**Panel on:**

**“Pragmatism, Justice, and Hope for the Future”**

**(Category #2: Ethics and Politics)**

**Panel Participants:**

1. **Gregory PAPPAS, Professor of Philosophy at Texas A&M University (USA):**

**“The Pragmatists’ Approach to Injustice”**

1. **Shannon SULLIVAN, Professor of Philosophy at University of North Carolina at Charlotte (USA):**

**“Pragmatism and Epistemic Justice”**

1. **Erin TARVER, Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Oxford College at Emory University (USA):**

**“Pragmatism and The Moral Equivalent of Football: James, Feminism, and the Future of College Athletics”**

1. **Phillip MCREYNOLDS, Assistant Professor of Philosophy at University of North Carolina at Charlotte (USA):**

**“Pragmatism Without Hope: Dewey, Post Humanism, and the Anthropocene”**

**Panel Abstract:**

The four papers in this panel examine timely issues in pragmatist ethics and social-political philosophy, combining theoretical considerations with concrete practices and ranging from questions of justice and injustice to problems generated by sports and environmental crises. The papers are united in their belief that pragmatist philosophy is an extremely useful resource for examining human experience. At the same time, they take up pragmatism critically, with an eye for how pragmatism might be improved to better address the problems of men and women.

The first paper, “The Pragmatists’ Approach to Injustice” by Gregory Pappas, acknowledges that classical American pragmatists did not develop theories of justice or, indeed, spend much time explicitly addressing the topic of justice. And yet contemporary pragmatists have drawn on pragmatist work to address situations of injustice. Pappas continues that line of work demonstrating that pragmatism can help fulfill the goals of non-ideal theories, such as that recently advanced by Elizabeth Anderson in her book *The Imperative of Integration*. Pappas argues that non-ideal social-political theories need to go beyond merely eschewing abstract versions of ideal worlds that do not suffer from racism, sexism, and other problems. They also need to go beyond consulting empirical work on social problems. To be fully effective those theories also need to be generated out of and explicitly return to the concrete experiences and contexts of people’s lives.

The second paper, “Pragmatism and Epistemic Justice” by Shannon Sullivan, continues to focus on justice and injustice by examining its explicitly epistemic forms. Injustice can and often takes place by discrediting a person as a legitimate knower because of her gender and/or race, for example. As Sullivan argues, pragmatism can help theories of epistemic injustice better account for understand the harm done by those injustices. The harm is not, as analytic epistemologists often imply, that a person is being denied the opportunity to contribute to representations of the world. Rejecting representational epistemologies that are based on mirroring nature, pragmatism posits that knowledge is an activity of organisms in the world whose purpose is enabling human flourishing. Epistemic injustice thus causes harm because it inhibits some organisms’ flourishing through their epistemic practices, and it is those harms that need our attention.

The third paper, “Pragmatism and The Moral Equivalent of Football: James, Feminism, and the Future of College Athletics” by Erin Tarver, turns to ethical issues surrounding the sport of football. Focusing on American football, Tarver’s paper uses William James’s work on war to highlight the militarism and violence involved in sport. Parting ways with James, however, Tarver argues that the alternative to football’s militarism should not be to find another outlet for its masculinist violence. Neither, interestingly, is her preferred solution to advocate for virtues traditionally considered feminine, such as care and cooperation. Instead, Tarver argues against considering strength, ambition and competitiveness as exclusively or quintessentially masculine characteristics and examines women’s sports as a possible moral equivalent of war that feminist pragmatists could endorse.

The fourth paper, “Pragmatism without Hope: Dewey, Post Humanism, and the Anthropocene” by Phillip McReynolds, is a fitting conclusion to the panel because it pushes pragmatism hardest on the question of pragmatism’s ability to provide a more just future for humanity. Challenging the humanism that lies at the heart of pragmatist philosophy, McReynolds argues that environmental problems pose serious challenges to humanist concepts of agency and the prospect of ameliorating the human condition through self-control of human’s habit-formation. As the idea of the Anthropocene emphasizes, humanity has become a geophysical force changing the planet in ways that may well be beyond humans’ ability to control. What then might become of pragmatism? Mounting an internal critique of pragmatist philosophy, McReynolds questions whether additional doses of meliorism and hope are sufficient for the environmental problems at hand. Describing a posthumanist pragmatism that comes to terms with the Anthropocene, McReynolds argues that we cannot and should not set aside pressing problems such as racism, sexism, injustice, and war in hopes of solving the global environmental crisis. Rather, we are required to continue to work on these problems even in the absence of developing final, successful, or satisfying solutions to these problems.

**Individual Paper Abstracts:**

1. **“The Pragmatists’ Approach to Injustice”**

**Gregory Pappas**

There has been a recent resurgence of Pragmatism in sociopolitical theory, one in which Pragmatism is presented as offering an alternative and promising approach to nonideal theories of justice. This may seem ironic since the record of the classical Pragmatists on being explicit about justice or the injustices of their time in their philosophical corpus is a mixed one at best. However, this has not stopped recent philosophers from continuing to draw from the philosophical resources in this tradition to address the injustices of today (e.g., Cornel West, Eddie Glauge, Shannon Sullivan, Melvin Rogers, Jose Medina, Elizabeth Anderson, Roberto Frega).

What is it about this philosophical tradition that in spite of its shortcoming seems worth reconstructing for today? The short answer is a metaphilosophy guided by a normative vision of democracy that continues to bear interesting and promising fruits in the hands of new scholars. This essay argues that this metaphilosophy is worth reconstruction, but that in order to advance it we need to reexamined it by making explicit what are the basic tenets of this approach to injustices in the world, how it differs from other non-ideal approaches, and highlighting some of its virtues as well as some of the difficulties (some left unanswered) that commitment to such an approach to injustice entail. I claim that in this reconstructive task we would do well to revisit some of the commitments and key insights about methodology found in Addams, Alain Locke, and especially John Dewey. For Dewey, more than any other figure, wrote about the proper methodology for philosophy in addressing social problems.

Anderson’s *Imperative of Integration* is the most important recent development in a pragmatist’s approach to a social problem. Anderson sees her book as an instantiation of a non-ideal pragmatist’s conception of political philosophy and democratic theory, one that is a challenge to the way mainstream analytic political philosophy is done. Indeed, in its subject matter and its methodology her book *The Imperative of Integration* stands out when compared to the predominant ways that scholars work today in socio-political philosophy after Rawls. In blending social science research, moral philosophy, and political theory it is reminiscent of John Dewey. I will examine her characterization of the pragmatist’s methodology from the standpoint of Dewey’s own in order to reconstruct the best possible version of the pragmatists approach to injustice for the 21st century. I will claim that while Anderson’s characterization of the pragmatists approach is on target, it is incomplete and sometimes narrow in regard to (a) what should be the starting point (b) what are the experiential resources that pragmatism considers important, and (c) what constitute the normative ideal. My criticism of Anderson is done in the spirit of reformulating and strengthening the pragmatist approach to injustice, one that can answer some of the objections that have been raised already against Anderson; more importantly, one that offers a promising approach to inquiry into present and future injustices.

**(2) “Pragmatism and Epistemic Justice”**

**Shannon Sullivan**

This paper develops a pragmatist approach to epistemic justice and injustice. Closely related to sociopolitical injustice, epistemic injustice concerns injustice done to people in their capacity as knowers and as producers of knowledge. The topic of epistemic injustice recently has received a great deal of attention thanks to Miranda Fricker’s 2007 *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, which uses the “negative space” of epistemic justice to identify issues of epistemic justice. In particular, on Fricker’s account epistemic justice is achieved through testimonial justice (when a hearer recognizes and neutralizes the impact of prejudice in her judgment of a speaker’s credibility) and hermeneutic justice (when a hearer is sensitive to the possibility that a speaker might not seem to make sense because of differences in communication styles due to different cultural backgrounds). The primary harm done in both cases, according to Fricker, is unfair exclusion from participating in the “pooling” of knowledge. This harm is achieved through “the very construction of selfhood.”

Fricker’s account is important and insightful, and yet it would benefit from a pragmatist epistemology, specifically that of John Dewey. In contrast to traditional approaches to epistemology, Dewey’s pragmatist account of knowledge understands it as transactional, which means that knowing is an activity undertaken by a bodily organism-in-the-world that helps shape that which is known. The known world does not stand separate from the knower, in other words, but instead the knower and the known co-constitute each other in a dynamic fashion. Most importantly for Dewey, the purpose of knowledge is not to accurately represent the world, as if (to paraphrase Richard Rorty, who follows Dewey on this point) knowing were a process of mirroring nature. It is to enable an organism’s flourishing. Knowers are not little gods hovering outside the world; they are in the midst of and constituted by the very world that they seek to know. The reason they seek that knowledge thus is because it can help them cope, survive, and hopefully even thrive.

When philosophers and others move away from representational epistemology as pragmatism would have us do, our approach to epistemic (in)justice will shift in important ways. A Deweyan approach to epistemic injustice would help us see that the primary harm done by testimonial injustice is not that a speaker without credibility isn’t allowed to “pool” knowledge (i.e., represent the world) through her speech like everyone else. The harm instead is that the speaker isn’t allowed to epistemically transact with the world in ways that enable her flourishing. In a similar fashion, the harm done by hermeneutic injustice is not merely that a speaker operating with a different worldview than a hearer is dismissed as unreasonable or crazy. This too operates with a problematic “pooling” or representational model of knowledge, writ large at the level of a culture or community. The harm is that being dismissed as crazy impacts the perceived reasonableness of the entire culture/community in question. That in turn impacts the culture/community’s ability to be an environment that encourages and enables the flourishing of its members.

Epistemic injustice conceived as interference with transactional flourishing (as I will call it) can happen as a deprivation, in which a person isn’t able to epistemically engage the world. But even more importantly, it also can occur as a production, in which a person is produced as a kind of knower required to epistemically engage the world in ways that undercut her. In the latter case, a person’s epistemic activity is particularly harmful because it is transactionally self-destructive: it forces a person to help shape and build a world that, in turn, tears her down. This is the insight that I believe Fricker is trying to capture when she points to the epistemic harm caused to constructions of selfhood. Working with a pragmatist approach to epistemology, we will have a more robust account of how that harm transactionally takes place.

**(3) “Pragmatism and The Moral Equivalent of Football:**

**James, Feminism, and the Future of College Athletics”**

**Erin C. Tarver**

In recent years, criticism of the business of NCAA athletics in the United States—particularly American football—has grown more pronounced. Reports of cheating scandals and sexual assault cover-ups to protect powerful players and coaches call into question the appropriateness of linking highly profitable athletics programs with institutions of higher learning. And ethical questions remain even in cases in which no such obvious moral violations have taken place: how can one justify the expense of stadiums and athletics programs while academic budgets are cut and institutions rely increasingly on adjunct labor? What are we to make of the immense profits achieved by institutions and television networks as the result of dangerous physical labor by young (often black) men who are, themselves, barred from profiting from their efforts? And how can we justify watching, much less supporting or enjoying, such a violent game? These questions are reasonable ones, and thoughtful critics of NCAA football are to be commended for thinking critically about what has become an object of nearly religious devotion in American life.

Yet, the solution to this problem is more complex than some critics have allowed—particularly those who would argue for the elimination of football (and/or NCAA athletics) at academic institutions. Sports and sports fandom comprise a complex set of disciplinary practices whose influence and effects far exceed the actions and agents on the field of play. At stake in the vicissitudes of football, both American and European, are not only the bodies and identities of individual players or institutions, but also the identity and pride of fans and communities. It is difficult to see, in this context, what might feasibly be done, when so much rests on the practice of football fandom for so many.

In his essay, “The Moral Equivalent of War,” William James addresses a similar (if more pressing) problem: how to rid a world enamored of the aesthetic and moral benefits of war of the horrific reality of war itself. James famously argues that our propensity for “pugnacity” and appreciation for hardihood and heroism are impossible to overcome, and thus that if we are to ever successfully give peace a chance, we must find ways for the pacifistic program to call forth the manly virtues of strength, hardness, pride, competitiveness, and valor. There is a sense in which American (and perhaps also European) football has become “the moral equivalent of war,” though perhaps not in quite the way that James envisioned. Read in the context of NCAA football, James’ rhetorical question, “Why should men not some day feel that it is worth a blood-tax to belong to a collectivity superior in *any* ideal respect?” takes on a rather different meaning. It is arguable, as some philosophers of sport have suggested, that football is so popular precisely because it aligns with the impulses of militarism. College football, James might say, puts on full display our “unwillingness to see the supreme theatre of human strenuousness closed,” despite—or sometimes because of—its horrors. If this is so, there will be no getting rid of the college football industry (or of the myriad social ills that come with it) while we have no substitute for it.

In consideration of what might or could take the place of football’s militarism, I part ways with James. James’ solution to the problem involves calling for the joining forces of all men to fight a war against nature, to subdue it and make it work for our (human) purposes. I argue that James’ solution is ineffective—and gives rise to dependence on the controlled violence of football—precisely because it presumes a masculinist outlook. There is no good reason why we should view the virtues and values James mentions as associated with militarism—pride, competitiveness, strenuousness, courage—as necessarily requiring manliness, violence, or hardness, or as necessarily excluding “feminism unabashed.” Indeed, I suggest that we take seriously James’ claim that “Patriotic pride and ambition in their military form are…only specifications of a more general competitive passion. They are its first form, but that is no reason for supposing them to be its last.” In so doing, we might quite reasonably suggest that the problem in finding a moral equivalent of war, or of football, is the problem of finding a means of cultivating and valorizing pride, competitiveness, and courage that does not presume the value of hardness, violence, and manliness over any enterprise associated with femininity.

In contrast with a particular brand of second-wave feminism, I do not argue that competitiveness, pride, ambition, or strenuousness are inherently anti-feminist values; following Iris Young and other feminist philosophers of sport, I suggest that the cultivation of such attitudes can be useful to women. The problem, rather, is what we see instantiated in James’ essay just as strongly as in mainstream football marketing: namely, the figuration of these virtues as inherently masculine, and as requiring the subordination, domination, and/or exclusion of women. This figuration supports football’s ‘crown jewel’ marketing status (as the only one of the ‘revenue sports’ played only by men), normalizes violence against women, and makes the exploitation of young black men all but inevitable in a world marked by a racist fascination with and fear of black masculinity. Continuing to imagine strength and pride as wholly masculine and femininity as simpering and sedentary will result not in finding a moral substitute for war, but in locating still new venues for its conduct. I end by briefly examining the rise of women’s athletics, and consider whether women’s basketball could become, on a Jamesian feminist reading, the moral equivalent of football.

**(4) “Pragmatism without Hope:**

**Dewey, Post Humanism, and the Anthropocene”**

**Phillip McReynolds**

In this paper I argue that global climate change and the advent of the Anthropocene present unique challenges for pragmatism as a humanistic philosophy of hope. The Anthropocene highlights human energies that exceed human bounds while making manifest the post human future implicit in pragmatism, insofar as it is an evolutionary philosophy, but with which pragmatism is presently ill equipped to deal, given its rootedness in human experience. I argue that in light of this double challenge, pragmatists should temper the hopefulness of their meliorism and that to remain relevant in this current geological epoch pragmatism will need a new frame.

Pragmatism, at least in its Deweyan incarnation, is a self-consciously, even proudly, humanist philosophy. With its emphasis upon organized and applied intelligence, “as a sovereign force in human life” pragmatism clearly displays its heritage as offspring of the enlightenment and, with caveats, a continuation of the enlightenment project for the betterment of humankind, broadly construed. Indeed, one of the most distinctive features of pragmatism as a philosophical tradition is its commitment to addressing problems embedded within the bounds of human experience and human history.

Recent scientific developments threaten to undermine the hopeful humanistic core of pragmatism, however, by challenging traditional conceptions of human agency and troubling a human-centered orientation toward history and time. These developments are the discovery of anthropogenic climate change and the recognition of the emergence of the Anthropocene as our current geological epoch. Coined in the year 2000 by Crutzen and Stoermer, the term “Anthropocene” underlines the fact that recently, for the first time, human beings have become a geophysical force of nature on par with other non-human forces that have likewise transformed the biosphere to such an extent that they have left planetary-scale imprints in the geological record. The Anthropocene directly challenges John Dewey’s view that humans are able “to exercise control over their own habit-formation,” at least when it comes to species-action.

Pragmatism must come to terms with the Anthropocene as a defining feature of the human condition, which is different from treating it as a problematic situation to be resolved. The Anthropocene, in other words, is the epoch in which the human condition is overtaken by the post human. As this essay will argue, the Anthropocene represents the logical limits of the human and therefore of humanistic philosophies including pragmatism. While pragmatists are well prepared to accept that the context for all action and thought are irreducibly local, hence all action and thought are local, the advent of the Anthropocene confronts us with the possibility that while global action is impossible local action will not be enough.

The idea of the Anthropocene brings to the fore the always implicit fact (at least in Darwinism, and so in pragmatism as well) that the apparently open and limitless horizons of human action and experience are, and always were, closed. In the face of the Anthropocene what is called for is a reconstructed pragmatism, a pragmatism without hope. A reconstructed pragmatism would not hope to build a better world in which climate change has been solved and human extinction is not inevitable. Rather, a pragmatism without hope would set to work resolving human problems at human scales within the boundaries of closed horizons. Our future is not limitless. We are not likely to restructure society in such a way that avoids mass extinction on this planet. We do, however, face persistent problems of poverty, racism, injustice, and war, just to name a few. As pragmatists, we should continue to work on these problems while coming to terms with a future without us and that is not framed by our values. These are the challenges that the Anthropocene represents to pragmatism.