

Book Review

Pragmatism and Education

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Daniel Tröhler and Jürgen Oelkers, Eds. *Pragmatism and Education*, Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2005. 236 pp. ISBN 9077874658 | 978-9077874653, \$147.00 (hbk.); ISBN 9077874070 | 978-9077874073, \$49.00 (pbk.)

In 1908, the Third International Congress of Philosophy convened in Heidelberg, Germany. According to the editors of *Pragmatism and Education*, this event witnessed a rejection of pragmatic ideas in Germany which would hold throughout most of the twentieth Century.¹ In the wake of the American revival of pragmatism, the intellectual landscape in Germany has changed, enough so to invite a reconsideration of pragmatism's philosophical coherence and relevance for contemporary German educational thinking. In 2003, the editors organized a conference in Zurich to do just that. The resulting book consists of eleven papers along with the editors' Introduction. The papers range from the historical to the philosophical, and cover a variety of pragmatists, from Dewey, James and Mead, to Jane Addams and Mary Parker Follett. Each essay considers both the philosophical ideas of its subject and the relation of those ideas to German pedagogical thought in the twentieth century. Overall, although the papers (admittedly) do not constitute a comprehensive treatment of the issues, they represent an interesting and valuable contribution to the ongoing discussion of pragmatism and its relevance to the philosophy of education, inside Germany or out.

In the first chapter, James A. Good challenges the traditional view that Dewey made a complete break from Hegelianism by 1903. Much of the impetus for such a reading, Good argues, lies in an apparent need to dissociate Dewey from the "philosopher of the Prussian state" (19). On the contrary, Good argues, we ought to recognize that Dewey's early Hegelianism was influenced by the St. Louis Hegelians, who opposed that interpretation of Hegel (14). Dewey's early admissions of his debt to Hegel implicate the influence of the St. Louis Hegelians on this count. Second,

although Dewey reversed his interpretation of Hegel in *German Philosophy and Politics*, his reading of Hegel in that work is questionable, and Dewey returns to his original view in 1929 with the publication of *The Quest for Certainty*. Ridding ourselves of the anti-Prussian bias evident in Dewey's "middle interpretation" of Hegel clears the way for us to see how Dewey and Hegel were *both* pursuing similar tasks, what Good has argued more recently as a commitment to education as *Bildung* (Good, 2005, 2007).

The book's second chapter, by Meike Sophia Baader, compares James's view of religious experience to that of the *Reformpädagogik*, a progressive educational movement in Germany at the turn of the last century. While James was a progressive about education, differences between his progressivism and that of the *Reformpädagogik* are crucial for a complete understanding of their relationship. Importantly, reform pedagogy assumed a link, which James denied, between morality/cognition and religion/emotion, and which underlies the former's concept of the "religious-moral personality" (35). Finally, the reform pedagogues saw the religious person as morally superior, and emphasized the cultivation of the moral-religious personality. Baader then notes several congruencies between James's views and contemporary writings on religion—individualism, pluralism, and globalism among them. Baader points out that the topic is clearly relevant for contemporary educational debate in Germany, since the role of religious instruction is still disputed, and since James's view, that the strength of democracy is rooted in religious pluralism, is a needed voice in those disputes.

The next two chapters both argue that Dewey's views offer a corrective to contemporary educational theorizing in Germany. Hans-Peter Krüger argues that the Deweyan concepts of individual, public, and communication are the necessary, but not sufficient conditions for transforming a "great society" into a "great community." Roswitha Lehmann-Rommel, also supporting Deweyan concepts, argues that his aesthetics is more a theory of qualitative experience, emphasizing the contingency and unpredictability of experience, rather than the projection of ideals (the role of art and aesthetics) and the intentionality of action. Lehman-Rommel argues that because the traditional model—of predetermined aims set out as the goals for intentional pursuit—lies behind much school reform that has failed to produce improvements in student outcomes, examining Dewey's views as an alternative might yield interesting and important results for those interested in school reforms.

Chapters 5 and 6 turn to the work of Jane Addams and Mary Parker Follett. Daniel Tröhler and Birgit Althans both argue that traditional historiography of the Chicago Pragmatists overemphasizes Peirce, James, Mead, and Dewey, at the expense of women such as Jane Addams and Mary Parker Follett. Tröhler argues that this has led to the underestimation of the influence of the geopolitical conditions that spurred the pragmatists' thinking. He contrasts Addams's views with the "education as enlightenment" views of Upton Sinclair, on the one hand, and the teaching of the procedural ideal of democracy proposed by Theodore Roosevelt, on the other. He shows how Addams's views were influenced by the problems of economic industrialism in Chicago between 1880 and 1904. Althans discusses Mary

Parker Follett in the context of the connection between discussions in economics, social problems, the women's liberation movement, and social work in both the U.S. and Germany, from the 1870s through 1910. An important pair of themes that emerges during this period is the application of the standards of social justice and reform to economic discussions, and the call for the professionalization of social work. Both draw the conclusion that an appreciation of the work of Addams and Parker Follett is crucial to an accurate understanding of pragmatism and its importance as a philosophical tradition.

The next two chapters, by Gert Biesta and Jürgen Oelkers, focus on George Herbert Mead. Biesta offers a theoretical and Oelkers a historical discussion of Mead's *semiotic* theory, or theory of meaning. Mead's theory of education, in their view, is a theory of how meanings are communicated from one person to another, and from one generation to the next. Between 1860 and 1916, Oelkers argues, it became clear that a theory of education for a democratic society would require a specially tailored social theory. The emphasis in schooling must be on the social practices in which the objects of meaning are placed. Yet, as Biesta points out, Mead's theory is not just about participation in social practices, but also includes the introduction of a "method of thought" in which the student comes to be able to abstract from and reflect on his or her own experiences. This is required for the emergence of consciousness and the construction of meaning. Biesta concludes his essay by comparing Mead's and Dewey's approaches and then noting several more specific implications for contemporary theory of schooling. Oelkers takes this point a step further, connecting the formation of the self to the formation of democratic citizens, showing how Mead's is truly a democratic theory of education.

Philip Gonon and Stephan Bittner each discuss the historical relationship between German pedagogical theory and pragmatism prior to and after 1945, respectively. Both describe a widespread rejection of pragmatism along with a smaller current of acceptance. Gonon concludes that pragmatism's reception was marred by a narrowing of James and Dewey's fields of expertise—James was seen as "merely" a psychologist and Dewey "merely" a philosopher of education. According to Bittner, following a postwar period during which time educational reforms took Dewey's name but not his actual views, educators and theorists begin to turn to Dewey's actual works and to argue the merits of his views as well as methods of implementation, a trend which reversed itself as the Cold War developed. However, Bittner argues that none of the postwar interpretations of Deweyan pragmatism gets below the surface. According to both authors, then, there are opportunities for "creative encounters" between Deweyan pragmatism and German pedagogic discourse.

The final essay in the collection is a piece by Philip Jackson, in which he begins to explore a number of themes from Dewey's work in order to uncover the reasons for Dewey's optimism. Jackson's essay (he admits) makes little progress on the latter task: This is a work in progress, and Jackson uses the occasion of the conference to discuss not just the ideas he gleans from Dewey's work, but the process/progress of his own thinking on the source of Dewey's optimism. Jackson begins his essay with an exploration of ten concepts he believes hold the key to Dewey's optimism.

He then considers briefly what those themes have in common. In particular, Jackson makes three observations. First, all ten items, although commonly discussed as nouns, really refer to *ways* of doing things. Second, in Dewey's writings, these terms form a systematic whole, made up of interdependent parts. Finally, Dewey's understanding is that each of these terms serves as a mediating view between opposing extremes, i.e., a middle way between the classic dichotomies that have puzzled philosophers for two millennia.

Like *The New Scholarship on Dewey* (Garrison, 1995), another anthology linking pragmatism and education, *Pragmatism and Education* provides us with many interesting and important signposts to the links between pragmatism and educational theory. The work of Dewey, Mead, James, Addams, and Follett clearly has important implications for discussions of educational policy and practice. One missing element, however, which ought to be rectified in any future discussions, is the connection between the "classical" authors and work in the philosophy of education in other countries—in particular Britain, the United States, and Japan, where the pragmatists had a stronger influence and were debated more thoroughly. It is laudable that the German educational philosophers are beginning to listen to and take part in the pragmatic conversation, but the historical authors are only one, albeit important, thread in that discussion.

Note

1. Daniel Tröhler & Jürgen Oelkers, eds. *Pragmatism and Education* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2005), 1. All page references, unless otherwise noted, will be to this work.

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