

Doing — and Undoing — the Done Thing: Dewey and Bourdieu on Habituation, Agency, and Transformation

Vincent Colapietro

Both Dewey and Bourdieu emphasize the extent to which human practices are inherited practices, and the extent to which inheritance is a function of imitation. Affinities between Dewey's concept of habit and Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* are explored. This essay focuses on four variations on the theme of doing the done thing: philosophers doing philosophy in a recognizable form (conversant with the done thing of traditional philosophy), nations perpetuating war as the unwitting enactment of a repetition compulsion, cultures fostering such democratic practices as communal deliberation, and simply the done thing as an integral part of human practices.

1. Introduction

The difference between reconstruction and deconstruction is hardly a difference that makes a difference, a broad and deep human difference, to anyone other than academics.¹ The theme of reconstruction and deconstruction, nonetheless, provides an occasion and perhaps even a motive for identifying humanly significant differences, for example, different ways of taking up the task of philosophy and also diverse approaches to working through the conflicts definitive of our cultures. Moreover, the strategies and aims of both deconstructive and reconstructive authors offer resources for how to address the dualisms and hierarchies so intricately and tightly interwoven into the very meshes of our language and, thus, our minds.²

I am inclined to presuppose a family resemblance between Deweyan pragmatism and Derridean deconstruction — indeed, to insist upon this resemblance — and, given this, to move on to a potentially more rewarding site, that of a suspected affinity between John Dewey and Pierre Bourdieu.³ But let me tarry here for a moment. What warrants my insistence upon this

resemblance are such assertions as Jacques Derrida's reply to a question posed by Julia Kristeva⁴ in an interview first published in 1968:

The case of the concept of structure ... is certainly more ambiguous [than that of sign]. *Everything depends upon how one sets it to work.* Like the concept of the sign — and therefore of semiology — it can simultaneously confirm and shake logocentric and ethno-centric assuredness [or cocksureness]. It is not a question of junking these concepts, nor do we have the means to do so. Doubtless it is more necessary, *from within semiology*, to turn them against their presuppositions, to reinscribe them in other chains, and little by little *to modify the terrain of our work and thereby produce new configurations*; I do not believe in decisive ruptures, in an unequivocal 'epistemological break', as it is called today. Breaks are always, and fatally, reinscribed in an old cloth that must continually, interminably be undone. This interminability is not an accident or contingency; it is essential, systematic, and theoretical." (1981, 24, emphases added)

In other words, there is simply no way of jumping outside of the history of our inheritances, no way of divesting ourselves of our language and other institutions, least of all by a single stroke or decisive move. Even so, we can *in time* twist ourselves free, but this is an ongoing (or interminable) process. Twisting ourselves free is also an arduous and subtle task. It all depends on how we put concepts to work and how the effects of our exertions reconfigure the terrain of engagement.⁵ This is, in my judgment, an apt description of Deweyan reconstruction, though it was offered as an explication of Derridean deconstruction.⁶

What I have to say about taking up the task of philosophy and also about working through the conflicts constitutive of our culture is informed by my reading of Derrida, but here my concern is (to repeat) to explore a family resemblance between Dewey and Bourdieu, not one between Dewey and Derrida. More generally, my concern is with social practices, including the social practices of theoretical inquirers struggling to frame an adequate theory of human practice. The comparison of Dewey and Bourdieu is undertaken mainly for the sake of illuminating some of the most important features of human agency and practice, thus, the inherently precarious possibilities of personal and institutional transformation.

The *leitmotiv* of doing the done thing provides a theme upon which numerous variations can be wrought. The four variations with which I am principally preoccupied here are philosophers doing philosophy in a

recognizable form (i.e., a form conversant with the done thing of traditional philosophy), nations perpetuating war as the unwitting enactment of a repetition compulsion, cultures fostering such democratic practices as communal deliberation, and simply the done thing as an integral part of human practices. For Dewey and Bourdieu, it is crucial to bring into sharp focus the extent to which human practices are inherited practices and, moreover, the extent to which inheritance is a function of imitation. For this reason, my discussion of taking up and carrying on the task of philosophy highlights just these dimensions of this undertaking.

2. The Imitation of Exemplars

First, then, let us consider the task of philosophy itself, paying attention especially to how practitioners tend to take up and carry on this task. Though hardly adequate as a definition, it is helpful to stress that philosophy is what philosophers do and, in turn, what philosophers do is complexly related to what thinkers in the past have done. Accordingly, the emphasis falls not only on doing but also on forms of doing, genres of activity, akin to what was done by exemplary predecessors. That is, what philosophers tend to *do* today is in crucial respects different than, yet rooted in, the done thing, the paradigmatic forms of traditional philosophy.⁷ In general, initiation into a practice depends on apprenticeship to exemplars who in their character, abilities, and sensitivity embody, in (at least) a provisionally authoritative way, the defining goals, tested procedures, and orienting self-understanding of the practice by which these exemplars define themselves.⁸ This however implies that, to some extent, these exemplars by virtue of their endeavors, aspirations, and achievements define the very practices by which they are defined. Socrates took himself to be a philosopher and, indeed, shaped his life in accord with this self-interpretation. In doing so, however, he came to define the task of philosophy for countless generations of later thinkers. His dialogic engagement with his fellow citizens and cosmopolitan intellectuals exemplifies what the practice of philosophy might be. Virtually every human practice depends upon concretely embodied ideals; and the most concrete of these embodiments are the exemplary individuals who show by their lives what the practice demands and promises.⁹ The done thing is the done thing because exemplary doers continue to exert a pervasive influence in a given field of human endeavor. Even in times (such as our own) when individual creativity is wildly exaggerated and shared paradigms are cripplingly disparaged, the done thing offers a steadying and directive influence, however rarely acknowledged.

This applies to philosophical reflection as much as any other human practice. With this in mind, then, consider simply a list of names: Hannah Arendt, Roland Barthes, Norman O. Brown, Martin Buber, Albert Camus,

John Dewey, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Sigmund Freud, William James, Herbert Marcuse, Karl Marx, Marshall McLuhan, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Josiah Royce, and Alfred North Whitehead. Arguably, these are the principal foils, interlocutors, and inspirations of John J. McDermott, in his role as author of *The Culture of Experience* (1976). This list testifies to a wide range of intellectual engagement. But this range becomes even more impressive when we consider some of the seemingly odd juxtapositions encountered in these essays: Charles Peirce and Charlie Parker, Paul Tillich and Willem de Kooning, Herman Melville, and Jackson Pollock.¹⁰ To take up the task of philosophy responsibly one has to be responsive to thinkers and artists whom professional philosophers, in their technical insularity, typically ignore. McDermott exemplifies this in a compelling and singular manner.

The human animal is, in William James's judgment, "*the imitative animal*": our whole educability and the entire history of our civilizations depend upon this trait (1890, 1027).¹¹ This judgment is, in fact, an echo of Aristotle's observation: "Man ... is the most imitative of all animals and he learns his first lessons through mimicry" (*Poetics*; quoted by Bourdieu in *The Logic of Practice*, 1990, 25). Insofar as the example of McDermott, John E. Smith, Richard J. Bernstein, and several others has been imitated by younger scholars, the spirit of Jamesian pluralism and engaged fallibilism continues to define the work of American philosophers (Smith 1983, 1992, chapter 11; Bernstein 1992, 336). Consider here the unnoticed implication of one of Ralph Waldo Emerson's most famous quotations (imitation is suicide), when embedded just in the immediate context of his own nuanced utterance: "There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better for worse as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on the plot of ground which is given him to till." ("Self-Reliance" in Emerson 1985, 176) But this time comes only after unconscious imitation and deliberate espousal of exemplary figures have enabled us to act in our own right and, indeed, to espouse our selves (to take ourselves for better and worse, as creative agents of a unique stamp).

Human beings are imitators and inheritors, though even in these roles their creativity and uniqueness are manifest. We are shaped by traditions that we re-shape in the very process of coming into possession of them. Philosophical movements as intellectual resources (as sources to which we can return numerous times for intellectual insights and stimulation, suggestions and orientation) are, at least potentially, traditions — intergenerational affairs in which past texts and thinkers can be heard to speak to present concerns and conflicts. Let us focus on one such movement precisely as a tradition.

3. The Tradition of Pragmatism / The Question of Practice

Though American philosophy includes far more than the pragmatic movement,¹² it is appropriate here to focus exclusively on this philosophical tradition. A philosophical or religious tradition is, as Alasdair MacIntyre suggests, an intergenerationally extended argument at the center of which is the question: What are we to make of this inheritance that has made us? Moreover, every tradition pivots around questions of identity. For instance, Judaism is an attempt to live the question, “What does it mean to be Jewish?” So, too, Christianity is an endeavor to live the question, “What does it mean to be Christian?” Analogously, philosophy is, in part, a series of responses to the challenge of ascertaining what it means to be a philosopher, though the insistently reflexive character of this question can, especially in an academic or institutional setting, work toward rendering philosophy an ever more abstracted and insular meta-reflection on a distinctive genre of human reflection. The counterbalance to this tendency is the resolve to recollect that the question of what it means to be a philosopher is inseparable from that of how to live one’s life and, thus, how to position oneself in a world of conflict and risk.¹³ Temporality entails transience, just as loss and destruction impose the tasks of amelioration and reparation. In a world wherein everything is transient and precarious, also one wherein much lies in ruins and much else gives signs of decay and even implosion, the task of philosophers cannot be oriented principally to understanding their work; it must be ordained to protecting and repairing their world(s).

In his essay “Transiency and Amelioration: Revisited,” thus, John McDermott suggested pragmatism is itself an attempt to plumb the deep significance of the term *practical*. How are we who today identify with this tradition (whatever misgivings we might have about the term by which it is identified¹⁴) to think through, in a truly practical manner, the deep significance of this seemingly trivial word?¹⁵ How are we to translate even our most abstract theoretical terms and claims into concrete practical experiences and exertions? The resources of pragmatism are, however, not adequate for thinking through these and related questions, though these resources are invaluable. Thus, as aids in addressing questions regarding *praxis*, I turn to Marx and Freud as well as Charles Peirce and William James, to Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault as well as George H. Mead and John Dewey, to Ludwig Wittgenstein, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, Umberto Eco, and Pierre Bourdieu as well as John E. Smith, John McDermott, Richard Bernstein, Richard Rorty, and Cornel West. Here I am simply imitating Smith (see, e.g., *Reason and God*, 1961), McDermott, Bernstein (e.g., *Praxis and Action*, 1971), and Rorty themselves. To treat the resources of pragmatism as adequate to address the question of practice¹⁶ is, in effect, to betray the pluralism so

central to this tradition. Peirce's careful study of the dusty folios of medieval authors and James' spirited engagement with his European contemporaries point to the need to look far and wide for help in addressing the question of practice and a host of related issues (see, for example, Smith 1992, 196–199).

The work of Pierre Bourdieu seems especially valuable for those committed to addressing questions regarding praxis. The more I study his writings, the more I am convinced he can help pragmatists live more critically and imaginatively the question of practice. I am even inclined to make an immodest proposal. Imagine a philosophically trained social scientist¹⁷ who has read Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Althusser, Lacan, and Foucault as well as Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Mauss, and Levi-Strauss; then imagine this individual, in effect, rewriting Dewey's 1922 *Human Nature and Conduct* in light not only of these theorists but also the geopolitical struggles and cultural developments occurring especially in the second half of the twentieth century. But there is no need to imagine such an individual. For the author of such works as *Outline of a Theory of Practice* and *The Logic of Practice* (*Le sens pratique*) has accomplished nothing less. Bourdieu's historical actuality is, paradoxically, not compromised by his recent death. In his writings, he remains available to us as a theorist of practice and much besides.

Bourdieu's training as an anthropologist took place in Algeria while the struggles of Algerians to overthrow French colonial rule were quickly gathering momentum. The historical context of his intellectual training provides a motive to recall the context in which our own work, including our introduction of Bourdieu here, takes shape and attains significance — or remains inchoate and irrelevant because of our studied ignorance of the actual world in which the cultural task of philosophical reflection is taken up.

So, allow me to consider at some length this context. After reflecting on the actual historical context in which we take up and carry on our intellectual tasks, I will turn to an all too brief and sketchy examination of how Bourdieu's appeal to and articulation of our social practices provide resources for pragmatists in addressing issues regarding practice.

4. Philosophy in the Present Situation

In recent decades in the United States and undoubtedly elsewhere, progressives seem to be making anything but progress (see, for example, Rorty 1998, 70), whereas conservatives are, *effectively*, undoing the fragile political consensus designed to enhance the opportunities of historically disadvantaged groups.¹⁸ Progressives have come to look like avatars, while conservatives have proven themselves to being adept at staging revolts of far-reaching and deep-cutting consequences. The rhetoric of progressives and liberals has become increasingly inaudible, that of conservatives and libertarians has become the one

providing the terms in which problems are articulated, thus solutions are imaginable.¹⁹ One way to describe neo-pragmatism is this: it is a movement committed to redescribing the failures of progressivism in such a way as make them appear to add up to something less than a rout by conservatives (see Rorty 1998, 52–54).

The unforeseen collapse of the Soviet Union, the widening circle of Islamic terrorism, the intransigent militarism of the Israeli state locked in a death struggle with the strategic terrorism of the fractured leadership of the Palestinian people (a militarism as committed to terrorism as its opponents are themselves intransigent), the worldwide resurgence of religious fundamentalism, the seemingly irreversible momentum of global capitalism, and various other developments help to define the actual context in which philosophers and others are called upon to take up the indispensable task of critical reflection. The winds of doctrine are one thing, the winds of war another, though the two are connected in obvious and subtle, coded and unmistakable, ways. “Philosophers are,” in John Dewey’s words, “parts of history, caught in its movement; creators perhaps in some measure of its future, but also assuredly creatures of its past.”²⁰ The times they are a-changing, but in ways largely unimaginable even just a short time ago and, for the majority of us, largely unacceptable. Just behind us stretches a century of carnage and ahead of us the prospect of continuing this slaughter in both traditional and innovative ways, with bare hands and primitive weapons as well as smart bombs and even nuclear arsenals. In the opening years of the last century, William James waged war against war, against not so much the *ēthos* of war as the traditional targets of what James supposed was our ineradicable bellicosity.²¹ His efforts seem today even more quixotic and utopian to us than they did to his contemporaries.

Is it possible to desist from doing the done thing when the done thing is the traditional military defense of our selves in the name of freedom? Has any word been used more for making the wine of Mars than that of freedom or its equivalents? Are we in a drunken rage or have we finally awakened from the psychedelic illusions of an insipid radicalism?

The question is, however, not so much whether we ought to defend our selves, but how. The widespread failure of democratic imagination in the United States such that dissent equals treason is, at once, horrifying and embarrassing. The ancestral habits assert themselves with stunning force, while the eloquent pleas of informed critics fail to prompt but a very number of people to stop and think (cf. Dewey). The question of how to defend the cause of democracy today manifestly concerns the pragmatic vision of our democratic practices. Part of my thesis is that we find, at the center of this vision, Dewey’s distinctive conception of human habituation and, closely allied to this, Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus*. Bourdieu’s term might be

preferable to Dewey's own, for a reason suggested by Peirce in his "Ethics of Terminology": "For philosophical conceptions which vary by a hair's breadth from those for which suitable terms exist, [it is necessary] to invent [new words] with a due regard for the usages of philosophical terminology and those of the English language but yet with a distinctively technical appearance."²² In any event, the actuality of democracy resides, more than anywhere else, in the *habitus* of deliberation, of communally thinking through the problematic of the public.

The formal structures of institutional democracy offer no guarantee that such a *habitus* is in place or is being nurtured.²³ Indeed, these structures might be obstacles. "[M]ost human institutions, by the purely technical and professional [?] manner in which they come to be administered," James observed, "end by becoming obstacles to the very purposes which their founders had in view."²⁴ In Dewey's lexicon, *democracy* designates first and foremost a way of life, not a form of government.²⁵ What distinguishes this way of life is its thoroughgoing commitment to human experience:

Democracy as compared with other ways of life is the sole way of living which believes wholeheartedly in the process of experience as end and as means; as that which is capable of generating the science [knowledge] which is the sole dependable authority for the direction of further experience and which releases emotions, needs and desires so as to call into being the things that have not existed in the past. For every way of life that fails in its democracy limits the contacts, the exchanges, the communications, the interactions by which experience is steadied while it is also enlarged and enriched. The task of this release is one that has to be carried on day by day. (*LW* 14: 229–230)

In its truly root meaning, democracy does not so much mean rule by the people as it does *governance by experience*. The process of such governance, however, demands painstaking consideration of the most inclusive experience obtainable; thus, it coincides with what is called "rule by the people." Moreover, the appeal to experience turns out to be an appeal to the social practices of embodied agents. The traditional quest to discover the transcendental grounds for human practices concerning governance, investigation, and conduct was abandoned by Bourdieu no less than by Dewey. These practices provide whatever grounds we have — or need — for carrying on our affairs. In a sense (though one difficult to understand rightly), they are self-grounded. "Nothing outside of the flux," in James's words, "secures the issue of it. It can hope salvation only from within its own intrinsic promises and potencies." (1907, 125)

We can adapt this insight to the topic at hand: Nothing outside of our practices guarantees their issue or success. They can be rendered more effective only in terms of their own inherent prospects and capacities. The critical perspective of the transcendental subject is an illusion generated by the far from uncommon implosion of one or another inherited practice, an implosion prompting agents to seek outside of history, heritage, and inheritance for the normative grounds of their defining practices (see Diggins 1994).

5. The Appeal to and Theory of Practice

To repeat, democracy principally means *governance by experience*, for it is that way of life unqualifiedly committed to the processes of experience as both means and end, as providing us with the most trustworthy procedures, methods, and warrants for securing knowledge, on the one hand, and with vitally sustaining enjoyments, consummations, and fulfillments, on the other. Our practical experience in its myriad forms is a function of our personal involvement in a wide range of social practices, all of which are incipiently and thus inchoately democratic. In other words, all of these practices hold out the promise of more consistent and complete governance by experience.

Such governance by experience ineluctably drives toward deconstructing the traditional dualism of theory and practice.²⁶ As a result of this deconstruction, theory is not subordinated to practice but rather theory is shown to be itself an irreducible mode of practice (or, more accurately, an vastly extended family of such social practices, many of which hardly bear any discernible family resemblance to distant kin). In other words, we need a theory of practice in which the *practices* of theorists are distinguished from and related to both one another and other practices (ones not at all identifiable as theoretical).²⁷ Such a theory can easily be derived from some of Dewey's principal writings, including *Democracy and Education* (1916), *Experience and Nature* (1925), *The Quest for Certainty* (1929), and *Logic: A Theory of Inquiry* (1938). Such a theory of practice is also the formal object of several of Bourdieu's most important and influential works.

In *Le Sens pratique* (1980), translated into English as *The Logic of Practice* (1990), Bourdieu opens his account of social practices with a critique of theoretical reason. This critique is launched in the name of practice itself. It is explicitly a critique of intellectualism (cf. James). "Intellectualism is inscribed in the fact of introducing into the object the intellectual relation to the object, of substituting the [theoretical] observer's relation to practice for the practical relation to practice." (*The Logic of Practice*, 1990, 34)²⁸

The source of historical action, that of the artist, the scientist, or the member of the government just as much as that of the worker or the petty civil servant, is not an active subject confronting society as if that society were an object constituted externally. The source resides neither in consciousness nor in things but in the relationship between two stages of the social, that is, between the history objectified in things, in the form of institutions, and the history incarnated in bodies, in the form of that system of enduring dispositions which I call *habitus*. (*In Other Words*, 1990, 190)

The theoretical observer's relationship to practice is one thing, the embodied practitioner's relationship to practice quite another. In several very late manuscripts, Dewey emphatically affirms the primacy of the practical: the relationship of theoretical observers to the formal objects of their controlled inquiries is dependent on more primordial involvements and attachments, that of embodied agents in their everyday endeavors to other social agents and perceptible actualities is the primordial level of human agency. Thus, Dewey observes, "we live in a world of objective acceptances and compulsions long before we are aware of the attitudes of our own, and of the action of say the nervous system." (*LW 1*: 381) Moreover, he insists,

...dispositions and attitudes are always towards or away from things beyond themselves. To love and hate, desire and fear, believe and deny, are not just states of mind in nor states of an animal body; they are active performances to and about other things, — acceptances and rejections, strugglings to obtain and to escape things. (*LW 1*: 382)

The differential perspective of the theoretical inquirer is accorded by traditional philosophy and other disciplines a more authoritative role than it actually possesses in human experience. The authority of this perspective derives from more rudimentary, uncelebrated, and undervalued practices. Our relationship to the world is, first and foremost, practical. Thus, any attempt to understand this relationship on the basis of the theoretical observer's stance toward the formal objects of controlled investigation is doomed to failure.²⁹

Affirming the primacy of our social practices involves acknowledging the irreducibility of lived time. Bourdieu's attention to this dimension of our practices is especially instructive. For example, he notes,

Practice unfolds in time and it has all the correlative properties, such as irreversibility, that synchronization destroys. The

temporal structure, that is, its rhythm, its tempo, and above all its directionality, is constitutive of its meaning.... In short, because it is entirely immersed in the current of time, **practice is inseparable from temporality**, not only because it is played out in time, but also because it plays strategically with time and especially with tempo. (*The Logic of Practice*, 1990, 81)

At the center of both Dewey and Bourdieu's theory of practice, of their overlapping efforts to articulate a compelling account of practice as practice and, within this account, an effective theory of theory as a mode of practice, there is an appeal to practice, to what we do in our roles as theoretical investigators and, of greater import, those of everyday actors. This appeal is akin to those made by Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time* and Ludwig Wittgenstein in *The Philosophical Investigations*. For example, Wittgenstein claims in this work: "If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: 'This is simply what do'." (as quoted by Bourdieu as an epigram for his Introduction to *The Logic of Practice*, 1990, 25)³⁰

But this appeal ought not to be uncritical. It is, however, difficult to see how such an appeal can be truly critical. Consistent pragmatists must base even their most radical critiques not on transcendent grounds but practical affairs; but these affairs are, in some instances at least, precisely what call for criticism. To make our practices the bases and warrants for our critiques appears to render these practices invulnerable to criticism. This is, however, a theoretical illusion, nourished by a theoreticist tradition. For a robust culture of reflexive critique makes of our practices themselves experientially governed (or guided) affairs, ones wherein the pressures of self-criticism and, hence, self-transformation are persistently immanent in these practices.

6. The Social Practices of Embodied Agents: Integrative Habits and Overlapping Fields

What would Bourdieu's conception of habitus contribute, if anything, to Dewey's notion of habit? In turn, what would Dewey's conception of habit contribute to Bourdieu's understanding of *habitus*? My sense is that much would be gained by both sides, but especially by Dewey. The principal reason is that Bourdieu's conception of *habitus* is intricately interwoven with his notions of field, capital, and power, themes inadequately thematized in Dewey's work. In *The Public and Its Problems* Dewey asserts,

Habit is the mainspring of human action, and habits are formed for the most part under the influence of the customs of a group.

The organic structure of man entails the formation of habit, for whether we wish it or not, whether we are aware of it or not, every act effects a modification of attitude and set which directs future behavior. (*LW* 2: 334–335)

Earlier in *Human Nature and Conduct*, in a chapter entitled “Habits as Social Functions,” Dewey suggests a crucial analogy:

Habits may be profitably compared to physiological functions, like breathing, digesting.... [H]abits are like functions in many respects, and especially in requiring the cooperation of organism and environment. Breathing is an affair of the air as truly as of the lungs; digesting an affair of food as truly as of the tissues of the stomach. Seeing involves light just as certainly as it does the eye and optic nerve. Walking implicates the ground as well as the legs; speech demands physical air and human companionship and audience as well as vocal organs.... They are things done by the environment by means of organic structures or acquired dispositions.... The social environment acts through native impulses.... [F]unctions and habits are ways of using and incorporating the environment in which the latter has its say as surely as the former.” (*MW* 14: 16)

Dewey’s emphasis on the transactional character of habits (they are as much affairs of the environment as they are of the organism) does not obscure for him the crucial fact that organisms are loci of habits; in turn, habits are modifications of organic structures (for example, muscles and nerves).

Intelligence is not something other than habits. It is a complex of habits of a certain character (such as discriminating, nuanced, modifiable, and more or less integrated). Certain ways of attending to objects and events, of outwardly and (at least of equal moment) imaginatively responding to what is encountered or ensuing, become *incorporated* in the organism’s manner of being and acting, reacting and responding. “The level of action fixed by *embodied* intelligence is” for Dewey, “always the important thing.” (*LW* 2: 377)

Our highest achievements, including those pertaining to the acquisition and augmentation of knowledge, depend upon somatically rooted and socially acquired dispositions, including. Thus, Dewey stresses,

...knowledge is a function of association and communication; it depends upon tradition, upon tools and methods socially transmitted, developed and sanctioned. Faculties of effectual observation, reflection and desire are habits acquired under the influence of the culture and institutions of society, not ready-made inherent powers. (*LW 2*: 334)

The centrality of habits in Dewey's account of cognition (and of much else) cannot be more succinctly or forcefully stated than he himself does in such assertions as these (ones which could easily be multiplied by consulting virtually any of his major works): "The influence of habit is decisive because all distinctively human action has to be learned, and the very heart, blood, and sinews of learning is creation of habitudes.... Habit does not preclude the use of thought, but it determines the channels within which it operates. Thinking is secreted in the interstices of habits." (*LW 2*: 335)

The human animal is, from first to last, a dialogical being whose very humanity takes recognizable shape in an ongoing engagement with other humans. As Dewey puts it,

To learn to be human is to develop through the give-and-take of communication an effective sense of being an individually distinctive member of a community; one who understands and appreciates its beliefs, desires and methods, and who contributes to a further conversion of organic powers into human resources and values. (*LW 2*: 332)

Dewey's concept of habit invites comparison with Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*. "The habitus is," Bourdieu claims, "the system of durable, transposable dispositions which functions as the generative basis of structured, objectively unified practices."³¹ The affinity of this concept to Dewey's understanding of habit is made even clearer when we learn that:

[H]abitus is the product of the work of inculcation and appropriation necessary in order for those products of collective history, the objective structures (e.g., of language, economy, etc.), to succeed in reproducing themselves more or less completely, in the form of durable dispositions, in the organisms (which one can, if one wishes, call individuals) lastingly subjected to the same conditionings.³²

Still other points of connection come into focus when we realize that, for Bourdieu,

The habitus ... makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks, thanks to analogical transfer of schemes permitting the solution of similarly shaped problems, and thanks to the unceasing corrections of the results obtained.³³

Given limits of space, let me highlight only briefly three respects in which Bourdieu's account of *habitus* thickens and deepens the range of phenomena connected to Dewey's notion of habit. The *habitus* constitutive of our agency structures and is structured by a *field* of activity. Bourdieu's sociological attention to the delineating features of various fields of human activity, including that of institutional scholarship and the distinctive form of symbolic capital so central to this particular field, provides the means for offering an even thicker account of human striving than anything found in Dewey's writings.

Bourdieu offers, though with some hesitancy, nothing less than an ontology of social practices pivoting around his innovative notion of habitus. He confesses,

I would not speak of an ontology, unless one is ready to accept the (truly oxymoronic) notion of an *historicist ontology*. As I demonstrated in an old article entitled 'The dead seizes the living', being — that is to say, history — exists in the embodied state as habitus and in the objectified state as fields. Habitus being linked to the field within which it functions (and within which, as is most often the case, it was formed) by a relationship of ontological complicity, the action of the 'practical sense' amounts to an immediate encounter of history with itself, through which time is engendered. The relation between habitus and the field through and for which it is created is an unmediated, infraconscious, practical relation of *illusio*, of investment, of interest in the game, which implies a sense of the game and a sense (with the twofold meaning of orientation, direction, and signification) of the history of the game; in short, a practical anticipation or inclination not to be mistaken for a conscious project or a calculated scheme. This investment, realized only in the relation between habitus and field, is the specific libido, the socially constituted and fashioned principle of every action.³⁴

We might note in passing that the metaphor of field was one with which James suggestively toyed but never systematically developed. Moreover, this notion is, at the very least, quite compatible with Dewey's own understanding of the historically and culturally specific sites in which human transactions actually take place.

Let us make the transition from Bourdieu's conceptualization of field to his concern with capital (the second respect in which his notion of habitus might help to thicken and deepen Dewey's theory). "Both habitus and field (and also the specific form of capital produced and reproduced in this field) are," he insists, "the site of a sort of *conatus*, of a tendency to perpetuate themselves in their being, to reproduce themselves in that which constitutes their existence and their identity (for instance, in the case of bourgeois habitus, the system of differences and distances constitutive of distinction)." He is quick to point that: "This I hold against a finalist, utilitarian vision of action which has been attributed to me. It is not true to say that everything that people do or say is aimed at maximizing their social profit; but one may say that they do it to perpetuate or to augment their social being."³⁵ No economic reduction is intended here.

But there is an explicit theoretical attention to the pervasive and critical ways in which economic institutions structure everyday experience. This attention is guided by the awareness that: "Capital is accumulated (in its materialized form or its 'incorporated', embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor."³⁶ Dewey was, of course, appreciative of the vast, fundamental influence of economic arrangements on all facets of human existence. He was critical of much traditional ethics for its systematic neglect of these arrangements: "...we can hardly expect a moral system which ignores economic conditions to be other than remote and empty." (*LW* 4: 225) He went so far as to assert: "The economic aspect of human association decides the condition under which human beings actually live." (*LW* 15: 218) Even so, he did not subject these economic conditions to anything as nearly detailed or complete an analysis as can be found in, for example, Bourdieu's writings.

Finally, relations of power are stressed and examined by Bourdieu in ways useful for anyone desirous to carry forward the deeper aspirations of Deweyan pragmatism. "Each state of the social world is," Bourdieu notes, "thus no more than a temporary equilibrium, a moment in the dynamics through which the adjustment between distributions and incorporated or institutionalized classifications is constantly broken and restored." At every turn, Dewey's analyses and evaluations presuppose a sensitivity to the distorting effects of power differences. But, his characteristically irenic disposition tends to incline him not to tarry too long in marking these differences or drawing out

their implications. In contrast, this is very much in the foreground of Bourdieu's concern. Any social order is the site of endless struggles to maintain by some groups and to usurp by other ones the power needed to survive and flourish in the manner definitive of membership in these groups. The struggle concerns not only the acquisition of specific goods but also the institution of a legitimate order (for example, one in which one's characteristic modes of acquisition are enshrined as licit, whereas those of one's rivals are defined as illicit). "The struggle which is," Bourdieu notes, "the very principle of the distribution is inextricably a struggle to appropriate rare goods and a struggle to impose a legitimate way of perceiving the power relations manifested by the distributions, a representation which, through its own efficacy, can help to perpetuate or subvert these power relations." (*The Logic of Practice*, 1990, 141)

Having identified three respects in which Bourdieu's approach can help push Dewey's own in the direction of a more truly pragmatist social theory, because a more effectively historicist and contextualist theory, let me conclude this section by highlighting three deep affinities between these two theorists. First, both Dewey and Bourdieu are acutely aware of the role of art in the reconstruction of culture. Dewey says, "Men's conscious life of opinion and judgment often proceeds on a superficial and trivial plane. But their lives reach a deeper level." Our actual lives and experience cut far more deeply than is registered in explicit or articulate consciousness. "The function of art has always been," Dewey claims, "to break through the crust of conventionalized and routine consciousness." (*LW 2*: 345)

In addition, both thinkers are finely attuned to the relationship between the local and the global (see Bernstein 1986, 270). In *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey insists:

Unless local community life can be restored, the public cannot adequately solve its most urgent problem; to find and identify itself. But if it be reestablished, it will manifest a fullness, variety and freedom of possession and enjoyment of meanings and goods unknown in the contiguous associations of the past. For it will be alive and flexible as well as stable, responsive to the complex and world-wide scene in which it is enmeshed. While local, it will not be isolated. (*LW 2*: 370)

Dewey also says, "The essential need ... is the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion." (*LW 2*: 364)

Finally, both Dewey and Bourdieu are keenly conscious of the extent to which our lives are truly human because of the personal realization, however fleeting and impartial, of imaginative possibilities, not the least of which are

mutual recognition, solicitude, and admiration. Bourdieu goes so far as to contend: “The competition for a social life that will be known and recognized, which will free you from insignificance, is a struggle to the death for symbolic life and death.”³⁷ In this instance, Dewey’s formulation is more inclusive, thus less problematic (especially since it is less likely to dispose us to beg important questions regarding the imaginative possibilities sustaining and directing human agents in their everyday circumstances): “It all comes down to experience personally conducted and personally consummated.” (*MW* 3: 94) That is, it all comes down to human organisms as agent-patients destined to undergo the consequences of their own exertions and, among these consequences, the consummations of their experience.

The very exercise of our agency exposes it to transformative pressures and not infrequently to disintegrative impasses. The center of our agency is rooted in a more or less integrated set of effective and flexible habits, while the exercise of this agency is always potentially transformative of itself and much else. In doing the done thing, at least in the context of late modernity or (nascent postmodernity), we ineluctably undo and redo the done thing, in ways outstripping either our intention of consciousness. The structures by which we act are incorporated in our very being, such that these structures are (at least) as facilitating as they are constraining, as enabling as they are limiting. A fuller exploration of these two figures would show in detail how Bourdieu’s conceptions of field and capital add to his notion of *habitus* a depth and dimensions lacking in Dewey’s understanding of habit.³⁸ But, on this occasion, the all too brief and sketchy comparison provided above must serve as an invitation for further exploration and fuller comparisons. Indeed, on this occasion, the pressing urgency of the living present must be honored. Above all, we must be alert to the tangled implications so much a part of the practical meaning of those social practices at the center of our democratic *ēthos*.³⁹ It is, thus, to these implications we turn, mindful of present crises, confusions, and temptations to compromise the integrity of our practices — the soul of nothing less than democracy.

7. Conclusion: Practical Involvement in the Living Present

Richard Bernstein rightly highlights that John Dewey’s “central focus was with the living present, with facing our present conflicts and problems with honesty and imagination, and with finding concrete ways in which we can reconstruct experience where free communication, public debate, rational persuasion and genuine sharing are integrated into our everyday practices.” (1986, 272)⁴⁰ It is not so much that these are to be integrated into our everyday practices as they are to make up these practices.

“By their tone,” Williams James suggests, “are all things human either lost or saved.” (1971, 23) He goes on to claim: “it all reverts in the end to the action of innumerable imitative individuals upon each other and to the question of whose tone has the highest spreading power.” (1971, 23)⁴¹

I feel disposed to confess, again with James: “Nothing future is quite secure; states enough have inwardly rotted; and democracy as a whole may undergo self-poisoning. But, on the other hand, democracy is a kind of religion, and we are bound not to admit its failure.” (1971, 21)⁴² In the name of freedom itself, we bind ourselves to this form of life, defining our selves through our commitment to defending and enhancing democratic institutions, practices, and discourses. Our unwillingness to admit its failure is one with our willingness to cultivate the still fragile *habitus* of communal deliberation. The resources for cultivating this *habitus* are found both near at hand, in the writings of James, Dewey, Mead, and other pragmatists, and in seemingly odd places, in the texts of Derrida, Lyotard, Deleuze, and other postmodernists. Such resources are also manifestly available in the painstakingly articulated theory of practice to be found in Pierre Bourdieu’s writings.

James distinguished between the “party of red blood, as it calls itself, and that of pale reflection.” (Perry 1935, 299) James no less than Dewey knew the reactionaries and the mob in any country “will always pull together in the red-blood party, when the catchwords are properly manipulated.” (299) When the blood of one’s own has been shed, it is almost always too late to counteract the force of ancestral habits.

Just about one hundred years ago, in 1903, James observed:

Our American people used to be supposed to have a certain hardheaded shrewdness. Nowadays they seem smitten with utter silliness. Their professed principles mean nothing to them, and any phrase or sensational excitement captivates them. The sensational press is the organ and promulgator of this state of mind, which means ... a new ‘dark ages’ that may last more centuries than the first one. Then illiteracy was brutal and dumb, and power was rapacious without disguise. Now illiteracy has an enormous literary organization, and power is sophisticated; and the result is necessarily a new phenomenon in history — involving every kind of diseased sensationalism and insincerity in the collective mind. (1935, 318)

The habits of communal reflection are also today at the mercy of mass fear. When Dewey suggested theory is the most practical thing in the world,⁴³ he did not have in mind the discourses of transcendental theoreticians obsessed with unearthing ahistoric foundations for our historical practices, but the

deliberations of situated practitioners, taking full advantage of the vast resources of their diverse inheritances. For me, these are found as much in European as in American thinkers, as much in Bourdieu, Foucault, and Ricoeur as in Peirce, James, and Dewey. In going beyond the tradition of pragmatism to address more fully questions of praxis, however, I honor the exemplars of this tradition by imitating their own sympathetic yet critical engagement with diverse intellectual perspectives. Accordingly, the first word of John J. McDermott's *The Culture of Experience* — its opening epigram — serves equally well as our last word: "Real culture lives by sympathies and admirations, not by dislikes and disdains; under all misleading wrappings it pounces unerringly upon the human core."⁴⁴

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2nd Central European Pragmatist Forum on "Deconstruction and Reconstruction," held at the Przegorzaly Conference Center of Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland, on 11 June 2002.

NOTES

1. The theme of the 2nd Central European Pragmatist Forum was "Deconstruction and Reconstruction." In opening in this fashion, I do not mean to slight the foresight of the organizers. It turned out, however, that this was more honored in the breach than in the observance, though several very fine presentations addressed this theme in a direct and informed way.

2. Simon Critchley opens an insightful essay by asking: "Is pragmatism deconstructive? Is deconstruction pragmatist?" In the opening paragraph, he replies to his own questions by asserting: "At a superficial level, the response to the first question is clearly affirmative, in so far as pragmatism deconstructs all forms of foundationalism ... and argues for the contingency of language, self, and community." "With regard to the second question [Is deconstruction pragmatist?], it can perhaps be said that deconstruction is pragmatist in two senses: first, that the deconstruction of texts from the history of philosophy ... can be assimilated to an antifoundationalist critique of philosophy; second, that the deconstructive claim that the ideality of meaning is an effect of the differential constitution of language ... can be assimilated to a pragmatist conception of meaning as a function of context, i.e., the Wittgensteinian reduction of meaning to use...." Hence, "at this superficial level, it would indeed seem that pragmatism is deconstructive and deconstruction is pragmatist. Yet, [Critchley asks] is this the whole story? ... I would like to disrupt this identification of deconstruction and pragmatism from the perspective of Derrida's work...." (1996, 19) My own sense is that this is more than superficially true, though there are reasons (among those, the ones proffered by Critchley) why any thoroughgoing identification is more misleading than instructive. But the same must be said of too sharp an opposition between the two.

3. It is certainly ironic that Derrida, the champion of difference, readily concedes the affinity between pragmatism and his own project, whereas defenders of pragmatism (especially Dewey's version), ordinarily suspicion of absolutely sharp differences and unbridgeable chasms, strenuously resist admitting anything but the most superficial similarity between their position and Derrida's. It is instructive to recall here Derrida's admission: "I think that deconstruction ... shares much, and Simon Critchley noted this very well, with certain motifs of pragmatism. In order to proceed quickly I recall that from the beginning the question concerning the trace was connected with a certain notion of labour, of doing, and that what I called then *pragmatology* tried to link grammatology and pragmatism. And I would say that all the attention given to the performative dimension ... is one of the places of affinity between deconstruction and pragmatism." (1996, 78)

4. The fragment of the text quoted here is embedded in Derrida's lengthy response to Kristeva initial question, "Semiology is today constructed on the model of the sign and its correlates: *communication* and *structure*. What are the logocentric and ethnocentric limits of these models, and how are they incapable of serving as the basis for a notation attempting to escape metaphysics?" (Derrida 1981, 17)

5. Consider also what Derrida says about subjectivity and then relate this to Dewey's own position. Decentering the subject does not amount to dispensing with the concept of subjectivity. Derrida is quite explicit about this: "The subject is absolutely indispensable. I don't destroy the subject; I situate it. That is to say, I believe that at a certain level both of experience and of philosophical and scientific discourse one cannot get along without the notion of subject. It is a question of knowing where it comes from and how it functions." (1970, 271) In *Experience and Nature*, Dewey opens his chapter devoted to "Nature, Mind and the Subject" by contending: "Personality, selfhood, subjectivity are eventual functions that emerge with complexly organized interactions, organic and social." (*LW* 1: 162)

6. Just as he was emerging, after a somewhat extended apprenticeship, as a philosopher in his own right, Derrida noted: "Here or there I have used the word *déconstruction*, which has nothing to do with destruction. That is to say, it is simply a question of (and this is a necessity of criticism in the classical sense of the word) being alert to the implications, to the historical sedimentations of the language we use — and that is not destruction. I believe in the necessity of scientific work in the classical sense." (1970, 271) This too strikes me as an apt description of Deweyan reconstruction — the ongoing task of being resolutely critical, in particular, of being alert to the often elusive implications and the always deep historical sedimentations of the language we use and other structures on which we rely.

7. The irreverence of so much analytic philosophy is tied to the disrespect of so many analytic philosophers toward the done thing, the traditional forms of philosophical reflection. One irony here is that, with the most prestigious institutions, philosophers who have for decades self-consciously cut themselves off from the history of their own discipline feel entitled to pronounce in a categorical and univocal way that styles of philosophy other than their own (i.e., styles more in keeping with those of traditional philosophy) are not philosophy at all (cf. Smith 1983, 242).

8. In "Experience and Individuality," Dewey reflects on "the education of artisans through their work." He points out "the customs, methods, and *working* standards of the calling [say, carpentry] constitute a 'tradition' ... and initiation into the

tradition is the means by which the powers of learners are released and directed. But ... the urge or need of an individual to join in an undertaking is a necessary prerequisite of the tradition's being a factor in his personal growth in power and freedom; and also ... he has to see on his own behalf and in his own way the relations between means and methods employed and results achieved. Nobody else can see for him, and he can't just see by being 'told,' although the right kind of telling may guide his seeing and thus help him to see what he needs to see." (LW 2: 57)

9. As Dewey notes in *The Public and Its Problems*, "The level of action fixed by embodied intelligence is always the important thing.... Capacities are limited by the objects and tools at hand. They are still more dependent upon the prevailing habits of attention and interest which are set by tradition and institutional customs. Meanings run in the channels formed by instrumentalities of which, in the end, language, the vehicle of thought as well as communication, is the most important." (LW 2: 366) Intelligence is embodied or incorporated mainly in the habits, including those of attention and interest, solicitude and discrimination, characteristic of individuals who warrant the name of their calling (such as carpenters, mechanics, and gardeners).

10. I do not mean to suggest or imply that these figures are proximately juxtaposed by McDermott in the essays themselves, but rather than here are explorations in which the voices and significance of, say, both Peirce and Parker are interwoven.

11. Josiah Royce was also finely attuned to the instinctual imitateness of the human animal. For example, he states: "Nobody amongst us men comes to self-consciousness ... except under the persistent influence of his social fellows. A child in the earliest stages of his social development ... shows you ... a process of the development of self-consciousness in which, at every stage, the Self of the child grows and forms itself through Imitation, and through functions that cluster about imitation of others.... In consequence, the child is in general conscious of what expresses the life of somebody else, before he is conscious of himself. And his self-consciousness, as it grows, feeds upon social models, so that at every stage of his awakening life his consciousness of the Alter is a step in advance of his consciousness of the Ego. Now, contrast is, in our conscious life, the mother of clearness." ("The Human Self," 1971, 193) Also see Emerson's "Quotation and Originality" (in 1985), an essay first delivered as a lecture in 1859.

12. There is often a double and even triple reduction — first, of American philosophy to pragmatism, then, of pragmatism to Dewey's instrumentalism and, finally, of Dewey's pragmatism to its "strong misreading" by Richard Rorty.

13. "To be a philosopher is," as Henry David Thoreau notes in *Walden*, "not merely to have subtle thoughts, nor even to found a school, but so to love wisdom as to live according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity, and trust. It is to solve some of the problems of life, not only theoretically, but practically." (1980, 14)

14. One of the main points of John McDermott's keynote address at the 2nd Central European Pragmatist Forum (McDermott 2004) was how unfortunate a label *pragmatism* is.

15. In *Pragmatism*, James stresses the term is derived from a Greek word meaning "action, from which our words 'practice' and 'practical' come." (1907, 28; all references to James are to the Harvard edition of James's works) Max H. Fisch explains

more fully the meaning of *pragma* when he identifies as its principal meanings “deed, action, behavior, practice, affair, pursuit, occupation, business, going concern.” He goes on to note: “The Greek formula has several advantages over the Latin. The Latin *factum* emphasizes the completed actuality, the pastness, of the deed; the Greek *πράγμα* covers also an action still in course or not yet begun, and even a line of conduct that *would* be adopted under circumstances that may never arise. The Latin is retrospective; the Greek is, or may be, prospective. The Latin is, on the face of it, individual.... The Greek leaves room for possibility and for generality....” (Fisch 1986, 223–234)

16. This is a misleading expression insofar as it suggests that there is a single question or problem, rather than a tangled cluster of issues.

17. Gary Gutting concludes his informative study of *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* by suggesting that “the ever-increasing prestige of the social sciences has drawn considerable talent out of philosophy and undermined its status as the leading intellectual discipline [in France]. It may not be long before we look back on twentieth-century French philosophy as a vanished golden age.” (2001, 390) If this actually occurs, Pierre Bourdieu will likely stand out as a transitional figure.

18. The title of this section is an inversion of the topic given to James (“The Present Situation in Philosophy”) upon being invited to give Hibbert Lectures at Manchester College, Oxford. These lectures were published in 1909 under the title *A Pluralistic Universe: Hibbert Lectures at Manchester College on the Present Situation in Philosophy*.

19. Take a relatively trivial example, the term *character* as used in recent political debates and campaigns. Of course, the word is often used as part of an implicit contrast, one made quite explicit by Emerson: Character is higher than intellect.

20. Dewey, “Philosophy and Civilization,” *LW* 3: 4. References to Dewey’s writings in *The Middle Works* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976–83) and *The Later Works* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981–90) are indicated by *MW* or *LW* followed by volume and page numbers.

21. “Pacifists ought to enter more deeply into the aesthetical and ethical point of view of their opponents. Do that first in any controversy ... *then move the point*, and your opponent will follow. So long as antimilitarists propose no substitute for war’s disciplinary function, *no moral equivalent* of war ... so long they fail to realize the full inwardness of the situation.” (James 1977, 10) He adds, “I do not believe that peace either ought to be or will be permanent on the globe, unless the states, pacifically organized, preserve some of the old elements of army-discipline. A permanently successful peace economy cannot be a simple pleasure-economy.” (10)

22. Peirce, *The Collected Papers of Charles S. Peirce* (1931–58), vol. 2, para. 226. Compare with Dewey: “The word habit may seem twisted somewhat from its customary use when employed as we have been using it. But we need a word to express that kind of human activity which is influenced by prior activity and in that sense acquired; which contains within itself a certain ordering or systematization of minor elements of action; and which is operative in some subdued subordinate form even when not obviously dominating activity. Habit even in its ordinary usage comes nearer to denoting these facts than any other word. If the facts are recognized we may use the words attitude or disposition.” (*MW* 14: 31)

On the general question of the propriety of using technical terms in philosophical discourse analogous to those used in such sciences as physics, chemistry,

and biology (the models for Peirce's ethics of terminology), it is only fair to recall James' charge: "Technical writing on *philosophical* subjects ... is certainly a crime against the human race!" (Perry 1935, vol. 2, 387) "In a subject like philosophy it is really fatal to lose connexion with the open air of human nature, and to think in terms of shop-tradition only." (*A Pluralistic Universe*, 1909, 13) See, however, John E. Smith (1983, 238–240); also Peirce (1998, 264–266). Suffice it to recall here Peirce's claim, the "case of philosophy is peculiar in that it has positive need of popular words in popular senses, — not as its own language (as it has too usually used these words), but as objects of its study." (264–265) This essay is in part an exploration of one such word — *practical* and its cognates.

23. "Democracy," Dewey stressed, "is neither a form a government nor a social expediency, but a metaphysics of the relation of man and his experience to nature." (*MW* 6: 135; quoted in Rorty 1998, 18)

24. "Hegel and His Method" (James 1977, 516). See also the opening sentence of his "Human Immortality": "It is a matter unfortunately too often seen in history to call for much remark, that when a living want of mankind has got itself officially protected and organized in an institution, one of the things which the institution most surely tends to do is stand in the way of the natural gratification of the want itself. We see this in laws and courts of justice; we see it in ecclesiasticisms; we see it in the academies of the fine arts, in the medical and other professions; and we even see it in the universities themselves." (James 1992, 1100)

25. In *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey notes: "Democracy is a word of many meanings. Some of them are of such a broad moral and social import as to be irrelevant to our immediate theme. But one of the meanings is distinctly political, for it denotes a mode of government, a specified practice in selecting officials and regulating their conduct as officials. This is not the most inspiring of the different meanings of democracy; it is comparatively special in character. But it contains about all that is relevant to political democracy.... To discuss democratic government apart from its historic background is to miss its point and to throw away all means for an intelligent criticism of it. In taking the distinctively historical point of view we do not derogate from the important and even superior claims of democracy as an ethical and social ideal." (*LW* 2: 286–287)

26. Since this dualism is intertwined with other equally stultifying and deeply engrained dualisms, it is impossible to deconstruct this one without also deconstructing these others. One such dualism is brought into sharp focus by Bourdieu himself: "We shall escape from the ritual either/or choice between objectivism and subjectivism in which the social sciences have so far allowed themselves to be trapped only if we are prepared to inquire into the mode of production and functioning of the practical mastery which makes possible both an objectively intelligible practice and also an objectively enhanced experience of that practice." (1977, 4)

27. "It was necessary," Bourdieu explicitly contends, "to create a theory of practice as practice, that is to say, as an activity premised on cognitive operations involving a mode of knowledge that is not that of theory, logic, or concept, without for all that being ... a kind of mystical communion or ineffable participation." (1993, 267)

28. In *The Principles of Psychology*, James identifies "The Psychologist's Fallacy" as: "The great snare of the psychologist is the *confusion of his own standpoint with that of the mental fact* about which he is making his report. I shall hereafter call

this the ‘psychologist’s fallacy *par excellence*. For some of the mischief, here too, language is to blame.” (1890, 195)

29. Near the conclusion of Dewey’s 1911 “Brief Studies in Realism, II. Epistemological Realism: the Alleged Ubiquity of the Knowledge Relation,” Dewey asserts that “Unless epistemological realists have seriously considered the main propositions of the pragmatic realists, viz., that knowing is something that happens in the natural course of their career, not the sudden introduction of a ‘unique’ and non-natural type of relation — that to a mind or consciousness [conceived in a supernatural or transcendental way] — they are hardly in a position to discuss the second and derived proposition that, in this natural continuity, things in becoming known undergo a specific and detectable qualitative change.” (*MW* 6: 121)

30. See Stanley Cavell (1998), p. 76.

31. As quoted by Mahar, Harker, and Wilkes in *An Introduction to the Work of Pierre Bourdieu*, eds. Harker et al. (1990), p. 10.

32. Bourdieu, (1977), p. 85.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

34. Bourdieu, (1993), pp. 273–274.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 274.

36. Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” quoted in Calhoun (1993), p. 67.

37. Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays towards a Reflexive Sociology* (1990), p. 196. Bourdieu warns, “one must be careful not to transform into necessary traits intrinsic to a particular group (the nobility or the samurais or factory workers or white-collar employees) the characteristics that they acquire at a given time due to the *position* they occupy in a determinate social space and in a determinate state of the *supply* of possible goods and practices. At every moment and in every society we are faced with a set of social positions bound through a homology to a set of activities ... and goods ... that can themselves be characterized only relationally.” (1990, 273) But, arguably, Bourdieu transforms into a necessary trait of human sociality a feature of a particular group in late modernity — the ongoing struggle for symbolic recognition.

38. In the discussion following the presentation of an abridged version of this paper, Lyubov Bugaeva perceptively challenged my tendency then to make too little of the differences between Dewey and Bourdieu. The significant overlap in the positions of these two thinkers makes possible a fruitful exchange and mutual enhancement, at least by their representatives or defenders. They are not saying the same thing, but the similarities or affinities are so deep and various that the differences become even more important. In particular, the ways and degree to which Bourdieu thematizes questions of power and capital deepen what Dewey holds regarding human habits as social functions. So too Bourdieu’s concept of field recalls pragmatists to a metaphor with which James suggestively toyed but never systematically exploited.

39. Recall here Derrida’s statement, quoted above: “Here or there I have used the word *déconstruction*, which has nothing to do with destruction. That is to say, it is simply a question of (and this is a necessity of criticism in the classical sense of the word) being alert to the implications, to the historical sedimentations of the language we use — and that is not destruction.”

But it is also instructive to recall here a point stressed by Dewey in his 1905 Presidential Address to the American Philosophical Association (first given and published as “Beliefs and Realities,” eventually revised and reprinted as “Beliefs and

Existences”), that of philosophical inquiry as a distinctive way of telling human (or historical) time. In this text he underscores “the task of telling present time, with all its urgent implications.” Assuming this task “brings home, steadies, and enlarges the responsibility for the best use of intelligence.” (*MW* 3: 98)

40. Dewey insists: “We do not use the present to control the future. We use the foresight of the future to refine and expand present activity. In this use of desire, deliberation and choice, freedom is actualized.” (*MW* 14: 215)

41. James contends, “The bigger the unit you deal with, the hollower, the more brutal, the more mendacious is the life displayed. So I am against all big organizations as such; national ones first and foremost; against all big successes and big results; and in favor of the eternal forces of truth which always work in the individual and immediately unsuccessful way, under-dogs always, till history comes, after they are long dead, and puts them on top.” (Perry 1935, vol. 2, 316)

42. “Democracy is on trial, and no one knows how it will stand the ordeal.” (James 1977, 20)

43. In *The Logic of the Judgments of Practice*, Dewey asserts: “The depersonalizing of the things of every practice becomes the chief agency of their repersonalizing in new and more fruitful modes of practice. The paradox of theory and practice is that theory is with respect to all modes of practice the most practical of all things, and the more impartial and impersonal it is, the more truly practical it is. And this is the sole paradox.” (*MW* 8: 82)

44. McDermott (2004), p. 1. It is thus regrettable when the often exceedingly misleading wrappings of deconstructive rhetoric prompts pragmatists to fail to discern any human core other than that of sophistry and cleverness (however, see Gutting 2001).

REFERENCES

- Aboulafia, Mitchell. “A (neo) American in Paris: Bourdieu, Mead, and Pragmatism,” in *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Shusterman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 153–174.
- Bernstein, Richard J. *Praxis and Action: Contemporary Philosophies of Human Activity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971).
- Bernstein, Richard J. *Philosophical Profiles: Essays in a Pragmatic Mode* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986).
- Bernstein, Richard J. *The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992).
- Bohman, James. “Practical Reason and Cultural Constraint: Agency in Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice” in *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Shusterman (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 129–152.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1972), trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Logic of Practice* (1980), trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1990).

Bourdieu, Pierre. *In Other Words: Essays towards a Reflexive Sociology*, trans. Matthew Adamson (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1990).

Bourdieu, Pierre. "Concluding Remarks: For a Sociogenetic Understanding of Intellectual Works," in *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*, eds. Craig Calhoun, Edward LiPuma, and Moishe Postone (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 263–275.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990).

Butler, Judith. "Performativity's Social Magic," in *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Shusterman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 113–128.

Calhoun, Craig. "Habitus, Field, and Capital," in *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*, eds. Craig Calhoun, Edward LiPuma, and Moishe Postone (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 61–88.

Calhoun, Craig, Edward LiPuma, and Moishe Postone, eds. *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

Cavell, Stanley. "What's the Use of Calling Emerson a Pragmatist?" in *The Revival of Pragmatism*, ed. Morris Dickstein (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 72–80.

Critchley, Simon. "Deconstruction and Pragmatism: Is Derrida a Private Ironist or a Public Liberal?" in *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, ed. Chantal Mouffe (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 19–40.

Derrida, Jacques. "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourses of the Human Sciences" and "Discussion" in *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, eds. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), pp. 247–272.

Derrida, Jacques. *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

Derrida, Jacques. "Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism," trans. Simon Critchley, in *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, ed. Chantal Mouffe (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 77–88.

Dewey, John. *Human Nature and Conduct* (New York: Henry Holt, 1922). Cited as *MW* 14.

Dewey, John. *The Public and Its Problems* (New York: Henry Holt, 1927). Cited as *LW* 2.

Dewey, John. “Creative Democracy — The Task Before Us” (1939). Cited as *LW* 14: 224–230.

Diggins, John Patrick. *The Promise of Pragmatism: Modernism and the Crisis of Knowledge and Authority* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

Emerson, R.W. *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Selected Essays*, ed. Larzer Ziff (New York: Penguin Books, 1985).

Fisch, Max H. *Peirce, Semeiotic, and Pragmatism*, eds. Kenneth Laine Ketner and Christian J. W. Kloesel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

Gutting, Gary. *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Harker, Richard, Cheleen Mahar, and Chris Wilkes, eds. *An Introduction to the Work of Pierre Bourdieu: The Practice of Theory* (New York: Macmillan, 1990).

James, William. *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981). All references to James in this paper are to the Harvard edition of James’s works.

James, William. *Pragmatism* (1907) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975).

James, William. *The Meaning of Truth* (1909) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975).

James, William. *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977).

James, William. *The Moral Equivalent of War and Other Essays*, ed. John K. Roth (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

James, William. *The Writings of William James: A Comprehensive Edition*, ed. John J. McDermott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).

James, William. *William James: Writings, 1878–1899*, ed. Gerald E. Myers (New York: Library of America, 1992).

Kristeva, Julia. *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt*, trans. Jeanine Herman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

McDermott, John J. *The Culture of Experience: Philosophical Essays in the American Grain* (New York: New York University Press, 1976).

McDermott, John J. *Streams of Experience: Reflections on the History and Philosophy of American Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986).

McDermott, John J. "Ill-at-Ease: The Natural Travail of Ontological Disconnectedness," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 67 (1994), pp. 7–28.

McDermott, John J. "Transiency and Amelioration: Revisited," in *Deconstruction and Reconstruction: The Central European Pragmatist Forum, Volume Two*, eds. John Ryder and Krystyna Wilkoszewska (Amsterdam and New York: Editions Rodopi, 2004), pp. 1–7.

Mouffe, Chantal, ed. *Deconstruction and Pragmatism: Simon Critchley, Jacques Derrida, Ernesto Laclau, and Richard Rorty* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

Perry, Ralph Barton. *The Thought and Character of William James* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1935).

Peirce, Charles S. *The Collected Papers of Charles S. Peirce*, 8 vols., eds. Charles Hartshorne, Paul Weiss, and Arthur Burks (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1931–58).

Peirce, Charles S. *The Essential Peirce, vol. 2, 1893–1913*, ed. Peirce Edition Project (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

Robbins, Derek. *The Work of Pierre Bourdieu* (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1991).

Rorty, Richard. *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth Century America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).

Royce, Josiah. *The Philosophy of Josiah Royce*, ed. John K. Roth (New York: Crowell, 1971).

Shusterman, Richard. *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).

Smith, John E. *Reason and God* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1961).

Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden, or, Life in the Woods* (New York: New American Library, 1980).

Vincent Colapietro
Department of Philosophy
240 Sparks Building
Pennsylvania State University
University Park, Pennsylvania 16802-5201
United States

The "learning" bit is critical. Doing sudoku does not count. 30. 30 claps. Follow all the topics you care about, and we'll deliver the best stories for you to your homepage and inbox. Explore. Become a member. Get unlimited access to the best stories on Medium and support writers while you're at it.