

***Cracks in the Pragmatic Façade: F. C. S. Schiller and the Nature of Counter-Democratic Tendencies*¹**

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ABSTRACT

The “pragmatist philosophical tradition” is often described as an American and democratic one. There are, however, a number of purposeful and/or accidental erasures in the history of pragmatism that make this tale possible; namely, the elision of pragmatism’s international cast in its formative years. This essay will focus on one of the most prominent of these forgotten figures and point out how he complicates the assumptions underlying pragmatism’s relationship to democracy. F. C. S. Schiller (1864-1937), the foremost British pragmatist of the early 1900s, championed a Jamesian approach to pragmatism. Schiller’s humanistic approach to pragmatism is all the more striking given that he championed eugenics and authoritarian governments. These two tendencies—espoused in popular and philosophical essays and books—press hard against a causal acceptance that democratic practice is warranted by pragmatism. Schiller, excised from the intellectual history of pragmatism, is relevant precisely because he provides a useful counter to those who would assume as a matter of faith that pragmatism-as-method is the best representation of democratic ideals in philosophical thought. Schiller also suggests what is to be gained by re-evaluating the narratives that have allowed such generalizations to gain ground and flourish.

¹ Several of the themes, and some of the content, in this essay are taken from my dissertation, *F. C. S. Schiller and the Style of Pragmatic Humanism* (University of Pittsburgh, 2006). These themes are given more thorough treatment in my as yet unpublished manuscript, *A Rebel’s Rhetoric: F. C. S. Schiller and the Dawn of Pragmatism*. *A Rebel’s Rhetoric* is the first ever comprehensive biography of Schiller, subjecting the whole of his philosophical career to a rhetorical analysis that explains both his importance to, and erasure from, the intellectual history of pragmatism.

Cracks in the Pragmatic Façade

Pragmatism has no exclusive claim to be a philosophy of democracy, or a philosophy which is open-eyed to the results and methods of science. I make this remark because writers of this school frequently convey the opposite assumption.

James Edwin Creighton (1916)²

There is a nameless mood abroad in the world today, a feeling in the blood of more than a few people, an expectation of worse things to come, a readiness to riot, a mistrust of everything one reveres. There are those who deplore the lack of idealism in the young but who, the moment they must act themselves, automatically behave no differently from someone with a healthy mistrust of ideas who backs up his gentle persuasiveness with the effect of some kind of blackjack. Is there, in other words, any pious intent that does not have to equip itself with a little bit of corruption and reliance on the lower human qualities in order to be taken in this world as something serious and seriously meant?

Robert Musil (1930)³

1. *A Well Told Tale*

The “pragmatist philosophical tradition” is a selective, if welcoming, bit of retrospective sense-making. One of the chief tenets of the tradition is the origin tale whereby Messrs. Peirce, James, and Dewey blazed an American trail across a philosophical landscape of mechanical naturalism and unbending absolutism. As time and temperament has changed, so too have the cast of characters included in the roster. This tale is, for the most part, true. No one will claim that the bounty of pragmatism isn’t chiefly the result of the ground-breaking works of Peirce, James, and Dewey. No one will challenge the fact that first generation pragmatism gave way to iterations and deviations, from Perry to Rorty to West, which extended the range and broadened the field of inquiry. My point is more specific than that.

² J. E. Creighton, review of *Democracy and Education*, by John Dewey, *Philosophical Review* 25, no. 5 (September 1916): 739.

³ Robert Musil, “Part II: Pseudoreality Prevails,” *The Man Without Qualities*, Vol. I, trans. Sophie Wilkins and Burton Pike (1930; reprint, New York: Vintage International, 1996), 330.

Contemporary pragmatism, a heady interdisciplinary subject of discussion, is broad even as its reach remains historically incomplete.

Part of this can be explained by reference to how the intellectual history of pragmatism has been written. Historically, American tomes have given little mention to the range of international, if largely European, players who lent aid to first generation pragmatism. The Italian Giovanni Papini (1881-1956), the German Julius Goldstein (1873-1929), and the Brit David Leslie Murray (1888-1962) contributed to the foundation-building of the pragmatist philosophical tradition. But they remain ill-covered even as other, more peripheral, characters are added to the cast. The question is why? I would suggest that there are at least two tendencies at play. Their obscurity is partially the result of history itself. The narrative fracture that occurred as a new generation of pragmatists contended with a Second World War necessarily shifted weight from European to American institutions. Second generation pragmatists regrouped and refocused their messages in ways that clung tightly to the American tale of pragmatism. The omission of pragmatic outliers is also partially the result of how history is often written. Trained in the nuances of specific pragmatists, at a select group of institutions, the second generation scholars of pragmatism kept to a tended path symptomatic of many historical narratives, one engendered (if not enforced) by the institutional choices to include some, remove some, and, over time, forget others. This narrative-building also incurred a side effect: the history that is American is also almost certainly democratic.⁴ Here, too, we can find reasons. While the fortunes of pragmatism waned in the wake of the Second World War, the tale keepers could at least remain calmed by incantations that highlighted Dewey, paid realistic reference to James and, more and more, turned to the logical nuances of Peirce. The time was not yet ripe for the dash and vigor that neo-pragmatists would inject into the corpus in upcoming decades. The result, then, is a brilliant bit of truth-making: by force of their institutional conventions, and spirit of their insular rhetoric, a tale of American means and democratic ends gained cash value.⁵ This rhetoric is so

⁴ A comment by James T. Kloppenberg is telling: “This view of the relation between pragmatism and democracy [that ‘it is the form of social life consistent with pragmatism’], which intellectual historians have been urging now for a decade, helps explain the resurgence of interest in pragmatism” (“Pragmatism: An Old Name for New Thinking?” *The Journal of American History* 83, No. 1 [June 1996], 131; reprinted in *The Revival of Pragmatism*, ed. Morris Dickstein [Durham: Duke University Press, 1998], 83-127).

⁵ Obviously this origin tale has not been without its critics (for example see Stanley Fish, “Truth and Toilets: Pragmatism and the Practices of Life,” in *The Revival*, 418-33; for a direct rejoinder to Kloppenberg see also John Patrick Diggins, “Pragmatism and Its

strong that even those who purport to upset the narrative – a hint of postmodern irony, a hip rereading of canonical texts – often fall into the well worn contours.

Note that I twice made reference to *rhetoric*. Typically conceived as the harlot of the arts and the lesser sister of philosophy, rhetoric nonetheless displays a love of knowledge. Absent that, it tilts towards the lazy denunciations of sophistry that even pragmatists have had to argue against. Even where there is no absolute truth, there is a truth that works because it aids in adding value to the things we believe, the actions we take, and the courses we consider. Even then that truth, as contingent as Aristotle claimed and as relative to change as James noted, is always subject to more tests and better meanings. Ferdinand Canning Scott Schiller (1864-1937), the foremost British pragmatist of the early 1900s, supplies just that; he provides a rhetorical corrective that strengthens the intellectual history of pragmatism. In the wake of his time in America in the mid-1890s, Schiller went back to England to champion pragmatism with the blessing of James. He also defended it against broadsides by philosophers ranging from Dickinson S. Miller (1868-1963), to Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), to – most notably and vociferously – Francis Herbert Bradley (1846-1924).

Reading Schiller back in to the history should, then, be an easy task.⁶ Yet Schiller still hovers at the margins of rediscovery. The reason strikes me as both understandable and unfortunate: correctives have a way of corrupting the accepted texts. Schiller endorsed both eugenics and authoritarian governments as a way out of the morass that was Europe (and America) in the 1920s and 1930s. In philosophical and popular essays, and in books such as *Tantalus; or, The Future of Man* (1924), *Eugenics and Politics* (1926), *Cassandra; or, The Future of the British Empire* (1926), *Social Decay and Eugenic Reform* (1932), and *Our Human Truths* (posthumously, 1939), he sought to show that the truth-value of democracy had seen its day. His works, especially later in life, carry the suggestion that a better way was to be worked out through scientific force and governmental decree.

Limits,” *The Revival*, 207-31). The fact that it remains so vigorous, even up to present day, is what I find troubling.

⁶ Schiller’s coverage has waxed and waned over the years. The most substantial recent attempt to renovate Schiller remains the work of John R. Shook. In the past decade he penned several searching discussions of Schiller’s philosophy. Most recently he co-edited, with Hugh McDonald, *F. C. S. Schiller on Pragmatism and Humanism: Selected Writings, 1891–1939* (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2008).

On this point I must be clear: to welcome Schiller back into pragmatism's history is not to suggest that his views on eugenics or authoritarian governments are to be accepted wholesale. Indeed, certain features of his thinking – a united European governmental body or a need to curb the excess of those born into wealth – had currency then and hold some value today. What is to be considered is more complicated. The extent to which Schiller's views have been neglected speaks to the selective way in which the "pragmatist philosophical tradition" has been generally collected. His part in pragmatism's history challenges the stability of an American pedigree. It raises troubling complications for laying claim to democratic aspirations. In short, Schiller's role in first generation pragmatism deserves more recognition and study precisely because he ruptures the traditional tale. This essay will first explore the historical development of Schiller's pragmatic humanism. His humanism, less a distortion of James's views than some scholars claim, was at its base an attempt to extend pragmatism into all facets of human life. I will then examine how Schiller wedded this approach to eugenics and authoritarian governments. In contrast to the Civil War's impact on American pragmatists, Schiller saw in the tragedies of the First World War – and the impending doom of another war he wouldn't live to see – reasons for reworking the basis upon which societies were built. I hope to suggest that Schiller was right on at least one point: the philosophical musings of scholars, pragmatist or otherwise, are indelibly stamped with the hopes and fears that they bring to their pursuits. Contemporary scholars would gain by recognizing that Schiller brought *both* to the development of pragmatism.

2. *Unraveling a Riddle*

Schiller's *Riddles of the Sphinx: A Study in the Philosophy of Evolution* (1891) – published under the pseudonym *A. Troglodyte* – is by no means the first instance of him working out proto-pragmatic themes. In the years prior to his receiving his M.A., Schiller is already publicly and privately trying to find a way out of the labyrinth that was his training at the hands of the Absolute Idealists. Many of the themes found in the book – the relation of religion to science, the choice between pessimism and optimism, the problems of formal logic, the importance of the practical – are more fully realized discussions of ideas he had been working out in his personal notebooks and school essays. And, clearly, the book carries the tinge of a person still not fully comfortable

junking the absolutist project; the unifying nature of the Transcendent Ego, for instance, still finds a place in his thinking.

What is striking, though, is the paucity of coverage that this work has received, even from some of his more sympathetic biographers. Rueben Abel, while full well recognizing that “Schiller’s Goliath was the Absolute Idealism of Anglo-Hegelianism” represented by Thomas Hill Green (1836-1882), Bradley and others, finds no place for the work in his summary of Schiller’s philosophy.⁷ Herbert Searles and Allan Shields, in noting that it was in its time taken to be the work of “a genius of 25 years” go on to posit that it “still bears close reading” but for reasons not expressed.⁸ Kenneth Winetrou, in urging that Schiller deserves to be better known, suggests that one reason is that he, alongside James, Dewey, and Mead, showed a “ready willingness [...] to [engage] big and thrilling problems that gave early pragmatism both a warmth and vigor that is all too often missing in philosophy.”⁹ This, then, is the work of genius, developed within the stronghold of Absolute Idealism, which provides the pivot where Schiller changes from being a student to a philosopher, a mere critic of his learning to a proponent of what came to be pragmatism.

Schiller explains, in the third person, that this work originates from a felt lack in current philosophy: “It was the sense of this want, of the absence of any interpretation of modern results in the light of ancient principles, which prompted the author to given what is substantially *a philosophy of Evolution*, the first perhaps which accepts without reserve the data of modern science, and derives from them a philosophical cosmology, which can emulate the completeness of our scientific cosmologies.”¹⁰

Such a project is predicated on seeking accord between science and religion. It seeks to strip away the demarcations whereby “science is defined as the knowledge of the manifestations of the Unknowable”, “God has become an unknowable Infinite, and Faith has been degraded into an unthinking assent to unmeaning verbiage about confessedly insoluble difficulties.”¹¹ So what,

⁷ Reuben Abel, ed., introduction to *Humanistic Pragmatism: The Philosophy of F. C. S. Schiller* (New York: Free Press, 1966), 7.

⁸ Herbert L. Searles and Allan Shields, *A Bibliography of F. C. S. Schiller* (San Diego: San Diego State College Press, 1969), 14.

⁹ Kenneth Winetrou, *F. C. S. Schiller and the Dimensions of Pragmatism* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1967), 145.

¹⁰ F. C. S. Schiller, *Riddles of the Sphinx: A Study in the Philosophy of Evolution* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1891), vii.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

then, are the riddles? They are “merely the articulation of the question, What is man or what is life?”¹²

Schiller frames his answer as a turn toward Evolutionary Metaphysics and as a rejection of past philosophical conceptualizations – Agnosticism, Scepticism, and Pessimism – that attempted to deal with the process of Becoming: “For all reality is immersed in the flux of Becoming, which glides before our eyes in a Protean stream of change, interminable, indeterminate, indefinite, indescribable, impenetrable, a boundless and groundless abyss into which we cast the frail network of our categories fruitlessly and in vain.”¹³

The Agnostic cedes the challenge and lapses into inaction, refusing to deal with matters that can only lead to “practical certainty.”¹⁴ The Sceptic responds to the challenge, but does so by dealing with abstractions that exist *beyond* the everyday realm of experience: “all significant judgment involves a reference of the ideal content recognized as such – and it is this which we express in judging – to an unexpressed reality beyond judgment.”¹⁵ This push beyond practical certainty inevitably leads to Pessimism. Dealing in more and more idealized forms of judgment, stripped of practical bearing, the pessimist takes the view that “the world contains nothing which admits of rational interpretation.”¹⁶ Why this result? Schiller suspects that this retreat into Pessimism is based in the rejection of metaphysics, “of a systematic examination of ultimate questions, and of its bearing upon the theory and practice of life.”¹⁷

A turn toward Evolutionary Metaphysics isn’t, however, a retreat into the past. It must provide an account which frames theory and practice in a positive manner. The only irrefutable basis upon which to build such a system is this: “The existence of the Self is at present asserted only as the basis of all knowledge, and in this sense it cannot be validly doubted.”¹⁸ Such a system “would be realized when all our explanations made use of no principles which were not self-evident to human minds, self-explanatory to human feelings.”¹⁹ This system must be based in the workings of evolutionary science but also, by being philosophical, a corrective on those workings; “in other words, they

¹² Ibid., 9.

¹³ Ibid., 79.

¹⁴ Ibid., 17.

¹⁵ Ibid., 87.

¹⁶ Ibid., 97.

¹⁷ Ibid., 133.

¹⁸ Ibid., 139.

¹⁹ Ibid., 149.

must proceed from the phenomenally real to the ultimately real, from science to metaphysics.”²⁰ It reconfigures the flux of Becoming, the bane of previous metaphysical systems, as “the process which works out the universal law of Evolution.”²¹

What are the implications of this metaphysic? God, first and foremost, is understood as a partner in the human process of Becoming. Our relationship to God, as part of the process, is a *personal* one. If God is freed from responsibility for evil and pain, we become the responsible actors in the process: “The assertion, therefore, of the finiteness of God is primarily the assertion of the knowableness of the world, of the commensurateness of the Deity with our intelligence. By becoming finite God becomes once more a real principle in the understanding of the world, a real motive in the conduct of life, a real factor in the existence of things, a factor none the less real for being unseen and inferred.”²²

God, in short, becomes a pluralistic concept which the many may share and not a monistic abstraction which all must accept. It is a concept which aids us in overcoming the world as it is, in a progressive process of which we are important players. This aids in the construction of “a harmonious society of perfect individuals, a kingdom of Heaven of perfected spirits, in which all friction will have disappeared from their interaction with God and with one another.”²³ This ideal is, however, a matter of faith; for “what though he show what truth *must be, if truth there be*, he cannot show that truth *there is*.”²⁴ For it is only faith that proceeds to pass beyond pessimism; and only faith as acted upon that demonstrates belief. This belief may, then, be enough to usher in a system such as the one Schiller describes.

Critics note both the taint of his training and the novelty of Schiller’s implications. One commentator sees the metaphysic as “defective” in its “rejection of ‘epistemological’ and ‘psychological’ methods.”²⁵ But the reviewer goes on to note a latent pragmatism in that “the concrete metaphysical method is to be consistently and consciously ‘anthropomorphic,’

²⁰ Ibid., 163.

²¹ Ibid., 179-80.

²² Ibid., 361.

²³ Ibid., 432.

²⁴ Ibid., 455. He goes on to say: “Because *philosophy is practical*, mere demonstration does *not* suffice; to understand a proof is not to believe it. And in order to live rightly, we must not only assent that such and such principles are conclusively proved, but must also believe them” (italics mine, Ibid., 457).

²⁵ T. W., review of *Riddles of the Sphinx: A Study in the Philosophy of Evolution*, by F. C. S. Schiller, *Mind* 16, no. 64 (October 1891): 539.

explaining everything from individual existences viewed as analogous to ourselves.”²⁶ Another critic voices similar concerns. While recognizing that Schiller is attempting “to construct a modern metaphysic on the foundation of the latest results of science,”²⁷ the attempt is marred by straying too far from accepted practice. The specific complaints? Schiller betrays an “avowed contempt for epistemology and [...] uncritical acceptance of individualism.”²⁸

Schiller’s insights prove resistant to these complaints, spawning a second edition only three years later. They are also subject to inspired refinement during an otherwise disastrous stint at Cornell in the mid-1890s. It is at this point that he meets William James and begins a long-term friendship which focuses the emergent themes found in *The Riddles*. Schiller takes to the insights found in James’s *Principles of Psychology* (1890). He is also witness to the release of *The Will to Believe; and other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (1897) and “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results” (1898). These works help to frame Schiller’s subsequent thinking, moving him squarely into the pragmatic realm. He is careful to add, however, that both he and James are inheritors of far older attempts to resist the abstractions of the a priori; “if then there existed absolute truth, of which man was not the measure, it would be most natural that the human mind should prove inadequate to its comprehension.”²⁹ The goal, then, is to find ways to further the project to which he and James now lay claim.

Upon returning to England and securing a position at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, Schiller begins to lay the framework that signals his transformation into a pragmatist. A key strategic decision is turning that transition into a defense of the Jamesian approach to the same. Other commentators have argued that this approach led to a distortion of James’s views. But the extant record would suggest otherwise. The 1901 “Axioms as Postulates,” published in the multi-authored *Personal Idealism*, was in development since at least the time of Dickinson Miller’s review of James’s *Will to Believe*.³⁰ Both Schiller and James were dissatisfied with Miller’s characterization of James’s views. In James’s letter of 27 January 1899 to

²⁶ Ibid., 538.

²⁷ F. C. French, review of *Riddles of the Sphinx: A Study in the Philosophy of Evolution*, by F. C. S. Schiller, *Philosophical Review* 1, no. 5 (September 1892): 559.

²⁸ Ibid., 561.

²⁹ F. C. S. Schiller, review of *The Will to Believe; and other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, by William James, *Mind* 6, no. 24 (October 1897): 550.

³⁰ Dickinson S. Miller, “‘The Will to Believe’ and The Duty to Doubt,” *International Journal of Ethics* 9, no. 2 (January 1899): 169-95.

Schiller he expresses “disappointment” with Miller’s review. On the back, Schiller jots down: “D. S. Miller asked me to reply to his art as W. J. wd not. I said he had misunderstood W. J. + M appealed [...] . This led me to write Axioms as Postulates to remove the misunderstanding.”³¹ James is also aware that Schiller is working on the essay given his correspondence with Schiller in 1900.³² It is clear, then, that Schiller’s “Axioms as Postulates” is not some errant exposition by a British outlier.³³ It is Schiller’s defense of Jamesian pragmatism and his first extended discussion of his views once the *Will to Believe* had tempered the complexity of *The Riddles*.

Schiller begins with a truism – each person’s understanding of the world is personalized by their experience of it. Left as is, this surely signals an arbitrary approach to knowledge. But Schiller goes on to suggest that there are two caveats: “The first of these is that the whole world in which we live is experience and built up out of nothing else than experience. The second is that experience, nevertheless, does not, alone and by itself, constitute reality, but, to construct a world, needs certain assumptions, connecting principles, or fundamental truths, in order that it may organize its crude materials and transmute itself into palatable, manageable, and liveable forms.”³⁴

³¹ James’s fuller comment is: “Miller’s article was a great disappointment to me—a complete ignoratio elenchi—with not *one* of my positions even touched” (William James, Cambridge, to F. C. S. Schiller, 27 January 1899, *The Correspondence of William James*, vol. 8, eds. Ignas K. Skrupskelis and Elizabeth M. Berkeley [Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000], 490; Schiller’s handwritten comments are found on the letter in Box One, Folder Thirteen, Educators and Librarians Collection, Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford [subsequent references to the archives will be abbreviated as SUL, B1, F13]). In referencing subsequent letters, I will, whenever feasible, keep to the text as it was written to provide the flavor of the original comments.

³² Reference to James’s appraisal of the work’s progress can be found in: William James, Lamb House, Rye, to F. C. S. Schiller, 9 January 1900, (“Calendar” letter summary), *The Correspondence*, vol. 9, 2001, 587; and William James, Bad Nauheim, to Schiller, 30 September 1900, *The Correspondence*, vol. 9, 327 [both originals: SUL, B1, F13]; truncated reference is found in Ralph Barton Perry, ed., *The Thought and Character of William James*, vol. 2 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1935), 150.

³³ Sturt, the Personal Idealist who edited the volume, was willing to reflect on the impact of Schiller’s work later in life. In his biting criticism of Oxonian philosophy, *Idola Theatri*, Sturt had this to say about “Axioms as Postulate”: it “startled the world by its advocacy of a principle which might have been traced already in the work of Prof. William James and of several continental writers, and has now become famous under the names of Pragmatism and Humanism. This essay [...] appears to me to have opened a new chapter in British thought” (Henry Sturt, *Idola Theatri* [London: Macmillan, 1906], 3).

³⁴ F. C. S. Schiller, “Axioms as Postulates,” in *Personal Idealism*, ed. Henry Sturt (London: Macmillan and Co., 1902), 51.

Schiller recognizes that this point, that reality is made by the shaping of our experiences, is open to attack. To exclaim that ‘what I experience is what I experience’ seems only to circle back around and again suggest the initial truism. What is crucial is the extent to which one or another experience succeeds in moving forward our understanding of reality. And experience is tested by experimenting with it, by trying out one option or another and seeing where it leads.³⁵ Should we fail, we furnish the substance for another experiment, and that experiment adds more qualification to the world we work so eagerly to understand.

Schiller sees the risk of failure as demonstrative of the Aristotelian notion of *ύλη*, or potentiality.³⁶ Nothing is given. We must, as a consequence, assume as a “*methodological necessity*” that “the world is *wholly plastic*, i.e. to *act as though* we believed this, and will yield us what we want, if we persevere in wanting it.”³⁷ But this faith in axioms must continually be tested by way of use: “They will begin their career, that is, as *demands* we make upon our experience or in other words as *postulates*, and their subsequent sifting, which promotes some to be axioms and leads to the abandonment of others, which it turns out to be too expensive or painful to maintain, will depend on the experience of their working.”³⁸

There are further considerations in understanding the move from postulates to axioms. A will to believe isn’t a license for lunacy; “mere postulating is not in general enough to constitute an axiom.”³⁹ Rough and wild, aprioristic or empiricist, postulates of all sorts will find their way into experience. To obtain axiomatic status, they must “have obtained a position so unquestioned, useful, and indispensable” so as to be considered as such.⁴⁰ Yet, just as quickly as they assume said status, they must admit of more tests which can, and often do, downgrade them. Or, more positively, we use them as foundations upon which to build, picking and choosing amongst them as experience dictates, never enshrining them in sham categories or supposing it practical, or even possible, to list them all and for all time.⁴¹

³⁵ “I observe that since we do not know what the world is, we have to find out. This we do *by trying*” (Ibid., 55).

³⁶ Ibid., 60.

³⁷ Ibid., 61.

³⁸ Ibid., 64.

³⁹ Ibid., 91.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 92.

⁴¹ Ibid., 94-5.

What is to be had by this approach? A dose of humility. We may never know, exactly, the origins of some postulates. Thus, we have to be content with moving an idea forward; “the true nature of a thing is to be found in its validity—which, however, must be *connected* rather than *contrasted* with its origin. ‘What a thing really is’ appears from what it *does*, and so we must study its whole career.”⁴² There will also be a retreat from the hubris of Absolute Idealism and “the chilling vacuity of its abstractions.”⁴³ Its supporters, the formal logicians, with their sterile and complicated schemes, create only “a trivial game which may amuse but can never really satisfy.”⁴⁴ Schiller hopes to banish them to James’s “Museum of Curios” with a query: “Oh mighty Master of both Worlds and Reasons, Thinker of Noümena, and Seer of Phenomena, Schematiser of Categories, Contemplator of the Pure Forms of Intuition, Unique Synthesizer of Apperceptions, Sustainer of all Antinomies, all-pulverising Annihilator of Theoretic Gods and Rational Psychologies, I conjure thee by these or by whatever other titles thou hast earned the undying gratitude of countless commentators, couldst thou not have constructed a theory of our thinking activity more lucidly and simply?”⁴⁵

These distractions thus dismissed, philosophy can turn again to its legitimate focus: human interest and a love of knowledge that does its best to move that interest forward. “Genuine thinking must issue from and guide action, must remain immanent in the life in which it moves and has being.”⁴⁶

The reactions to the book are a mixed lot. The *Western Press* suggests that it is “is one of the most valuable metaphysical works of recent years,” written with “a lucidity which is rarely found in philosophical works.”⁴⁷ The *Daily Chronicle* is of a similar mind when it notes that this work represents “the coming generation of Oxford tutors.”⁴⁸ But some reviewers argue that the

⁴² Ibid., 125.

⁴³ Ibid., 131.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 129.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 78-9.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 128.

⁴⁷ Review of *Personal Idealism: Philosophical Essays*, ed. Henry Sturt, *Western Press*, 1 September 1902, Newspaper and Magazine Clippings, 1902, Box Fourteen, F. C. S. Schiller Papers (Collection 191), Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles (subsequent references to this archive abbreviated as FCS191/CYRL/UCLA).

⁴⁸ Review of *Personal Idealism: Philosophical Essays*, ed. Henry Sturt, *Daily Chronicle*, 18 August 1902, Newspaper and Magazine Clippings, 1902, Box Fourteen, FCS191/CYRL/UCLA.

book lacks a consistent approach and veers too readily into mocking dismissal. Others apply their advice specifically to Schiller. The *Oxford Magazine* is led to say: “Here we have the doctrine of Pragmatism, if we may say so, in all its rude and naked glory.”⁴⁹ James, for his part, offers advice in keeping with the other reviewers. Schiller needs to “tone down a little the exuberance of his polemic wit”; he also needs to settle into a more systematic elaboration of the principles only hinted at in *The Riddles* and “Axioms.”⁵⁰

Schiller takes the advice to heart. The next several years see a flurry of activity aimed at drawing out the implications of pragmatism.⁵¹ This work suggests to him that a widened purview calls for a more expansive moniker. So Schiller pushes for the adoption of a term meant to go beyond pragmatism. In a letter dated 24 April 1903, one senses the delicacy of Schiller’s proclamation to James: “I have been inspired [...] with THE name for the only true philosophy! You know I never cared for ‘pragmatism’ [...] it is much too obscure and technical, and not a thing one can ever stampede mankind to. Besides the word has misleading associations and we want something bigger and more extensive (inclusive). [...] why should we not call it HUMANISM? [...] Not that we need drop “pragmatism” on that account as a technical term in epistemology. Only pragmatism will be a species of a greater genus, – humanism in theory of knowledge.”⁵²

On the one hand, he is seeking James’s endorsement. On the other, he is attempting to stamp the next phase of pragmatism’s development with his personalized mark. Thus, Schiller decides to engage in a sophisticated promotional game. He continues to attack those who threaten the specifics of pragmatism. This he does in caustic jabs at his favorite straw man, Bradley, in essays such as “On Preserving Appearances.”⁵³ At the same time, he must

⁴⁹ Review of *Personal Idealism: Philosophical Essays*, ed. Henry Sturt, *Oxford Magazine*, 3 December 1902, Newspaper and Magazine Clippings, 1902, Box Fourteen, FCS191/CYRL/UCLA.

⁵⁰ William James, review of *Personal Idealism*, ed. Henry Sturt, *Mind* 12, no. 45 (January 1903): 94.

⁵¹ In letters James emphasizes his approval for the project, but also the work that remains in bringing it to fruition; see William James, Torquay, to F. C. S. Schiller, 20 April 1902, *The Correspondence*, vol. 10, 2002, 26-7 [original: SUL, B1, F14]; William James, Torquay, to F. C. S. Schiller, 24 April 1902, *The Correspondence*, vol. 10, 34 [original: SUL, B1, F14]; William James, Chorcorua, to F. C. S. Schiller, 6 August 1902, *The Correspondence*, vol. 10, 99 [original: SUL, B1, F14]; see also Perry, *The Thought*, 2, 495-6.

⁵² F. C. S. Schiller, Oxford, to William James, 24 April 1903, in Perry, *The Thought*, 2, 489-90.

⁵³ See F. C. S. Schiller, “On Preserving Appearances,” *Mind* 12, no. 47 (July 1903): 341-54.

work to extend the domain it can be seen to encompass. He accomplishes this in more systematic statements detailing the merits of applying pragmatism, such as “The Ethical Basis of Metaphysics.”⁵⁴ James’s reaction to both of these articles is succinct and approving: “I don’t see how truth could be more broadly and convincingly set down and I should think they would have great effect. But things must also get into *books* to be effective.”⁵⁵

So Schiller sets about collecting his works for publication in book form. But that is of less concern for Schiller than James’s opinion of humanism, as both a concept and a label. The initial reply isn’t favorable: “‘Humanism’ doesn’t make a very electrical connexion with my nature – but in appellations the individual proposes + the herd adopts or drops. I rejoice exceedingly that your book is so far forward, + am glad that you call it Humanism – we shall see if the name sticks. All other names are *bad*, most certainly – especially pragmatism.”⁵⁶ With a month or less before the release of the book, Schiller seems panicked by the wait-and-see approach of James. “What I want to know from you is how the name ‘Humanism’ now strikes you + whether you agree as to its relation to Pragmatism?” And he is willing to do a bit of selling to secure approval: “Of one thing I feel fairly sure viz. that it will puzzle the enemy considerably. They had only just become alive to the necessity of bringing up their big guns to dispose of ‘pluralism’, when it turned out that ‘pragmatism’ + ‘personal Idealism’ were the keys to the position they had to attack, + now behold the real citadel is Humanism + they have a choice between being scholastics + barbarians!”⁵⁷

The approval will have to wait until after the book that announces it arrives.

Uncertainty notwithstanding, Schiller’s praise of James adorns the dedication of *Humanism: Philosophical Essays* (1903): “To my dear friend, the Humanest of Philosophers, William James, without whose example and unfailing encouragement this book would never have been written.” The work collects a range of previously published pieces – such as “Metaphysics of the Time-Process” (1895), “Non-Euclidean Geometry and the Kantian a Priori”

⁵⁴ See F. C. S. Schiller, “The Ethical Basis of Metaphysics,” *International Journal of Ethics* 13, no. 4 (July 1903): 431-44.

⁵⁵ William James, Chocorua, to F. C. S. Schiller, 27 April 1903, SUL, B1, F15 [not cataloged in *The Correspondence*].

⁵⁶ William James, Cambridge, to F. C. S. Schiller, 5 July 1903, William James, Cambridge, to F. C. S. Schiller, 5 July 1903, *The Correspondence*, vol. 10, 2002, 280 [original: SUL, B1, F15].

⁵⁷ F. C. S. Schiller, Oxford, to William James, 9 September 1903 [Draft], SUL, B1, F15.

and “Lotze’s Monism” (1896), “Darwinism and Design” (1897), and “‘Useless’ Knowledge” – that chart out Schiller’s developing viewpoints. Not that this collection was Schiller’s intended result. He apologizes that “the work of a college tutor lends itself more easily to the conception than to the composition of a systematic treatise.”⁵⁸

The initial reactions from friends give Schiller reason to be pleased, and optimistic, as regards his attempts at pragmatic expansion. Lifelong friend Howard Vincenté Knox (1886-1960) comments: “I think the essays decidedly gain by being brought together in book form. The title is decidedly good, and will, I think prove attractive. Your preface brings out the advantages of the name very well.”⁵⁹ Knox goes on to note that logician Alfred Sidgwick (1850-1943) has also expressed approval for the work. Even James, despite his label leeriness, is upbeat: “[...] read your book this A.M. [...] I am charmed by the elegance of the whole presentment. [...] Altogether I ‘voice’ a loud ‘hurrah’ – first cries of allégresse [joy]!”⁶⁰ But Schiller continues to press James with the issue of endorsement, asking “whether you might not say a word to draw attention to Humanism on your side, whether signed or anonymously (e.g. in the *Nation* or the *Psych. Rev.*) (The *Nation* does not yet seem to have acknowledged it, so I suppose the N. Y. Macmillan Co. has not yet imported it). It is of course of capital importance that you sh^d pronounce on the appropriation of ‘Humanism’ as a label.”⁶¹ This is Schiller, so recently experiencing a surge in self-assurance, expressing a crisis of confidence.

In February 1904, the endorsement finally arrives. James writes to Schiller that “‘Humanism’ (the term) which did not at first much ‘speak’ to me, I now see to be just right. Vivat et floreat [live and flourish]!”⁶² But he adds this warning: “One man recently said to me ‘I *hate* him’—another: ‘he is intolerable and odious’.” Poor Schiller—so good a man! It is well to know of these reactions which one can provoke, and perhaps to use the knowledge for political effect. Now that you are the most responsible companion in England

⁵⁸ F. C. S. Schiller, *Humanism: Philosophical Essays*, 2d ed. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1912), xi. Please note that references to specific pages are from the 2nd edition of the work.

⁵⁹ Howard Vincenté Knox, London, to F. C. S. Schiller, 25 October 1903, Correspondence, Box One, FCS191/CYRL/UCLA.

⁶⁰ William James, Salisbury, to F. C. S. Schiller, 16 November 1903, *The Correspondence*, vol. 10, 329 [original: SUL, B1, F15].

⁶¹ F. C. S. Schiller, Oxford, to William James, 24 November 1903 [Draft], SUL, B1, F15 [*The Correspondence*, vol. 10, 331, makes reference to the final version posted the following day].

⁶² William James, Tallahassee, to F. C. S. Schiller, 1 February 1904, *The Correspondence*, vol. 10, 369-71 [Original: SUL, B1, F15]; see also Perry, *The Thought*, 2, 502.

of what is certainly destined to be the next great philosophic movement, may it not be well (for the sake of the conversion effect) to assume a solemn dignity commensurate with the importance of your function, and so give the less excuse to the feeble minded for staying out of the fold?

Schiller seems to hear the praise but ignore the warning, and so sets off yet again on the path he had so recently begun. He continues to publish broadsides against the enemies, real and imagined, in the Absolute Idealist camp. He also pushes for the larger applications of pragmatic humanism. These efforts culminate in *Studies in Humanism* (1907). Like its predecessor, the book provides previously published but expanded essays: “In Defence of Humanism” (1904) is reworked as “The Truth and Mr. Bradley”; “The Definition of ‘Pragmatism’ and ‘Humanism’” (1905) is expanded to include arguments that Schiller made in the Italian journal *Leonardo*; “Plato and His Predecessors” (1906) is revised and renamed “From Plato to Protagoras.” Like *Humanism*, Schiller apologizes for any lack of systemization, noting “that the conditions under which I had to work greatly hamper and delay the composition of a continuous treatise.”⁶³

The critics again alternate between praising the novelty and questioning the style. The *Westminster Gazette* labels Schiller “a Modern Protagoras.” It argues that the philosophical content of the volume “may prove to be one of the most interesting and important in the history of British thought.”⁶⁴ The *Edinburgh Evening Post* is less pleased. It urges the writer to “walk somewhat more warily,” lest “those who combat dogmatism” become that which they attack.⁶⁵ The more philosophically minded reviewers also urge caution. George Fredrick Stout (1860-1940), a philosopher intimately familiar with Schiller’s writing, complains that Schiller lashes out “against all theories which seem to him irrelevant or hostile to the progressive satisfaction of human needs.”⁶⁶ Henry Barker (1829-1917) faults Schiller for “an undue exaggeration of the novelty of the new doctrine.”⁶⁷

These strikes against Schiller play into a situation that also befalls James. It is a situation which brings James’s praise for humanism into much sharper

⁶³ F. C. S. Schiller, *Studies in Humanism* (London: Macmillan, 1907), vii.

⁶⁴ Review of *Studies in Humanism*, by F. C. S. Schiller, *Westminster Gazette*, 10 August 1907, Newspaper and Magazine Clippings, 1907, Box Fourteen, FCS191/CYRL/UCLA.

⁶⁵ Review of *Studies in Humanism*, by F. C. S. Schiller, *Edinburgh Evening Post*, 13 July 1907, Newspaper and Magazine Clippings, 1907, Box Fourteen, FCS191/CYRL/UCLA.

⁶⁶ G. F. Stout, review of *Studies in Humanism*, by F. C. S. Schiller, *Mind* 16, no. 64 (October 1907): 583-4.

⁶⁷ Henry Barker, review of *Studies in Humanism*, by F. C. S. Schiller, *Philosophical Review* 17, no. 3 (May 1908): 324.

focus. At the start of 1908, the first reviews of James's *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (1907) are out in the periodic literature. They are not kind. Persons such as Schiller's family friend James M. E. McTaggart (1866-1925) criticize James's writing, suggesting that "though always picturesque, [it] is far from lucid." Then, after asserting that James holds that Truth "is a quality of nothing but beliefs," McTaggart accuses James of asserting his conclusions without meeting the arguments of pragmatism's critics.⁶⁸ Nor do the general commentaries on pragmatism provide cause for celebration. Also in early 1908, Arthur Lovejoy (1873-1962) publishes an article which purports "to discriminate all the more important doctrines going under the name pragmatism which can be shown to be not only distinct, but also logically independent *inter se*."⁶⁹ He concludes that pragmatism needs "clarification of its formulas and a discrimination of certain sound and important ideas."⁷⁰

James is furious. On 17 January, he exclaims: "I find myself at last growing impatient with the critics of 'Prag^m', and beginning to share your temper towards the reigning Oxford influences." He then gets specific, "McT., e.g. in this months Mind means to be perfectly annihilating, but some of his interpretations wd. be discreditable to my terrier dog. Ditto Lovejoy in the J. of P. I'm getting tired of being treated as 1/2 idiot, 1/2 scoundrel [...]"⁷¹ James seems possessed by the polemic spirit of Schiller, an approach that James had cautioned against in years past. He continues in a letter a week later: "I agree with you in full that our enemies of the absolutist school deserve neither respect nor mercy. Their stupidity is only equaled by their dishonesty." If the call is for more argument, James is clear as to how he will conduct it. "Don't think, my dear Schiller, that I don't see as if in a blaze of light, the all embracing scope of your humanism, and how it sucks my pragmatism up into itself. I doubt I shall trouble myself to write anything more about prag^m. If anything more about truth, it will be on the wider humanistic lines."⁷²

This last line, in particular, suggests the degree to which Schiller finally sees his approach as the correct one. He gains the assent of his most trusted

⁶⁸ John M. E. McTaggart, review of *Pragmatism*, by William James, *Mind* 17, no. 65 (January 1908): 104; 105.

⁶⁹ Arthur O. Lovejoy, "The Thirteen Pragmatisms. II," *Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 2 (January 1908): 29.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 38-9.

⁷¹ William James, Cambridge, to F. C. S. Schiller, 17 January 1908, *The Correspondence*, vol. 11, 2003, 522 [original: SUL, B1, F17].

⁷² William James, Cambridge, to F. C. S. Schiller, 26 January 1908, *The Correspondence*, vol. 11, 527-8 [original: SUL, B1, F17].

mentor. James has come to see why it was that Schiller had been so obsessively dedicated to rooting out the rot that was Absolute Idealism. But he also takes this to mean that James understands that pragmatism will now be connected to the larger framework of Schiller's humanism. The resulting relationship between pragmatism and humanism can be understood in two ways. Pragmatism is the method by which to apply humanism; or, framed differently, humanism is the pragmatic approach writ large. Together, then, they provide for the basis of arguing against any complete or systematic metaphysic since: (1) knowing is subject to human idiosyncrasies, and (2) knowledge (or truth) is subject to the conditions of the time in which it occurs.⁷³ Thus both gain traction in pursuit of practical ends wherever they are to be found. For Schiller, this means that humanism is focused on ameliorating human problems that extend beyond the realm of philosophy proper even as it refashions the tools *of* philosophy. Or, in his words, humanism "demands that man's integral nature shall be used as the whole premises which philosophy must argue from wholeheartedly, that man's complete satisfaction shall be the conclusion that philosophy must aim at."⁷⁴ We now turn to areas where Schiller sought such satisfaction beyond the bounds of, then as now, accepted philosophical practice.

3. *The Humanist Philosopher (King)*

A select few, often more gifted, scholars have traced out how Schiller took this call as a marching order against all forms of philosophy that enslaved the world to a priori machinations. How he went carelessly about his business of dismantling formal logic, how he erred in ignoring the positives of its symbolic developments. A review and reinterpretation of those issues and battles must be saved for another time. Why? Because those are the places most philosophers have looked at Schiller, even when their vision was askew. Because looking solely at philosophy proper blinders a review of the fact that Schiller took pragmatism, via humanism, outside of philosophy proper. Here again, he finds sanction from James. In May 1910, only a few months before his passing, James writes to Schiller: "I [...] am glad you are extending thus the area which your wings cover."⁷⁵ The reason for his joy? Schiller's April

⁷³ Abel, *Humanistic*, 72-3; Schiller, *Studies*, 14.

⁷⁴ Abel, *Humanistic*, 66; Schiller, *Studies*, 13.

⁷⁵ William James, Rye, to F. C. S. Schiller, 4 May 1910, *The Correspondence*, vol. 12, 2004, 492-3 [original: SUL, B1, F18].

1910 article “National Self-Selection” in the *Eugenics Review*. While Schiller’s involvement in eugenics predates the above date, his involvement in pushing forward a variety of positive and negative eugenical proposals accelerates in the years leading up to World War One. His merger of these proposals with suggestions as to the forms of government most suited to seeing them through increases in the war’s aftermath. If Louis Menand and others are right to suggest that proto-pragmatic strands of thought in America coalesced in the wake of the Civil War, one can offer a comparative argument regarding Schiller. His use of humanism, seen as the widespread application of pragmatism, finds its locus in the disorder of Europe.

Schiller’s embrace of eugenics is revealing, not merely for the fact that it was seen as an extension of his pragmatic humanism. In his writings on the subject, Schiller both champions and challenges some of the contemporary understandings of eugenics. He buys into scapheap science while, at the same time, suggesting ideas which continue to hold sway, albeit with slightly different labels and vastly improved science. In “Eugenics and Politics” (1914) Schiller explains that eugenics can “be conceived as the application of biology to social life, as a sort of social hygiene on a large scale; and so it seems destined to make trouble in a world which has long grown used to unhygienic, dirty ways.”⁷⁶ Its value lies in disabusing people of the notion that betterment is the rule and progress is assured. For Schiller, eugenics affords a pragmatic tonic to those lulled into complacency; it might, so Schiller reasons, help society to see the danger and “enable our forethought to avert it.”⁷⁷

What is this danger? In one sense, it is to champion *quantity* at the expense of *quality*, to ignore what the world so full well demonstrates: “For some bodies are intrinsically better than others, stronger, fairer, healthier; and some minds are strong, ampler, and happier than others. It is better to be born an Achilles than a Thersites, and a Plato than an idiot. Is it not worth while, therefore, to get for oneself one of these superior equipments for the purposes of living, or otherwise to learn how to make the best and the most out of the bodily and mental qualities one is endowed with?”⁷⁸

But this relatively benign suggestion corresponds with another assumption of Schiller’s. There is a danger of mistaking pity for progress. Schiller rails against propping up the “weaklings, wasters, fools, criminals, lunatics” who drain society; he fumes at the governments that “have made no systematic and intelligent efforts at improving the human race or preventing its

⁷⁶ F. C. S. Schiller, “Eugenics and Politics,” *Hibbert Journal* 12, no. 1 (January 1914): 241.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 242-3.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 244.

degeneration.”⁷⁹ Schiller is clear that the proper course would be a reconceptualization of society in ways that stress the dissemination of the good (genes and otherwise) over the bad. Here he tilts fully into the coarse and prejudicial, sounding like a paranoid believer in eugenical schemes that, even then, held little large-scale sway: “There is no saying, therefore, how powerful an instrument of good the family may not become, if the ultimate aim of statesmanship is conceived, not as the meaningless triumph of abstractions like ‘the State’ and ‘the’ individual, but as such an ordering of society as will tend to the survival of the better families, that is, *stocks*, rather than of the worse, and to elimination, as smoothly and painlessly as can be arranged, of those which are diseased or defective or tainted.”⁸⁰

Schiller reasons that “Western societies” have led to the current state of affairs. So the continued use of their models of governance will, at best, only provide stopgap solutions. Instead, one needs to look to collectivist societies such as China and Japan for areas to test the best that “Western science” offers.⁸¹

This is the synthesis of positive and negative strains of eugenics: the promotion of that which fits with the elimination of that which does not. A reader need not stray too far from the text to graft onto suggestions of “elimination,” or casual discussions of “stocks,” the painful and horror-inducing terminus they found in the decades that followed. But caution is necessary when assessing Schiller’s suggestions. First, these claims came as the First World War *approached*. His arguments would take on different shadings and seek out different models in its aftermath. Secondly, these are not the only suggestions that Schiller made regarding eugenics. Read in company of other equally strong recommendations, his pragmatic approach to eugenics is disorientating. Schiller makes clear that a scientific approach to social phenomena, which is how he conceived of eugenics, fares poorly when it traffics in the prejudices it seeks to remove.⁸² To this end, he pushes hard against tenets of eugenics that are now seen as inherent to any adherent of the same. In reviewing *The Processes of History* (1918), by pioneering sociologist Frederick John Teggart (1870-1946), he finds little to celebrate. But Schiller notes: “He also regards man as much of a muchness everywhere, and repudiates the pseudo-scientific extravagances of the ‘race’ theory and the

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 245.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 257-8.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 258-9.

⁸² See for example F. C. S. Schiller, review of *The Science of Power*, by Benjamin Kidd, *Eugenics Review* 10, no. 2 (July 1918):101-3.

conceit of ‘chosen peoples,’ pointing out its falsity and its futility as an explanation [for the exceptionality of progress].”⁸³ In 1920, Schiller goes further while commenting on the work of friend and psychologist William McDougall (1871-1938): “For not only is it a scientific fact that all human ‘races’ are mixed, and especially that all the populations of Europe are made up of much the same ingredients in much the same proportions, but there is no scientific reason to think that they are any worse for it, or that a ‘pure’ race, if it could be got, would be specially admirable.”⁸⁴

This is Schiller, the humanist, taking a pragmatic approach to the application of eugenics. It is an attempt, no matter how crude or out of step with fashions then or now, which sought to merge the seemingly incompatible: progressive ends with regressive means. But what other approach could be had if one was to approach the eugenic question pragmatically? As Schiller notes, “the question of Progress is ultimately a question of *value*, and that of values at least we are the measure, though we can find no measure that is absolute.”⁸⁵ This will to believe provides no guarantee of success; but neither do those with fixed standards. And if the end result of this project is failure, that is but one stage in a further process of refinement; “why not suppose that by continuing to hope, and to strive, and to amend, he may progressively *correct* his errors?”⁸⁶

This belief leads Schiller to revise his approach to eugenics in the years after the First World War. There is nothing particularly novel about this approach save the context and the baggage that comes with it. Interestingly enough, that context was as problematic then as it is now. In “Eugenics *versus* Civilization” (1921), Schiller sets about correcting misconceptions: “Neither as a science nor as an art is Eugenics committed to a ‘low’ view of human nature. It is not a form of materialism. It is not blind to whatever is not physical. It is not pledged to treat man as merely an animal. It is not a crude and silly attempt to intrude the methods of the stock-breeder into realms where they must ludicrously fail. Its past reveals that it was first conceived by the most

⁸³ F. C. S. Schiller, F. C. S., review of *The Processes of History*, by Frederick J. Teggart, *Eugenics Review* 10, no. 4 (January 1919): 235.

⁸⁴ F. C. S. Schiller, review of *The Group Mind*, by William McDougall, *Eugenics Review* 12, no. 3 (October 1920): 225.

⁸⁵ F. C. S. Schiller, review of *The Idea of Progress*, by W. R. Inge, *Eugenics Review* 12, no. 3 (October 1920): 227.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 228.

idealistic and ascetic of philosophers, Plato, and its future points to a higher and nobler scheme of morals than is now in operation anywhere.”⁸⁷ (382)

This process of improvement begins by educating society about the steps needed to reverse the slide to which it has committed itself. This education proceeds by experimenting deliberately and in much the same way of “deciding whether a certain foodstuff, say a new fungus, is good to eat.”⁸⁸ In short, society must proceed tentatively. It must experiment “with opinions about the good-for-man,” so as to foster the likelihood “that Eugenics and Civilization should reach an agreement about the principles on which the former should reform the latter.”⁸⁹

Schiller chooses to cast wide, embracing a variety of reforms. In *Eugenics and Politics* (1926), for instance, he offers a plan for revising the educational system along eugenical lines. Yet again, the assumed nature of eugenics mixes with features that are seemingly incongruent. Schiller resists changes that would decrease “the eugenical value of the old Scholarship System”⁹⁰ At first, his solution seems unfailingly (and vaguely) in keeping with current understandings of eugenics: “a modern society should put capable men at its head and enable them to rise to the control of things, while nothing is more ominous than that personal success should have to so often be purchased by racial extinction.”⁹¹ But Schiller is not advocating a policy of eliminating the lower classes from the pool of educational hopefuls. As he notes, “So long as a relatively rigid social order rendered it almost impossible for ability to rise from the ranks, reservoirs of ability could accumulate unseen in the lower social strata.”⁹² So Schiller suggests that universities “should aim at attracting the best ability, from whatever section of the community it can be drawn, by whatever means are found most effectual, and then at giving it the best training.”⁹³ This would help to institute “a new and real nobility, based on real superiority, and not as now recruited by the proceeds of unhallowed wealth and politics, and this would absorb, or perhaps suppress, our present sham nobility, which has become a social institution that means nothing

⁸⁷ F. C. S. Schiller, “Eugenics versus Civilization,” *Eugenics Review* 13, no. 2 (July 1921): 382.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 393.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 393.

⁹⁰ F. C. S. Schiller, “Eugenics and Education,” *Eugenics and Politics* (London: Constable and Co., 1926), 98.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 108.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 119.

biologically.”⁹⁴ While Schiller still sees value in a merit-based system, he is willing to range wider than the status quo allows.

In “Eugenical Reform. II. The Democracy” (1930), Schiller ponders the form of government most suited to eugenic goals. He argues that most governments are democracies in name only. They work behind the scenes to become “masters in the art of guiding, and hoodwinking.”⁹⁵ Here he sounds most in keeping with the rightfully negative contemporary characterization of eugenics, cautioning against “the free breeding of the most undesirable sections of their population” and social welfare programs that spend large sums of money on “the breeding and supporting of lunatics and ‘morons’.”⁹⁶ And while he again suggests that the elimination of “the idle rich, the froth at the top,” as a first step in any democratic reform, Schiller displays a cringe-inducing concern with a working class that forces “competition between European and coloured labor.”⁹⁷ So what is to be done? Schiller casually voices one of his most repugnant observations in a discussion of hypothetical solutions: “The temptation to exploit and enslave the coloured labour, rather than to exterminate it, would prove irresistibly attractive to a large and potent faction of the whites; the result would be class wars among the whites, to be followed later by successful slave revolts. These would doubtless be fomented and supported by states *not* ruled by whites—at present China and Japan—and likely to be more numerous and powerful in the future.” (404)

The more prudent policy, then, is to increase the worth of the white laborer through eugenic reform. But the question remains: via what governmental medium?

If the democratic experiment, in Europe and American, goes by the boards, what will chance to replace it? Schiller supplies a partial answer in “Man’s Future on Earth” (1933): “some form of government that will practice social planning instead of leaving men to find the ways to their ends by cut-throat competition.”⁹⁸ Such forms already exist, albeit in incipient states. Communism seems ready to reduce man to a form of “social insect”; and while this could certainly “arrest man’s deterioration” it would also “put an end to

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁹⁵ F. C. S. Schiller, “Eugenical Reform. II. The Democracy,” *The Nineteenth Century and After* 108, no. 643 (September 1930): 397.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 398-9.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 399; 403.

⁹⁸ F. C. S. Schiller, “Man’s Future on the Earth,” *The Personalist* 14, no. 2 (April 1933): 123.

any significant history of man.”⁹⁹ What alternative would Schiller consider? “There is, however, conceivable a second and more intelligent mode of planning, of which Italian Fascism may be the harbinger. It does not fly in the face of natural selection, and try to reduce all to the same lowly level; it is selective, that is, aristocratic, in method, and aims at raising man above his present level. Thus it is essentially an attempt by human society to direct its own development, to supersede mere survival-values by ethical values of equal or greater survival value and substituting for natural selection a selection of what is judged to be the best to grow a super-man.”¹⁰⁰

Two years before his death, in “Ant-Men or Super-Men?” (1935), Schiller carries this proposal further. He again notes the potential in Fascist Italy, what with its “the dramatic sense of the people” that is developing into “a political theory of sorts.” But he also points to another option on the political scene: Nazi Germany, “the maddest of all the dictatorships, based on the pseudo-science of fantastic race theories and the barbarism of anti-Semitic *Judenhetzen*.”¹⁰¹

This comment, like some of the ones offered previously, is shocking in how it stands out against current conceptualization of the history of eugenics. But Schiller adds another observation that undercuts the novelty. The Nazi government, for all its problems, desires a *Superman*: “Already one of the new dictatorships, the German, has declared in favour of eugenics, alike in its negative or sanitary form, which aims at purifying the stock, and, in its positive and more ambitious form, which aims at creating a real aristocracy and a better type of man. No doubt many centuries may elapse between this declaration and the realization of its programme, but it is none the less significant that the ideal of eugenics should now have been officially adopted and proclaimed in a great modern State.”¹⁰²

For this to work, however, the appropriate steps must be taken. A eugenical State, to inspire the masses in its direction, “will have to be elevated into some sort of biological religion and equipped with appropriate rituals and myths.”¹⁰³ It will have to, as Schiller believes to be the case with Hitler, commit itself “to the policy of developing *leadership*, a quality which the

⁹⁹ Ibid., 123-4.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 125.

¹⁰¹ F. C. S. Schiller, “Ant-Men or Super-Men?” *The Nineteenth Century and After* 117, no. 695 (January 1935): 95.

¹⁰² Ibid., 99.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 100.

democracies are more and more failing to do.”¹⁰⁴ Authoritarianism promises to “utilize the progressive possibilities latent in human individuality and to cherish the individuals from whom it will derive the impetus to progress.”¹⁰⁵ Rather than ceding to the failures of the past, Schiller posits that humanism will flourish by casting its lot with newer social schemes and newer approaches to governments pragmatically developed.

4. *A Tale Told Well*

A little less than a year after his death, one of Schiller’s last essays was published. “The Relativity of Metaphysics” is a return to the very issues with which Schiller grappled in *The Riddles*, still “the loftiest and most arduous region of the philosophic field.”¹⁰⁶ Whereas Schiller was wont to sort out the flux of Becoming in 1891, he is found here offering up a piece of advice that helps to frame this conclusion. In all metaphysics, the grand and the small, there remains one constant: the individual. All Schiller asks is that philosophers be kind enough “to drop some hints concerning the ways in which metaphysics may be constructed, so that every one who chooses may be able to construct his own, to suit his case, and to suit himself.”¹⁰⁷ Clearly, the humanism he embraced, the pragmatism he practiced, and the ends to which he directed both, are expressions of the world Schiller saw and the world he wanted to see.

The paradox is that, as much as Schiller is a part of the “pragmatist philosophical tradition,” his work in moving that tradition forward remains obscured. As I noted in the introduction, this is the result of how the narrative has been rhetorically constructed. An American narrative has little room for a decidedly British (if not by birth, by life) philosopher. That story also suffers a rupture should it invite into high-minded discussions of democracy tales of sterilization and fascism. Pleading Schiller’s case, then, becomes a frustrating business. To note that his was a racist and classist pragmatism, but not an anti-Semitic one, scores few if any points. To suggest his humanism trafficked in ideas then understood as part of eugenics, and now conceived in more

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 100.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 100.

¹⁰⁶ F. C. S. Schiller, “The Personalistic Implications of Humanism, IV. The Relativity of Metaphysics,” *Personalist* 19, no. 3 (July 1938): 241.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 246.

acceptable terms, only underscores the degree to which ideas, like philosophies, have far longer lineages than we often care to remember. Rediscovering Schiller requires rewriting certain portions of the history of pragmatism.

So scholars rehearse an intellectual history, often without knowing it, which keeps the tale true. Take, for instance, the recent *Pragmatism, Nation, and Race: Community in the Age of Empire*. The editors note that the revival of American pragmatism has “been a retrieval wary of elision.” In the wake of events like 9/11, however, there is a renewed need for a “creative rethinking of the pragmatist tradition.”¹⁰⁸ It is exactly at this point, between the American tale and the more general reality, where Schiller might serve as both a warning and an explanation for the issues raised in their title. But the form is resistant even if the possibilities for contact are there. Pragmatism is a method that admits of no prohibitions save the continued test of experience. As Robert Westbrook notes, “Truth is the aim of moral inquiry, but the best that can be secured at any moment in its course is well-justified belief, which is not necessarily true.”¹⁰⁹ This is the same “practical certainty” which Schiller championed, even as his moral inquiry led him to support policies that now strike us as repugnant. And pragmatism is not a political force in the world. It is a method which can be used to justify and censure political acts. Cornell West argues that “there is no one-to-one correspondence between pragmatist views on truth, knowledge, and so forth, and pragmatist politics. You can be left, center, or right and that’s very important.”¹¹⁰ For every Posner there is a Rorty, and for every Dewey there is a Schiller. To ignore *the varieties of pragmatic experience* is to traffic in the sorts of generalizations which pragmatism seeks to challenge.

So Schiller’s tale fits, even as it disrupts and extends the narrative. He fought philosophical battles far from the established citadels of American pragmatism. He lived through a conflict that most Americans witnessed secondhand. He endorsed decidedly non-democratic practices whose full force he would not live to see. Indeed, his is exactly the sort of voice that the narrative needs if pragmatism is to remain a tough-minded and inclusive philosophical pursuit. As Shannon Sullivan posits, “Sometimes it is only when an alternative to the present can be seen, or at least sketched out, that one can

¹⁰⁸ Chad Kautzer and Eduardo Mendieta, “Introduction: Community in the Age of Empire,” *Pragmatism, Nation, and Race: Community in the Age of Empire* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2009), 1.

¹⁰⁹ Robert Westbrook, “Pragmatism and War,” *Ibid.*, 247.

¹¹⁰ Cornell West, Interview with Cornell West, conducted by Eduardo Mendieta, *Ibid.*, 280.

see how and why the present is problematic.”¹¹¹ For a method with a new name for far older ways of thinking, Schiller promises an older version of the same even as he raises *new* challenges and questions. Pragmatism is strong enough to suffer the inclusion.

¹¹¹ Shannon Sullivan, “Prophetic Vision and Trash Talkin’,” *Ibid.*, 192.