

Guests Editors' Preface
Pragmatist and Democracy: an overview

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From its inception at the origins of American philosophy up until contemporary reappraisals of traditional pragmatist themes and approaches, the pragmatist tradition has defied every attempt at defining its specific identity. The diversity and richness of pragmatism as a philosophical tradition can be appreciated by looking at the great variety of conflicting positions and perspectives on central issues of democratic theory and practice which have been argued to fall within its scope. It is possible to find pragmatist views scattered along the spectrum of debates such as those between the epistemic or ethical nature of democratic decision-making, 'thin'-procedural vs. 'thick'-substantial views of the normative scope of democracy, and liberal vs. communitarian conceptions of democratic life and society. Moreover, while some pragmatists have primarily engaged in the theoretical and foundational project of defining and justifying democratic principles and institutions, others see pragmatism primary contribution to politics as the critical and educational effort of shaping and transforming actual democratic practice and culture.

This volume hosts a wide range of pragmatist reflections focusing on different aspects of the theory and practice of democracy, with a view both to exploring the richness and variety of this philosophical tradition and raising the question of its specificity and identity. In this brief introduction we highlight some of the main themes emerging from the different contributions to the volume.

In the opening paper Robert Talisse develops further his project of providing a justification of democracy from a Peircean epistemological perspective. He argues that a viable pragmatist democratic theory should abandon Deweyan comprehensive approaches to democracy, which are unable to account for John Rawls' insight that contemporary liberal democratic societies are characterized by the fact of reasonable pluralism. Considering that according to pragmatists there is an internal connection between proper philosophy and democratic politics, in the sense that for pragmatism

meaningful critical thinking can only be conducted democratically, Talisse points out that democratic theory should not only be seen as a central concern for a pragmatist political theory, but as a crucial test for attesting the very viability of pragmatist philosophy. It is in order to address this viability challenge that Talisse recommends to drop the anti-pluralistic Deweyan-way-of-life approach to democracy and endorse an alternative view inspired to Charles S. Peirce's pragmatist social epistemology.

Roberto Frega in his contribution outlines the main tenets of a pragmatist theory of public reason drawing on certain overlooked aspects of John Dewey's political thinking. Sharing with Talisse the distrust towards traditional comprehensive Deweyan approaches to democratic politics, Frega re-examines Dewey's epistemology of practice by means of a radical reconstruction of political epistemology centred on the notions of deliberation and justification. Through a critical account of some of main conceptions of public reason in contemporary political philosophy, such as those put forth by Rawls and Jurgen Habermas, Frega provides a distinct account of democratic practice which mediates between idealistic-liberal and critical-theoretical positions. Both Frega's and Talisse's papers show the increasing importance of epistemological arguments in democratic theory. While relying on different epistemological outlooks and pointing to different conceptions of the nature and role of justification in democratic theory, both papers claim that one of pragmatism key contribution to contemporary political debate lays in its account of the place of rationality in human affairs.

Gideon Calder and Fabrizio Trifiro' focuses precisely on the importance of philosophical theorization for political practice and especially the practice of democracy. Calder, through a critical exploration of Richard Rorty and Nancy Fraser's anti-metaphysical treatments of democracy, argues that to address key practical challenges facing democratic societies we require venturing to a theoretical vantage point further from ground-level political practice than either Rorty or Fraser would prefer. In particular, reflecting on the circularity inherent to the projects of democracy and social inclusion, namely that the elaboration of principles of democracy and inclusion presupposes democratic and inclusive processes of decision-making, Calder concludes that the only escape from this circular movement is through a recourse to 'prior philosophy.' Looking at the challenges of creating equal opportunities for disabled people he suggests that the meta-principles that would allow us to escape this dead-end for democratic politics can be found in the capability approach elaborated by Amartya Sen.

Trifiro' endorses instead a ground-level ethical/political approach to the everyday challenges facing liberal democracies, including what he identifies as the structural tensions within the liberal democratic project between the values of liberty and equality, liberal and democratic rights, and universalistic

and particularistic aspirations. Trifiro's approach draws on the anti-metaphysical and anti-sceptical works of Rorty and Putnam at a meta-normative level, and the deliberative turn in democratic theory and the capability approach to autonomy, at the normative level. He maintains that there is no philosophical argument that can protect liberal democracies from the challenges and threats they face, but only concrete and serious political and moral commitment. Looking at the challenges posed by the increasing intercultural contacts associated with contemporary globalization he argues that an anti-foundationalist approach to normativity that gives priority to the ethical and the political over the ontological and the epistemological is not only epistemically viable but also highly desirable for the fullest realization of the liberal democratic project in a deliberative spirit.

Mark Porrovecchio questions the assumption behind Talisse's viability argument, that there is a necessary internal relationship between pragmatist philosophy and democratic politics, by focusing on the neglected works of the British philosopher Friedrich. C. Schiller. Pointing out how Schiller's Jamesian humanism should be regarded as falling squarely within the pragmatist tradition and how he was able to accommodate his pragmatist humanism with the endorsement of eugenics and authoritarianism, Porrovecchio argues that the association of pragmatism with democracy and equalitarianism is forced and unjustified. Porrovecchio thus shows the extent to which the reintegration of Schiller's voice in the pragmatist tradition would not only contribute to enrich the pragmatist movement but also provide a more accurate account of the significance of pragmatist epistemology for political theory, and liberal democratic politics in particular.

Joëlle Zask outlines the main tenets of a pragmatist liberal democratic culture by bringing together Dewey's notion of the public and the different approaches to self-government elaborated by Thomas Jefferson, Henry D. Thoreau, and Alexis de Tocqueville. The resulting pragmatist view of liberal democracy is centred on the appreciation of the ineradicable 'situatedness' of every social agent, which is taken to entail that genuine democratic self-government must rely on the agents' not replaceable knowledge of their own specific situation. Such an approach, which counters the epistocratic tradition that grounds the right to govern upon the possession of some specific competence or knowledge not available to ordinary agents, purports to overcome the liberal/communitarian opposition by merging collective and individual autonomy in the radical project of comprehensive practices of self-government spanning across all forms of collective agency.

Barbara Thayer-Bacon, drawing on Dewey theory of social transaction and his anti-foundationalist epistemology, endorses a similar comprehensive view of democracy as a mode of associated living encompassing all fronts of life, with the intent to move beyond individualism and collectivism and liberal

democracy as we know it. The cornerstone of this radical political view is a transactional view of the selves as embedded in social relations which they continuously help shaping while being at the same time shaped by them. She takes this indissoluble social interconnection to point in a Deweyan way to the crucial role to be played by public education in equipping us for life in pluralist democratic communities and making us able to recognise the risks of oppression and exploitation lurking behind accepted social practice.

In a similar vein Sandra Laugier argues that Stanley Cavell's reading of Ralph W. Emerson's views about democracy shows us the way to overcome the individualism/collectivism dualism which has informed the debate between liberals and communitarians. This reading is centred on the appreciation of the Emersonian concept of self-reliance as the defining trait of a progressive democratic culture. The driving idea is that it is only by valuing, safeguarding and fostering the critical voice of self-reliant individuals that it is possible to prevent the degeneration of democratic consent into social conformism. Yet, Laugier maintains that this radical form of individualism is not to be regarded as the apology of the selfish pursuit of private interests. It is compatible with the pursuit of the public interest, since Emerson's self-reliant individuals are immersed in the ordinary everyday life they share with their fellow human beings, thus pursuing common interests. On this view, the value of education for democracy is seen as being that of helping creating self-reliant citizens, rather than exclusively knowledgeable individuals.

Filipe Carreira da Silva joins voice with Thayer-Bacon and Laugier in stressing the crucial role played by schooling and public education in the formation of individual selves and communities. His contribution illustrates the significance for democratic politics of George H. Mead's social psychological and evolutionist philosophy of education. In particular, through an examination of Mead's views on a variety of issues including the educative role of the family, the pedagogical role model of the experimental scientific method and the public role of schools in providing people with the skills and capacities required to participate actively in modern industrial economies and democratic societies, da Silva shows how it is possible to see emerging from Mead's social psychology of education a pragmatist, egalitarian and deliberative *ethos* of democracy. This is an *ethos* whose realization, from the local to the national and the global levels, depends crucially on informed citizenry and active public spheres.

Kenneth Stickers turns from the public role of education in equipping citizens for democratic life to that of intellectuals in identifying actual and potential threats and challenges to democratic societies, elaborating creative resolutions to address them, and raising public awareness and self-reflection about what it means to live in a democratic society. Following Dewey's insight that philosophy should operate as a 'liaison officer' for different areas

of culture, Sikkers maintains that pragmatism should urge public intellectuals to divert their attention from the theoretical task of justifying democracy against antidemocratic people to the transformative task of dealing with existing concrete threats to democratic life. In the background of his argument for the critical and transformative role of public intellectuals lays a pragmatist understanding of epistemic fallibilism which rejects adversary politics for the constructive inclusion and confrontation of all the dissenting voices. Enlargement of experience and not confutation is offered as the regulative ethos of social and political inquiry.

This seems to be the same ethos which Brian Duff, in his paper, argues to be threatened by approaches to social conflict based on the communitarian idea of parenthood as opposed to the universalistic idea of brotherhood. Duff develops his argument through a critical examination of certain aspects of Rorty's and Cornel West's thought, which he takes as exemplifying a communitarian pragmatist answer to the normative contingency and pluralism that follows from the rejection of foundationalist philosophy. Duff's main contention is that such approaches eventually lead to the stagnation of political debate and the conservative defence of the status quo.

Shane Ralston takes issue with the idea that democratic deliberation is primarily if not exclusively a group activity. He looks at Dewey's theory of moral deliberation and Robert Goodin's theory of 'deliberation within' as instances of more comprehensive and satisfying accounts of deliberative democracy that integrate dialogical and monological perspectives. The lesson deliberative democrats should take from the proto-deliberative democrat Dewey, according to Ralston, is the appreciation of the key role of imaginative thinking in formulating appropriate responses to the problematic situations we face in our everyday lives. He argues that Goodin's account of deliberation, transposing Dewey's insight from the moral to the political sphere, is the one deliberative democrats should look at.

In the final contribution Brian Butler draws a pragmatist philosophy law from Dewey's views of democracy and rational inquiry. Through a critical comparison with the approaches to law elaborated by Ronald Dworkin and Richard Posner, Butler argues that Dewey's pragmatist view of law is to be preferred. While Dworkin's approach is too principled and thus less accommodating to dissent and diversity, Posner's minimalist approach leaves spaces for social cooperation too exposed and vulnerable to the strategic pursuit of self-interest. Dewey's ethical and fallibilist approach is more conducive to the creation of legal systems fit for participatory, pluralist and deliberative democratic societies.