personal and professional ones. Of course, they never arose for Emerson since he enacted a poetic evasion of modern philosophy. Despite Peirce’s theoretical originality and personal eccentricity, he remained deeply wedded to the philosophic tradition, especially to certain medieval strains. And James, though always concerned with the honorific title of “philosopher” (partly owing to his having neither a B.A. nor a Ph.D.), would simply not have given a damn about these questions. For him, philosophy was not first and foremost socially engaged; rather, it mediated essential rifts in the self. Moreover, James abhorred the demands and pressures of professionalism. He taught what caught his fancy at Harvard. Yet Emerson, Peirce, James, and Dewey still remain in the American grain, with pragmatism a useful rubric with which to group and understand them.

Dewey’s dilemma is best depicted in Richard Rorty’s highly perceptive essay “Dewey’s Metaphysics.”⁶⁹ Rorty begins by noting that near the end of his life, Dewey hoped to write a new edition of *Experience and Nature*, changing the title as well as the subject matter to “Nature and Culture.” In a letter to his friend and collaborator Arthur Bentley, Dewey writes:

I was dumb not to have seen the need for such a shift when the old text was written. I was still hopeful that the philosophic word “experience” could be redeemed by being returned to its idiomatic usages—which was a piece of historical folly, the hope I mean.⁷⁰

This admission is more perplexing than Rorty admits, for several reasons. First, Dewey initially announced the need for a shift in philosophy in the name of a deep and richer notion of “experience.” We saw this earlier. Second, “nature” in the original title is as much a source of Dewey’s metaphysical motivations as “experience.” To jettison the latter notion does not necessarily preclude a Deweyan “naturalistic metaphysics.” And last, *Experience and Nature*, though Dewey’s principal work on and in metaphysics, is not the only Deweyan text in which metaphysical inquiry rears its head. For instance, his classic William James Lectures, *Art as Experience* (1934), are shot through with an organic idealism unbecoming a card-carrying pragmatist.⁷¹ Ought he to have renamed and rewrote this book as “Art as Culture”? In short, the notion of experience is simply too fundamental and omnipresent in Dewey’s work for us to put much weight on a quip to Bentley in later life.

In fairness to Rorty, he does admit that Dewey remains ambiguous about the role of metaphysics in his metaphilosophy.

For better or worse, he *wanted* to write a metaphysical system. Throughout his life, he wavered between a therapeutical stance toward philosophy and another, quite different stance—one in which philosophy was to become “scientific” and “empirical” and to do something serious, systematic, important, and constructive. Dewey sometimes described philosophy as the criticism of culture, but he was never quite content to think of himself as a kibitzer or a therapist or an intellectual historian. He wanted to have things both ways.⁷²

And as a self-styled descendant of Dewey, Rorty laments Dewey’s seduction by metaphysics as manifest in *Experience and Nature*.

Dewey’s mistake—and it was a trivial and unimportant mistake, even though I have devoted most of this essay to it—was the notion that criticism of culture had to take the form of a redescription of “nature” or “experience” or both. Had Dewey written the book called *Nature and Culture*, which was to replace *Experience and Nature*, he might have felt able to forget the Aristotelian and Kantian models and simply have been Hegelian all the way, as he was in much of his other (and best) work.⁷³

In other words, Rorty wishes Dewey to be a more consistent historicist pragmatist. And I agree. Yet from a pragmatic point of view, the criticism of culture can take many forms, including redescriptions of nature and experience. The redescriptions ought not to be viewed as metaphysical inquiries into “the generic traits manifested by existences of all kinds without regard to their differentiation into physical and mental,” but rather as metaphorical versions of what one thinks the way the world is in light of the best available theories. I find nothing wrong with this kind of intellectual activity as long as one acknowledges the needs and interests it satisfies. In Dewey’s case it seems to permit him to scratch a metaphysical itch—an itch, I might add, that serves as the principal cultural motivation for various scientific and artistic forms of redescriptions and revisions of the world. It also appears to minimize Dewey’s professional anxieties, especially given the fact that few people other than professional philosophers would ever bother reading and grappling with the issues raised in a densely written 437-page tome like *Experience and Nature*. I say this not to devalue Dewey’s achievement, but rather to situate historically and evaluate pragmatically the reasons why Dewey chooses to write in this way. For many pragmatists do not and ought not to choose to do so. And the kind of choices pragmatists do make regarding *the content and style* of their work depends greatly on their historical situation, personal aims, and sociocultural location. Dewey himself realizes this when he notes,

If the ruling and the oppressed elements in a population, if those who wish to maintain the *status quo* and those concerned to make changes,

had, when they became articulate, the same philosophy, one might well be skeptical of its intellectual integrity.⁷⁴

Women have as yet made little contribution to philosophy. But when women who are not mere students of other persons' philosophy set out to write it, we cannot conceive that it will be the same in viewpoint or tenor as that composed from the standpoint of the different masculine experience of things.⁷⁵

Dewey's metaphilosophy, despite his own ambiguity about it, accentuates the role of critical intelligence in human experience. Critical intelligence, for him, is simply the operation of the scientific attitude in problematic situations. This attitude often—though by no means always (as in art)—results in deploying the scientific method to resolve problems. This distinction between scientific attitude and scientific method is crucial for Dewey; those who overlook it view him as a vulgar positivist, one who makes a fetish of scientific method. But this is simply not so. Dewey indeed distinguishes dogmatic thinking from critical thinking, yet the latter is not simply the monopoly of scientific method.

Here is where ordinary thinking and thinking that is scrupulous diverge from each other. The natural man is impatient with doubt and suspense: he impatiently hurries to be shut of it. A disciplined mind takes delight in the problematic, and cherishes it until a way out is found that approves itself upon examination. The questionable becomes an active questioning, a search; desire for the emotion of certitude gives peace to quest for the objects by which the obscure and unsettled may be developed into the stable and clear. The scientific attitude may almost be defined as that which is capable of enjoying the doubtful; scientific method is, in one aspect, a technique for making a productive use of doubt by converting it into operations of definite inquiry.⁷⁶

The aims of critical intelligence are to overcome obstacles, resolve problems, and project realizable possibilities in pressing predicaments. A scientific attitude is indispensable for achieving these aims; the scientific method is usually the best means by which they are achieved. The first important point here is that critical intelligence is available to all peoples; it is neither the birthright of the highbrow nor the property of the professional. Rather it is "a human undertaking, not an esthetic appreciation carried on by a refined class or a capitalistic possession of a few learned specialists, whether men of science or of philosophy."⁷⁷

The second crucial point is that though critical intelligence deploys the scientific method, the results of science do not constitute the disclosure of the real. Dewey is no epistemological realist or ontological positivist, but rather a pragmatist with great faith in the power of critical intelligence. The cultural implication here is that Dewey's acceptance of the authority of science is itself instrumental—science is simply the best tool we conscious

organisms have to cope with our environment. The metaphysical implication is that although science has no monopoly on what is true and real, its predictive and explanatory powers help us deal more effectively with the world than anything else available to us.

Although the popular opinion of Dewey is that he was a scientific thinker, he actually held that science provides one kind of description (or set of descriptions) of the world among other kinds of equally acceptable descriptions, e.g., those of art. He promotes science when it best enables us to achieve specific aims and satisfy certain interests. Science in no way provides us with the fundamental nature of reality. Nor are the descriptions of science appropriate in every context. Dewey is quite emphatic about this:

There is something both ridiculous and disconcerting in the way in which men have let themselves be imposed upon; so as to infer that scientific ways of thinking of objects give the inner reality of things, and that they put a mark of spuriousness upon all other ways of thinking them, and of perceiving and enjoying them. It is ludicrous because these scientific conceptions, like other instruments, are hand-made by man in pursuit of realization of a certain interest.

Thus the recognition that intelligence is a method operating within the world places physical knowledge in respect to other kinds of knowing . . . there is no kind of inquiry which has a monopoly of the honorable title of knowledge. The engineer, the artist, the historian, the man of affairs attain knowledge in the degree they employ methods that enable them to solve the problems which develop in the subject-matter they are concerned with. As philosophy framed upon the pattern of experimental inquiry does away with all wholesale skepticism, so it eliminates all invidious monopolies of the idea of science. By their fruits we shall know them.⁷⁸

Dewey is not claiming that all epistemic claims have the same status; that an unregulated relativism reigns in pragmatic counterepistemologies; that science is a mere fictive discourse spreading false consciousness; or that the common man's natural explanations are as warranted as those of the trained physicist. Rather Dewey is saying that there are a variety of knowledges, each rigorously regulated by procedures that take seriously the role of hypothesis, evidence, and inference; that this epistemic pluralism gives no procedure privileged access to Truth and Reality; that science, though it posits unobservable entities, is the most reliable procedure regarding control of phenomena; and that commonsense reasoning is continuous with scientific method. Dewey's biblical conclusion, echoing Emerson and Peirce, is neither an anti-intellectual praise of action nor an elevation of praxis over theory, but rather an affirmation of the inseparability of thought and action and an acknowledgment of the role of consequences in reflective deliberation.⁷⁹ In other words, Dewey's pragmatism yields

an epistemic pluralism that does not consist of some metaphysical unity of theory and praxis or an antitheoreticist vitalism. Instead, he promotes a critical intelligence that defers to no authority other than the enrichment of human experience and the alleviation of the human plight.

Dewey's conception of truth reflects an Emersonian refusal to posit any authority other than human efforts and creation. Therefore he rejects Reality as the ultimate court of appeal in adjudicating between conflicting theories—and subsequently any correspondence theory of truth or realist ontology. He also rules out logical consistency and theoretical coherence as definitive criteria for acceptable theories about the world—and so coherence theories of truth or idealist ontologies are shunned. This does not mean that Dewey holds that there are no real objects or that consistency and coherence are unimportant in accepting true theories. Instead, I am suggesting that the predominant element in Dewey's view of truth is social practice, the human procedures of critical intelligence that yield warranted assertions. For Dewey, the only alternative for pragmatists is to settle for truth-as-warranted-assertibility; ideas are neither copies of the world nor representations linked principally to one another, but rather ingredients for rules and for plans of action.

The crucial question according to Dewey is whether ideas are reliable, worthy of acting upon given the ways by which we accept them. These all-important "ways" consist of social practices, rational procedures created by, aspired to, and approximated by human beings. The only truths we historical creatures have access to are those cautiously filtered through these error-prone yet self-correcting procedures concocted and enacted by ourselves. In fact, Dewey goes as far as to claim in his masterful *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938) not only that we accept these procedures on principally instrumental grounds, but also that logical forms themselves emerge owing to and within the operations and aims of inquiry.⁸⁰ Dewey essentially accepts Peirce's notion of truth as "the opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate";⁸¹ that is, he distinguishes ontological truth from epistemic validity yet puts the weight on the latter. As Bertrand Russell points out in a perceptive, provocative, yet wrong-headed attack on Dewey's treatment, "Truth is not an important concept in Dr. Dewey's logic."⁸²

Like James's, Dewey's idea of truth has simply little to do; all the work is loaded on warranted assertibility. Hilary Putnam has persuasively argued that truth is not an epistemic notion and if so regarded leads to intractable problems.⁸³ For example, to put it crudely, if warranted assertible claims at t_1 are no longer so at t_2 then Truth has changed in an unacceptable and unconvincing way. This implies not that Dewey regards truth as mere contingent generalized wishful thinking—as Russell suggests and James at his worst intimates—but rather that Dewey simply should not view truth as warranted assertibility. Instead, he should say that the latter

is all we're going to come up with when we make our tentative and revisable truth claims. On this view, truth is not reducible to warranted assertibility, yet to analyze the meaning and nature of truth in terms of correspondence with Reality or coherence with other sentences actually entails falling back on warranted assertibility in practice. To hold onto such analyses of truth soothes the agonized consciences of realists and idealists—with no payoff, no work being done. In short, there is no significant difference between the nature of truth and the test of truth, but the two are never identical. I suspect that talking of truth in terms of correspondence and coherence is a deep-seated rhetoric in North Atlantic cultures that does little harm when taken in a commonsensical manner, yet is grossly misleading when burdened with philosophic freight. In fact, if such rhetoric facilitates and motivates more careful inquiry, thus producing more and better-warranted assertible claims, it may be pragmatically justified as long as it remains philosophically innocuous.

The pragmatic conception of truth can be viewed as a kind of Americanization of the notion of truth, an Emersonian effort at democratization and plebeianization of the idea of truth that renders it “various and flexible,” “rich and endless” in resources, and it is hoped “friendly” in its conclusions. More pointedly, pragmatism conceives of truth as a species of the good; the procedures that produce warranted assertions are themselves value-laden and exemplary of human beings working in solidarity for the common good. In this way, Dewey's metaphilosophy and his accentuation of the role of critical intelligence are inseparable from his promotion of creative democracy.

Earlier we saw Dewey's deep commitment to democracy, influenced especially by T. H. Green, Henry Carter Adams, and his wife, Alice. I am suggesting that his profound revision of the Emersonian evasion of epistemology-centered philosophy is, in large part, motivated by his efforts to keep alive and vital the Emersonian theodicy under new circumstances and challenges. I am not claiming that Dewey had no intrinsic interest in the metaphysical and epistemological problems he attempts to dissolve. Rather I am suggesting that Dewey is first and foremost an Emersonian evangelist of democracy who views the expansion of critical intelligence as requisite for the more full development of human individuality and personality. His metaphilosophy is essentially an intellectual ax—a weapon of his pioneering activity—“to help get rid of the useless lumber that blocks our highways of thought, and strive to make straight and open the paths that lead to the future”; it is to ensure that his fellow Americans and world citizens do not “believe that the wilderness is after all itself the promised land.”⁸⁴ In this way, Dewey's technical treatments and sweeping critiques of the philosophic tradition constitute an Emersonian prophetic condemnation of “an ingenious dialectic exercised in professorial corners by a

few who have retained ancient premises while rejecting their application to the conduct of life."⁸⁵ Philosophy, after its evasion and emancipation in the name of critical intelligence and creative democracy, "ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men."⁸⁶ For Dewey, the task at hand is to call his fellow Americans and world citizens back to the American religion, an updated and revised Emersonian theodicy for a new world power with great economic might and colonial possessions, yet a persistent provincial mentality.

We thus tend to combine a loose and ineffective optimism with assent to the doctrine of take who take can: a deification of power. All peoples at all times have been narrowly realistic in practice and have then employed idealization to cover up in sentiment and theory their brutalities. But never, perhaps, has the tendency been so dangerous and so tempting as with ourselves. Faith in the power of intelligence to imagine a future which is the projection of the desirable in the present, and to invent the instrumentalities of its realization, is our salvation. And it is a faith which must be nurtured and made articulate: surely a sufficiently large task for our philosophy.⁸⁷

Ironically, Dewey himself often fails to examine seriously the degree to which the Emersonian theodicy, including his subtle version of it, contributes to this "loose and ineffective optimism" and "deification of power." He does not entertain the possibility that his own evangelical zeal for creative democracy falls prey to this optimism and deification of power. I am not claiming that it does this in a crude or vulgar fashion; but I do hold that Dewey does not fully escape the clutches of such optimism and enshrinement of power.

When we have used our thought to its utmost and have thrown into the moving unbalanced balance of things our puny strength, we know that though the universe slay us still we may trust, for our lot is one with whatever is good in existence. We know that such thought and effort is the condition of the coming into existence of the better. As far as we are concerned it is the only condition, for it alone is in our power.⁸⁸

Needless to say, Dewey's democratic faith is neither a religious commitment in the dogmatic sense nor an unreasonable conviction in the moral sense. Yet it is tainted by the very provincial mentality he scorns; that is, he simply cannot shed a rather narrow cultural and communal model for his creative democracy. This model rests upon, as C. Wright Mills notes, "a relatively homogeneous community which does not harbor any chasms of structure and power not thoroughly ameliorative by discussion."⁸⁹ The point here is not that Dewey possesses a deep nostalgia for a lost golden age of harmonious *Gemeinschaften*, but rather that he

believes that social conflict can be resolved and societal problems overcome by a widely held consensus more characteristic of artisanal towns or farming communities than of industrial cities or urban capitalist societies.

This focus does permit Dewey to see more clearly than most—especially his Marxist and liberal contemporaries—the cultural dimension of the crisis of American civilization; yet it also distorts his view regarding the role of critical intelligence in dislodging and democratizing the entrenched economic and political powers that be. Thus, Dewey's central concern is to extend the experimental method in the natural sciences to the social, political, cultural, and economic spheres rather than to discern the social forces and historical agents capable of acting on and actualizing (i.e., approximating) his creative democracy. His relative confinement to the professional and reformist elements of the middle class makes such discernment unlikely. And his distrust of resolute ideological positioning, as in political parties and social movements from below, leads him to elevate the dissemination of critical intelligence at the expense of the organization of collective insurgency. As C. Wright Mills notes, this insight partly explains

why Dewey has been rather liberally mugwumpish in politics, and why "action" is not linked with a sizable organization, a movement, a party with a chance at power. The concept of action in Dewey obviously does not cover the kinds of action occurring within and between struggling, organized political parties . . . Politically, pragmatism is less expediency than it is a kind of perennial mugwump confronted with rationalized social structures.⁹⁰

The point is not simply that Dewey adopts a gradualist view of social change and remains a reformer rather than a revolutionary. Rather it is the *kind* of gradualism he promotes and the *form* of reformism he propagates; that is, his gradualism is principally pedagogical in content, and his reformism is primarily dialogical in character. He shuns confrontational politics and agitational social struggle. The major means by which creative democracy is furthered is education and discussion.

Yet it is misleading to characterize Dewey as a liberal in the tradition of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. He indeed is influenced by this tradition as are all progressive political thinkers, but, in the end, he swerves from it. Unfortunately, he failed to grapple seriously with the Marxist tradition, not just Marx himself but Karl Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg, Georg Lukács, Anton Pannekoek, Karl Korsch, C. L. R. James, and others. In fact, Max Eastman notes that Dewey admitted to him that he never read Marx. Moreover, Dewey himself confessed in 1930—at the age of seventy-one—that he did not know enough about Marx to discuss his philosophy. This seems not to have deterred him from listing *Capital* as the most influential book in the past twenty-five to fifty years.⁹¹ To many Dewey appears

to be a left-wing Jeffersonian, an egalitarian more radical than liberalism and more individualistic than Marxism.⁹² And this is a plausible though not persuasive viewpoint. In a reply to Jim Cork, Dewey himself states, "I can be classed as a democratic socialist. If I were permitted to define 'socialism' and 'socialist' I would so classify myself today."⁹³ Yet even this admission warrants suspicion. It seems Dewey adopts this label more by default than by choice. Thus we are not surprised when he admits that no "existing brand of socialism has worked out an adequate answer to the question of *how* industry and finance can progressively be conducted in the widest possible human interest and not for the benefit of one class . . . I think that the issue is not as yet sufficiently definite to permit of any answer save that it has to be worked out experimentally. Probably my experimentalism goes deeper than any other 'ism.'"⁹⁴ I suggest that this "experimentalism" takes the form of creative democracy—a form of personal and social life that includes liberal, Jeffersonian, and socialist dimensions yet is ultimately guided by Emersonian cultural sensibilities.

Dewey is in search of a culture of democracy, of ways of life guided by experimental method, infused with the love of individuality and community, and rooted in the Emersonian theodicy. He did not articulate this vision in an elaborate fashion; and he never found an adequate label for it. His list of candidates ranges from the "new individualism," to "renascent liberalism," to "the great community."⁹⁵ These candidates are inadequate primarily because they fail to capture the most crucial aspect of Dewey's vision: the need for an Emersonian *culture* of radical democracy in which self-creation and communal participation flourish in all their diversity and plurality. For Dewey, the aim of political and social life is the cultural enrichment and moral development of self-begetting individuals and self-regulating communities by means of the release of human powers provoked by novel circumstances and new challenges. He thought that the crisis of American civilization was first and foremost a cultural crisis of distraught individuals, abject subjects, and ruptured communities alienated from their own powers, capacities, and potentialities. In the conclusion to his defense of "the new individualism" in *Individualism: Old and New*, he first invokes Emerson's democratization of genius and proceeds, by means of a central capitalist metaphor—the fence—to link this expansion of power to the energizing of people's everyday life in industrial America.

"It is in vain," said Emerson, "that we look for genius to reiterate its miracles in the old arts; it is its instinct to find beauty and holiness in new and necessary facts, in the field and in the roadside, in the shop and mill." To gain an integrated individuality, each of us needs to cultivate his own garden. But there is no fence about this garden: it is no sharply marked-off enclosure. Our garden is the world, in the angle at which it touches our own manner of being. By accepting the corporate and industrial world in which we live, and by thus fulfilling the precondition

for interaction with it, we, who are also parts of the moving present, create ourselves as we create an unknown future.⁹⁶

In his formulation of a “renascent liberalism,” Dewey echoes the best of Marx, calling for “the social control of economic forces” as “the means of free individual development,” the way to “release human energy for the pursuit of higher values.”⁹⁷ This echo prompted Sidney Hook—the leading student of Dewey—to predict that this text, *Liberalism and Social Action*, “may well be to the twentieth century what Marx and Engels’ *Communist Manifesto* was to the nineteenth.”⁹⁸ And there is some warrant for the comparison, though not for the prediction. Contrary to Hook, I am suggesting that Dewey is closer to the concerns of a left culturalist like William Morris than to those of a socialist theorist like Karl Marx, though his work resonates with the democratic sentiments of both. But Dewey’s ideal is neither the mythic medieval society of Morris nor the mythic Greek polis of Marx but rather a future Emersonian culture. He believes a “renascent liberalism,” radical in outlook and pedagogical in strategy, can contribute to the making of such a culture.

The greatest educational power, the greatest force in shaping the dispositions and attitudes of individuals, is the social medium in which they live. The medium that now lies closest to us is that of unified action for the inclusive end of a socialized economy. The attainment of a state of society in which a basis of material security will *release the powers of individuals for cultural expression* [italics mine] is not the work of a day. But by concentrating upon the task of securing a socialized economy as the ground and medium for the release of the impulses and capacities men agree to call ideal, the now scattered and often conflicting activities of liberals can be brought to effective unity.⁹⁹

In his major work in political philosophy, *The Public and Its Problems* (1927), Dewey calls for an Emersonian culture of radical democracy in the form of “the great community.” Responding, in part, to Walter Lippmann’s stinging attack on substantive democracy and his “pragmatic” defense of bureaucratic elitism in *Public Opinion* (1922) and *The Phantom Public* (1925), Dewey claims that the major task of radical democrats is to constitute a public sphere out of the various amorphous and unarticulated publics generated by “the great society” of industrial capitalist processes.

It is not that there is no public, no large body of persons having a common interest in the consequences of social transactions. There is too much public, a public too diffused and scattered and too intricate in composition. And there are too many publics, for conjoint actions which have indirect, serious and enduring consequences are multitudinous beyond comparison, and each one of them crosses the others and generates its own group of persons especially affected with little to hold these different publics together in an integrated whole.¹⁰⁰

The major obstacles to creating a public sphere—a discursive and dialogical social space wherein the various “publics” can find common ground—are the proliferation of popular cultural diversions from political concern such as sports, movies, radio, cars; the bureaucratization of politics; the geographical mobility of persons; and most important, the cultural lag in ideas, ideals, and symbols that prohibits genuine communication. Again, Dewey views the crisis as a cultural problem to be addressed by education and discussion, especially the application of the experimental method of the sciences to affairs of society. The rugged—or, as Dewey notes, ragged—individualism and smothering conformity of American culture are out of step with the advances of science and technology. To use Santayana’s imagery, the colonial mansion still sits next to the skyscraper. Dewey attributes much of this to the very frontier experience he valorizes in other ways. This frontier experience inculcates in Americans “the fear of whatever threatens the security and order of a precariously attained civilization.”¹⁰¹ American provincialism stays alive and well owing not to lack of exposure to change, but rather to a “frontier fear” of rapid change that threatens an already tenuous stability. In this way, Dewey observes—far more acutely than Frederick Jackson Turner—that the frontier experience contributes to conformity and scorns tolerance, openness, and curiosity.

We have been so taught to respect the beliefs of our neighbors that few will respect the beliefs of a neighbor when they depart from forms which have become associated with aspiration for a decent neighborly life. This is the illiberalism which is deeply-rooted in our liberalism.¹⁰²

In this sense, American culture is highly underdeveloped—anti-intellectual, escapist, repressive, hedonistic, intolerant, xenophobic—while the American economy is impressively developed, though the wealth is maldistributed. Dewey acknowledges the latter point—“The oligarchy which now dominates is that of an economic class” or “Our institutions, democratic in form, tend to favor in substance a privileged plutocracy”¹⁰³—yet his focus is on the cultural problem. And this problem is the creation of an Emersonian culture of radical democracy.

No government by experts in which the masses do not have the chance to inform the experts as to their needs can be anything but an oligarchy managed in the interests of the few. And the enlightenment must proceed in ways which force the administrative specialists to take account of the needs. The world has suffered more from leaders and authorities than from the masses.

The essential need, in other words, is the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion. That is *the* problem of the public. We have asserted that this improvement depends essentially upon freeing and perfecting the processes of inquiry and of dissemination of their conclusions.¹⁰⁴

Similar to the concerns of Jürgen Habermas in our own time, Dewey's preoccupation with communication proceeds out of a deep commitment to rational dialogue in an irrational culture. Dewey's notion of communication, however, does not simply undergird a regulative ideal that forecloses relativistic conclusions, but, more important, serves as *the* vehicle to create and constitute actual communities for the amelioration of existing circumstances. For Dewey, the move from "our Babel"¹⁰⁵ to "the great community" is a matter of cultural politics, in which communication resting upon shared values and promoting diversity must play a combative role.

On the surface, it appears that Dewey has not really moved too far from his *Thought News* project with Franklin Ford of forty-three years earlier or the democratic sentiments he shared with T. H. Green, Henry Carter Adams, and his first wife, Alice (who died in 1927). But, on a deeper level, we can see that this is not so. First, Dewey is now more intent on making the experimental method accessible than on making the facts available. Second, he is more aware—though, in many ways, still not sufficiently aware—of the dynamics of power in capitalist America (especially given the Depression) than he was before. Third, his project is no longer a matter of simply making philosophy relevant by means of journalistic intervention in the popular marketplace of ideas, but rather of making society democratic by pitting popular cultural transformation against a dominating economic oligarchy.

The major problem with Dewey's project is that his cultural transformation envisions a future Emersonian and democratic way of life that has the flavor of small-scale, homogeneous communities. This is not necessarily a nostalgia for rural America, especially given Dewey's no-turning-back attitude toward "the great society" and "the machine age." Moreover, much of present-day America remains ethnically and racially homogeneous, with its "chocolate cities and vanilla suburbs" (to use George Clinton's lyrics). Dewey's project is problematic not because he yearns for a bygone cultural golden age but rather because his emphasis on culture leads him to promote principally pedagogical and dialogical means of social change. Despite, and maybe because of, his widespread involvement in political organizations, groups, and even third parties, Dewey never did get over his Emersonian distrust of them. Hence, he falls back on "communication" as the major way in which "the great community" comes into existence. This communication signifies not only intellectual exchange and academic discussion, but also "close and direct intercourse and attachment."¹⁰⁶ The emergence of "the great community" assures the cultural revitalization and moral regeneration of local communities. Dewey's cultural project calls for changes that fundamentally affect the personal and institutional relations in society. He does not go into details, but he has a pregnant though vague idea of what his ideal would look like.

We have but touched lightly and in passing upon the conditions which must be fulfilled if the Great Society is to become a Great Community; a society in which the ever-expanding and intricately ramifying consequences of associated activities shall be known in the full sense of that word, so that an organized, articulate Public comes into being. The highest and most difficult kind of inquiry and a subtle, delicate, vivid and responsive act of communication must take possession of the physical machinery of transmission and circulation and breathe life into it. When the machine age has thus perfected its machinery it will be a means of life and not its despotic master. Democracy will come into its own, for democracy is a name for a life of free and enriching communion. It had its seer in Walt Whitman. It will have its consummation when free social inquiry is indissolubly wedded to the art of full and moving communication.¹⁰⁷

Contrary to popular opinion, Dewey's project never really got off the ground. Like Emerson's moralism, Dewey's culturalism was relatively impotent. Why? Principally because his favored historical agents—the professional and reformist elements of the middle class—were seduced by two strong waves of thought and action: managerial ideologies of corporate liberalism and bureaucratic control, and Marxist ideologies of class struggle and party organization. Both engendered utopian energies and group loyalties and could point to concrete victories. The first not only seized the imagination of his professional constituency, but also penetrated the very practices of his own occupational space, the university; the second attracted a number of his students, including talented ones such as Max Eastman and Sidney Hook. It is important to remember that Dewey's pragmatism is quite different from the practicalism of corporate liberalism. It is significant that Dewey's project of creative democracy differed greatly from Franklin D. Roosevelt's liberal program. Dewey opposed Roosevelt's strategies to patch up the crisis-ridden capitalist system, strategies that left significant power in the hands of the privileged plutocracy.¹⁰⁸ To put it bluntly, Dewey tried to create a third party and ended up voting for Norman Thomas on the Socialist party ticket in 1932, 1936, and 1940. In the midst of the war and a debilitated American left, he voted for FDR in 1944. In short, he was not a supportive ideologue for the most exemplary corporate liberalism in American history.

In regard to Marxism, Dewey remained a stranger, a novice, an extreme critic. Despite his courageous, diligent, and fair investigations concerning the "trial" of Leon Trotsky and his son, Dewey harbored deep prejudices against Marxism without the benefit of a serious study of its founder or its intellectual tradition.¹⁰⁹ I suspect that Dewey never came to terms with Marxism for three basic reasons. First, as a young left Hegelian himself for a short time, Dewey's worldly reflections were shaped by British and American writers such as T. H. Green, Henry Carter Adams,

Edward Bellamy, Henry George, Jane Addams, and his Chicago colleague Thorstein Veblen. In fact, in 1928 Dewey still described Henry George as "one of the world's great social philosophers."¹¹⁰ Here surely his earlier youthful enthusiasm blurred his judgment and bloated his rhetoric.

The second reason Dewey ignored Marxism was that it was anathema to the professional and academic circles he traveled in. Just as he had kept his distance from political controversy at Chicago, Dewey held Marxism at arm's length for career purposes. Even giving Marxism the dignity of close intellectual scrutiny could provoke the wrath of conservative trustees or university administrators.

Last, and most important, Dewey understood in later life that the major battle in the twentieth century was that between the United States and the Soviet Union, between Americanism and communism, between the legacy of Emerson and that of Marx. His role in mediating these battles in Russia (1928), Japan (1919), China (1920), Turkey (1924), South Africa (1934), and Mexico (1926, 1937) bears this out.¹¹¹ In the Soviet Union, Dewey saw not simply a new society being created but a new civilization emerging. In his article "Leningrad Gives the Clue" he writes, "The outstanding fact in Russia is a revolution, involving a release of human powers on such an unprecedented scale that it is of incalculable significance not only for that country, but for the world."¹¹² And in his piece "A New World in the Making" Dewey states: "The final significance of what is taking place in Russia is not to be grasped in political or economic terms, but is found in change, of incalculable importance, in the mental and moral disposition of a people, an educational transformation."¹¹³ At a crucial moment in this article, Dewey compares the United States with the Soviet Union with respect to creativity, ebullience, and pioneering spirit, and finds his own country lacking.

We all know a certain legend appropriate to the lips and pen of the European visitor to America: here is a land inhabited by a strangely young folk, with the buoyancy, energy, naïveté and immaturity of youth and inexperience. That is the way Moscow impressed me, and very much more so than my own country. There, indeed, was a life full of hope, of confidence, almost hyperactive, naïve at times and on some subjects incredibly so, having the courage that achieves much because it springs from that ignorance of youth that is not held back by fears born from too many memories.¹¹⁴

In other words, Dewey describes postrevolutionary Russia in Emersonian terms.

Dewey was wise enough to realize that even after Russia underwent vast regimentation and repression under Stalin, its utopian energies and revolutionary rhetoric could not but attract and inspire new generations of colonized peoples around the world yearning to be free. His description of how "socialistic literature, anarchism, Marx and Kropotkin" were

running “like wild-fire through reading circles” in China after the student revolt of May 4, 1919, was indeed prescient.¹¹⁵

Why then would Dewey not take the time to come to terms with this Marxism that possesses the capacity to sweep the globe? It is important to distinguish between Marxism as distinct political movements and Marxism as a diverse intellectual tradition. Dewey kept tabs on the former both as a foe of his Emersonian culture of radical democracy and as a source of insights to be incorporated into his project. Dewey largely discarded the latter as a monistic footnote to Hegel, a mere string of dogmatic platitudes and political slogans. As I noted earlier, Dewey considered Marx’s magnum opus *Capital* as the most influential book of the half century preceding 1930. I am suggesting he did this not because he believed Marx had laid bare the iron laws of capitalism but rather because the book had such impact through political movements in the world. In short, Dewey’s evangelical zeal for his version of Emersonian democracy deterred him from reading the classics of Marxism, just as Christians rarely read the Koran and Protestants pay little attention to Catholic catechisms. It seems to have never occurred to Dewey that the dominant communist movements may have traduced Marxism just as major “pragmatic” activists truncated his own views.

Notwithstanding his relative neglect of Marxism, Dewey’s one effort to write about and against it is still noteworthy. In his book *Freedom and Culture* (1939), he attempts to take on foes of creative democracy on cultural grounds; that is, he critically compares the pluralistic and individualistic ways of life in a “democracy” and the monistic and collectivistic ways of life under “totalitarianism.” The words in quotes remain abstractions throughout the book—atypical for Dewey. Yet his analyses do point out the significant degree to which Marxist conceptions of society often valorize totality, universal classes, unified movements, and homogeneous groupings at the expense of different social spheres, particular strata within classes, and diverse and heterogeneous ethnic, racial, and gender groups across classes. While Dewey hammers away at his old theme of allying democracy “with the spread of the scientific attitude,”¹¹⁶ he also makes claims somewhat similar to those currently debated in contemporary post-Marxist circles concerning the explanatory weight of economic, political, cultural, and psychological spheres in history and society. Like Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Stanley Aronowitz and Frank Cunningham, Dewey raises the methodological question:

Is there any one factor or phase of culture which is dominant, or which tends to produce and regulate others, or are economics, morals, art, science, and so on only so many aspects of the interaction of a number of factors, each of which acts upon and is acted upon by the others?¹¹⁷

Dewey quickly replies that his pragmatism rejects any attempts to invoke necessity and discern any single all-embracing causal force. Instead,

"probability and pluralism are characteristics of the present state of science." Therefore, "the fundamental postulate of the discussion is that isolation of any one factor, no matter how strong its workings at a given time, is fatal to understanding and to intelligent action."¹¹⁸

Dewey remains unable to conceive of Marxism as anything but a "uniformalitarian theory" that "throws out psychological as well as moral considerations" in the name of "objective" forces.¹¹⁹ He goes as far as to claim that this is true of "Marx and every Marxist after him."¹²⁰ This is blatantly false – and Dewey adduces no evidence, no close readings of Marx, Engels, Labriola, Lukács, Korsch, et al. Dewey's critique certainly applies to a crude version of Marxism, and the implications of his critique could supply interesting subject matter for dialogue with a sophisticated Marxist. Unfortunately, Dewey – here at his worst – forecloses such dialogue by presenting the weakest versions of his imagined interlocutor.

Dewey is often accused of either assuming a pluralist-interactionist view of society that overlooks the larger structural forms of power or promoting an explanatory nihilism that fails to give more weight to one factor over another and therefore yields no explanations.¹²¹ I think Dewey is innocent of both charges. In fact, Dewey approaches Marxism in highlighting the economic, though he is actually closer to Charles Beard's Madisonian economic determinism than that of Marx. Dewey is claiming neither that all factors may have the same weight nor that structural forms of power should be ignored. Rather he is saying that the weight that factors do have is determined not a priori but a posteriori, never by dialectical fiat but by empirical investigation. Of course, such investigation is necessarily theory-laden, but one's assumptions and theoretical entry points can still be kept tentative, provisional, revisable, and open to reasonable objections. Hence, there are no genuine theories of History and Society, only detailed, concrete analyses of particular peoples and specific societies. An analysis is acceptable according to how well it accounts for complex phenomena, not how well it conforms to some general theory. The debate between Marxists and non-Marxists should proceed likewise.

The only way to decide would be to investigate, and by investigation in the concrete decide just what effects are due, say, to science, and just what to the naked, so to say, forces of economic production. To adopt and pursue this method would be in effect to abandon the all-comprehensive character of economic determination. It would put us in the relativistic and pluralistic position of considering a number of interacting factors – of which a very important one is undoubtedly the economic.¹²²

Critics of Dewey are on firmer ground when they claim that *Freedom and Culture* tends to stress individuals more than communities and institutions as the safeguard to democracy. In his 1939 revised statement of his 1930 "What I Believe," Dewey writes:

I should now wish to emphasize more than I formerly did that individuals are finally decisive factors of the nature and movement of associated life.

The cause of this shift of emphasis is the events of the intervening years. The rise of dictatorships and totalitarian states and the decline of democracy have been accompanied with loud proclamation of the idea that only the state, the political organization of society, can give security of individuals . . .

It has been shown in the last few years that democratic *institutions* are no guarantee for the existence of democratic individuals. The alternative is that individuals who prize their own liberties and who prize the liberties of other individuals, individuals who are democratic in thought and action, are the sole final warrant for the existence and endurance of democratic institutions . . .

In rethinking this issue in the light of the rise of totalitarian states, I am led to emphasize the idea that only the voluntary initiative and voluntary co-operation of individuals can produce social institutions that will protect the liberties necessary for achieving development of genuine individuality.¹²³

In this revealing passage, Dewey is responding to that with which American pragmatists of his time and those who come later must grapple: the implications of fascism and Stalinism for American civilization. And, to complicate matters, the world-historical process of the decolonization of the third world accelerates while the United States emerges as *the* world power after World War II. Dewey's long and gallant struggle to creatively revise the Emersonian evasion and affirm the Emersonian theodicy exemplifies the coming-of-age of American pragmatism. Historical consciousness—like America in world history—seizes center stage. The Emersonian evasion recedes to the background, of limited interest and little importance to post-Deweyan pragmatists who become social critics, literary critics, or poets; and the Emersonian theodicy becomes more difficult to revise and reaffirm. A deep sense of tragedy and irony creeps into American pragmatism, a sense alien to Emerson, Peirce, James, and Dewey. American pragmatism, like America itself, reaches maturity. But can the post-Deweyan pragmatists keep the legacy alive? Can American pragmatism meet the new challenges of the American century? Or will it lose its footing in this new wilderness?