

INTRODUCTION TO “PRAGMATISM AS A GLOBAL PHILOSOPHY”

Rebecca Farinas and Philipp Dorstewitz

“The basic momentum is a widespread loss of faith in American – in liberal democracy, with its promise of the construction of a classless society. For Rorty, the fact of such a ‘moral decline’ is evident” (Nyiro, 2009).

Miklos Nyiro wrote, in 2009, on Rorty’s cautionary turn towards a more romantic and imaginative type of Pragmatism.¹ According to Nyiro, Rorty’s prophetic warnings of a disposed American identity, loss of world significance, even loss of soul, has come to pass. Because of the economic divisions caused by capitalist globalization and the loss of faith in institutions because of post-modern critiques, America is teetering on the brink of democratic and spiritual collapse. Nyiro writes, “To that extent, the tendencies inherent in globalization not only threaten the social project of Enlightenment but are pregnant with the menace of turning it into its very opposite.”²

Globalization along solely transactional ideas, in relation to how we think and how we solve problems, is also a major factor in the dispossession of democratic freedoms. Therefore, Nyiro relies on Rorty to point towards a pragmatic approach to philosophy by which we reckon with the past with hope for the future, rather than depending on sham universal laws, which serve as foundations for class separation, positivistic and deterministic nature, pure, disinterested reason, and static religions. The recent election of 2024, of Donald Trump (and Elon Musk) in the United States suggests such a turn by voting citizens, towards a faith in money and power, possibly over-riding laws protecting everyone’s democratic freedoms.

Nyiro asks if philosophers might continue to employ pragmatic philosophical and cultural methods which can guide us, while we reconstruct our values, ends in view,

and educational programs. The authors of this issue of Pragmatism Today are asking similar questions. The concerns of our authors can be summarized with two central questions: do pragmatic theories remain relevant, and do such tools still hold practical applications? They employ many methods and focus on a variety of topics, analyzing today’s reach and effectiveness of pragmatism.

However, we would like to remind readers of what could hold as glue for melioristic hopes for philosophies of democracy. Emil Višnovský convincingly makes a generally applicable case for pragmatism as a global philosophy, quoting William James,

everything that exists is influenced in some way by something else..., and in general, it may be said that all things cohere and adhere to each other somehow, and that the universe exists practically in reticulated or concatenated forms which make of it a continuous and “integrated” affair (James 1981, 68).

As we turn our focus to the following chapters, we should note that one of pragmatism’s most meaningful and progressive tools is an ‘integrated’ and pluralist approach to reality, in theory and practical affairs.

Our collaborative inquiry began in Vienna, June, 2024, at the bi-annual conference of the Central European Pragmatism Forum. In this issue of *Pragmatism Today*, the Forum’s Journal, we have reviewed some of the papers from the conference, as well as other essays the editors feel are particularly relevant to the conversation at hand. Other papers from that conference, and the Key-note address by Professor Leonard Harris, will be published in later Issues. As editors we would like to thank all the conference attendees, as well as the authors who herein have graciously contributed their work.

We can perhaps take a moment to reflect on that conference. As editors, one moment that seems especially poignant in the context of our inquiry, was when we were briefly lectured by Markus Hueble, curator and art educator at the Austrian Gallery Belvedere. Upon viewing and discussing Gustave Klimt’s *The Kiss* (1907 and 1908, museum in the Upper Belvedere Palace) the

¹ Miklos Nyiro, “Rorty on Politics, Culture, and Philosophy: A Defence of His Romanticism.” *Human Affairs*, Issue 19, 60-67, 2009. DOI: 10.2478/v10023-009-0021-0,60-67, P. 62.

² Nyiro, p. 62.

Curator explained, "She leans off the cliff, as she is enraptured. She also faces us the viewer, in bold assertion of her courageous predicament." His profound sentiment, if not an exact quote, related to us as pragmatists, how we collectively feel as lovers of wisdom and democracy, while re-opening an inquiry into the global relevance of pragmatic philosophy. As editors, we hope readers will experience that urgency and courage.

The Issue begins with a chapter concerning pragmatism, democracy and higher education, in relation to perhaps the most romantic of pragmatists, Emerson. Questions about globally prevalent social class hierarchies are surely at play as James Campbell frames Emerson's reflection on a philosophy of education as a global philosophy. Yet, a philosophy not lacking a distinctive geographic and historical context but one contributing to a welter of expressions of human thought that speaks to issues of global relevance. The article hints at a noteworthy tension: Emerson's stark distinction between higher and lower human faculties, on the one hand giving priority to reason, understanding, and aesthetic reflection over the senses and, on the other hand, our merely practical strivings. His elevation of the scholar/educator as a "prophet," dedicated to those higher faculties, seem to set him up for an anti-democratic and elitist ideal of education. However, Campbell and Emerson arrive at quite the opposite conclusion. By postulating the "primacy of the common over the elite," Emerson champions the ideal of a liberal education where cautious, personal, and individualized attention to fostering those higher capacities of reasoning take precedence over a narrow vocational training.

Boyles tends to the ambitions of Dewey's educational philosophy, questioning whether such an emphasis serves as a global philosophy, not, however, as a model or blueprint but as an experimental laboratory that generates insights for designing educational practices, either to be endorsed or avoided. For Boyles, Dewey is conscious and reflective that education systems are

modeled after the image of underlying economic systems that drive their societies. Since Dewey's day, these complications lead to attempts of a military-industrial complex to encroach on a free democratic liberal education by reducing it to vocational training, conditioning humans as dispositive factors in the chain of commercial value creation. Dewey believes that educators are not powerless in this game and proclaims the positive need to answer such encroachments with critical, reflective engagement of students in business ethics. Only through such critical engagement of schools as democratic microcosm, do societies, then and now, have a chance to avoid the pitfalls of merely being "acquisitive" (individualist profit oriented and fragmented) and to become "functional" (oriented toward the definition of attainment of a common good).

Moving from ideas and practices of global education, Kristína Bosáková, asks questions about our approaches to health and well-being, as a matter of our conscious realizations and our interpretations of our experiences of pain and suffering. She asserts Gadamer's understanding of health as a general state of consciousness by which we do not identify a feeling of "the wholeness of the whole." She argues against Daniel Dennett's position, however, that practical and social affairs of health management are what is most prevalent in explaining our approaches to human suffering. Bringing Rorty's understanding of what lies beyond such a functional approach is important, in that with Dennett's assumption we can not truly know the pain of others, sympathy and empathy, so such is strictly a matter of rational understanding. She thereby theorizes a philosophy of mind as including our global context and our individual realizations in relation to health and medical practices. Moreover, we should consider practical means to end suffering, but also our heart-felt desired ends. Interpretations of our mental states include such empathy and sympathy. Bosáková writes, "As all the mental states are necessarily bound to the physical existence, they cannot be exclusively temporal but

non spatial. Rorty also rejects the borderline position of mind. According to him, there is not an intersection point maintaining communication between the body and the soul of a human person."

From our hermeneutics in terms of general understandings of other's feelings and experiences of health, we can travel a road of inquiry, asking why we are stuck with a world which experiences global genocides and ongoing hidden histories. Furthermore, why do we block reparation of the health of our international and neighborly communities, and our personal and national identities? How can we analyze the injustice of eradicating the meaningful lives of family, friends, neighbors, fellow human persona from our present experiences? For Marsoobian, denialism is often part of global representations of national narratives, but it can be combatted by a community of self-reflective individuals, who remember, interpret, and communicate, thereby finding justice in the face of injustice. Such human resources are milestones of pragmatic philosophy. Marsoobian employs pragmatic epistemic methods in relation to the work of Classical American pragmatists, Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Jane Addams. Gilman wrote an article in the 1904 inaugural issue of *Armenia* entitled "International Duties," so as to combat, on a global scale, the denialism of genocide and national displacement. Yet, our hermeneutic understanding, in context with our personal experiences as diverse and expressionistic, is often undermined by situated hermeneutics and structural identity inequality. We can fight against hermeneutic injustice by taking actions in terms of personal testimony and critique (knowledge), reeducation, and social justice. Marsoobian thinks it is high time epistemic injustices are taken seriously, thereby reexamining national narratives, and urging people to act in terms of studied yet urgent reparative justice.

"Regaining Consciousness," Skinner's chapter, returns us to a pragmatic philosophy of mind. Skinner takes seriously Dewey's pragmatic instrumentalities of inquiry to solve a problematic inquiry, as well as pointing out

inappropriate technologies. Consciousness for Skinner is regained by solving problems with a sense of shared rationality, "while the efficacy of the conclusions is established through their successful deployment in practice." Soft relativistic thinking is not a problem-solving resource, and Skinner goes on to assert that agreeing with relativistic assumptions is not helpful to solving global problems. We have decisions to make, and these decisions depend, whether our votes of privatized individuals or representatives, should be focused on global priorities for the well-being of all of us. Such decisions cannot be made solely in terms of physical matters, but scientists, engineers, power brokers, and law makers must also rely on the non-material aspects of our human experiences. Our natures are interconnected and immaterial, our spiritual expectations go beyond a sense of regional context or material gain. Skinner urges us to recognize the emerging evidence of quantum physics, as well as the advice of Dewey's (and Joseph Margolis') to assume our reality as "natural but not naturalizable". We must use all of our human resources to resolve existential global threats.

The final chapter, in the main section of papers, allows for the future hopes of democracies and caste free citizens. Stroud elucidates Bhimrao Ambedkar's Navayana pragmatism in relation to combatting class and race struggles bred through tradition and religion. Ambedkar's pragmatic approach began when he was a student of John Dewey. His development of his own pragmatic philosophy correlates with a pragmatic historicity based on pluralism, as a notion, according to Stroud that "theories and personalities are such that it is reasonable to hold or live with a tension between two or more contradictory concepts or ideals." Yet, Personality and "semi-transcendental ideas' of liberty, equality, and fraternity are ways to critique or measure *any* given historical society in terms of justice." Navayana pragmatism relies upon these human resources, to chart a new way forward for democratic minded people struggling against division and oppression. Stroud's essay on Ambedkar's

strong case for democracy finds our discussion at a hopeful, albeit cautiously optimistic, point in time in terms of pragmatic philosophy having a place in discussions about global choices and trends.

This Winter Issue offers other engaging and scholarly essays on pragmatic thinking more generally. Saharrea and Viale's chapter puts forward new theories in terms of the epistemologies of Dewey and Rorty. Their investigations of methodologies and education augment approaches taken by the authors of the first section of papers. Both book reviews included in the issue are timely additions. Auxier examines, critiques, and adds to

the novel book co-edited by Hyeongjoo Kim and Dieter Schönecker, *Kant and Artificial Intelligence*. Stroud's book on Ambedkar's philosophy, which is a longer explication of the matters discussed in his essay herein, is reviewed by Hamid. Hamid maps new paths for practically applying Ambedkar's ideas, while giving us deeper insights into Stroud's scholarship.

Once again, as editors, we are indebted to all of the authors, and we thank them most sincerely. As well our gratitude goes to Ľubomir Dunaj. Also, we extend special thanks to Dóra Szauter.