

Pragmatism and Political Criticism abstracts

WIN 0-02 – Pragmatism and Political Criticism (I): “Pragmatism and Democracy”

Chair: Clayton Chin

Thursday 14:15-15:15 WIN 0-02

Pragmatist Aesthetics, Social Criticism, and Democracy

Michael Räber

Pragmatists rightly reject universalist Kantian or utilitarian expectations of ideal theories when it comes to political and moral choices. They hold that criteria for such choices cannot be other than contextually and historically constructed and they therefore appeal to notions of community. However, as we are living through conventional practices, we will confront choices that will not be fully determined by conventional meanings. Thinking critically of conventional meanings and practices is necessary, even if never from a point of nowhere. Hence it is needed to reflect on further criteria. While it is true that for a concept of social-political criticism it is required to take into account ontological and epistemological criteria, pragmatist thinkers like John Dewey and Richard Rorty stress the importance and priority of *aesthetic* criteria.

For both Rorty and Dewey, art is *the* medium for tapping critical, subversive power by disclosure and through imaginative vision addressed to imaginative experience of possibilities that contrast with actual conditions. In addition to that, Dewey seeks to construct normative aesthetic criteria for critical judgments through his very broad (and admittedly vague) notion of ‘aesthetic experience’ (as is suggested by recent works from Richard Shusterman, Mark Mattern, Scott Stroud or Aaron Rodriguez).

By reconstructing a Deweyan and Rortyan account of aesthetics (and developing aesthetic criteria for social and political criticism), I will put forward a reading of pragmatism that holds it to be a decidedly critical philosophy. It can be showed how social-political criticism is a necessary constituent of the idea of democracy (that democracy without criticism is not conceivable). Thus my argument will be that, if criticism is a necessary constituent of democracy and if art and aesthetics are manipulative and reflective means for social-political criticism, pragmatist aesthetics is critical philosophy oriented towards the ideal of democracy.

A Reconsideration of Peircean Democracy

Michael Bacon

Abstract TBC

Dewey, Sen and the Significance of Participation: A Critical Approach to Freedom and Democracy

Jessica Soester

Pragmatism, specifically that of John Dewey, offers a critical approach to the concept of freedom, or rather—to the concept and *practice* of freedom, as the dimension of participation plays a core role in Dewey's conceptions of "freedom" and "democracy." Focusing on this role participation plays in Dewey's philosophy offers insight into the fundamental connections between Dewey's understanding of "democracy" and "freedom," and emphasizes the key roles of "(creative) intelligence" and thus, "education."

After giving Dewey's critical analyses of traditional conceptions of "liberty" I lay out the main tenets of Dewey's account of freedom. I focus particularly on the participatory dimensions key to understanding of freedom and democracy. I then discuss importance these same participatory dimensions play in the work of the economist Amartya Sen. In particular, I focus on the importance participation, and the ability to participate, occupies in Sen's account of "freedom," "democracy" and "development." Lastly turn to discuss this importance in terms of a philosophy of education.

Due to the singular importance participation plays in both Sen and Dewey's accounts of "freedom" and "democracy," a well-developed account of "education" is required for each account. Although Sen's account places an important emphasis on education, and acknowledges its significant role, Sen never adequately engages in either in depth critical analyses of education, nor develops an extensive account of "education." I argue that Sen's capabilities approach would benefit from a dialogue with Dewey's political philosophy, particularly the Deweyan model of education.

Pragmatism and Political Criticism (II): “Pragmatism and Social Criticism”

Chair: Michael Bacon

Thursday 11:30-13:00 ABG024

Rorty and the Question of a Critical Pragmatism

Clayton Chin

Abstract TBC

Prophets of Democracy: Dewey, Connolly and the Limits of Critique

Joe Hoover

There is a strain of American democratic thought that inspires a hesitation for critical theorists, it seems too hopeful, too profess too much faith in the melioration rather than transformation of the present. I argue that it is the anticipation of just these objections that leads William Connolly to self-consciously rework democratic theory, incorporating methods of genealogy and deconstruction. I then use a critical reading of John Dewey to suggest that the American Pragmatic tradition in fact has unique critical resources - particularly its focus on corrective action. Rather than seeing Pragmatism as lacking criticality, I argue that it offers a different mode of critique that has as much to offer genealogy and deconstruction as critical methods as those methods have to offer American traditions of democratic political thought.

Towards a Pragmatist Theory of Multiculturalism

Dominik Gerber

Extending the recent reception of American Pragmatism in critical and especially democratic theory, I argue that the pragmatist motive of “inquiry” offers promising normative resources for a critical reply to the “multiculturalism backlash.” The claim that group-specific rights are philosophically unpersuasive, empirically under-informed, and harmful to the cohesiveness of liberal societies reflects the *normative* assessment of *empirical* observations held to be “detrimental” consequences of multiculturalism policies. Hence, one key implication of the multiculturalist reversal thesis appears to be that the experience of negative practical consequences is susceptible to invalidate not just the existing policy approaches to cultural diversity, but the normative basis of multiculturalism *tout court*. My aim is to show that this inference is ill-conceived and overly hasty. The argument proceeds in four steps: first, I turn to the current crisis surrounding the justification of multiculturalism. I show that the

multiculturalism backlash exposes a potentially problematic and largely unquestioned aspiration to metaphysical certainty and human infinitude that is lingering within justificatory theories of multiculturalism. Second, I exemplify this tendency discussing two well-known arguments for multiculturalism – Charles Taylor’s and Will Kymlicka’s. Third, I demonstrate that a possible solution to this problem can be reconstructed from the works of classical pragmatists. Two possible pragmatist justificatory strategies will be distinguished, one based on the epistemology of Charles S. Peirce, the other based on John Dewey’s naturalism. Fourth, I intend to argue why Dewey’s account is superior to Peirce’s epistemology as a critical guide towards a more reflective theory of multiculturalism.

Toward a Critical and Realist Political Theory

J. Prinz

Based on an immanent critique of recent debates about ‘realism’ in political theory, which often claim to pose a challenge to post-Rawlsian liberalism, I will try to sketch an approach to political theory that sets off by showing that the dichotomy found throughout liberal political theory between abstract, transcendental and (radically) critical approaches and the contextualist, realist and status-quo affirming approaches, is nothing but a sign of the structural inability of liberal political theory to be self-reflexive.

Rather, I argue, political theory can be both transcendental *and* status-quo affirming or practical *and* critical. In order to combine the practical and critical moments which stand in tension to each other I will take recourse to Theodor W. Adorno’s Critical Theory, especially his primacy of the object, his dialectical critique of analytical philosophy (including an attack on the is-ought-distinction) and his understanding of critique. A *political* theory/social philosophy (rather than a science) which is self-reflexive, yet aware of its practical potential, and hence radically (self-) critical can be constructed from these writings when reinterpreted through recent critical contributions in which the tension between critical and practical moments is exemplified, as in Raymond Geuss’ recent ‘realist’ interventions.

Thursday, 6th June

Time/Room	WIN 0-02	WIN 0-03	WIN 0-04	WIN 0-05	ABG024	ABF003	ABF001
9:30-9:45	OPENING WELCOME WINDSOR AUDITORIUM						
9:45-11:15	PsyAn. & CT (I)	Bodies (I)	Higher Ed (I)	Spinoza (I)	Identity (I)	Latin America (I)	
11:15-11:45	Break						
11:45-1:15	Represent- ation (I)	Nancy (I)	Futures Decon. (I)	Critique (I)	L. Bros (I)	New Amateur	
13:15-14:15	Lunch						
14:15-15:15	Pragmatism (I)	Historical Subj. (I)	Soul at Work (I)	New Mats (I)	Represent- ation (II)	PsyAn. & CT (II)	
15:15-15:45	Break						
15:45-17:15	Identity (II)	Feminism (I)	Justice	New Mats (II)	Critique (II)	Higher Ed (II)	Bodies (II)

Friday, 7th June

Time/Room	WIN 0-02	WIN 0-03	WIN 0-04	WIN 0-05	ABG024	ABF003	ABF001
9:30-11:00	New Mats (III)	Nancy (II)	Feminism (II)	Bodies (III)	Spinoza (II)	Higher Ed (III)	
11:00-11:30	Break						
11:30-13:00	Represent- ation (III)	Historical Subj. (II)	Spinoza (III)	Futures Decon. (II)	Pragmatism (II)	Soul at Work (II)	Latin America (II)
13:00-14:00	Lunch						
14:00-15:30	Represent- ation (IV)	Identity (III)	Nancy (III)	Feminism (III)	PsyAn. & CT (III)	Critique (III)	Spinoza (IV)
15:30-16:00	Break						
16:00-17:30	L. Bros (II)	Soul at Work (III)	Higher Ed (IV)	Futures Decon. (III)	Bodies (IV)	New Mats (IV)	