
Pragmatism, Justice, and Hope for the Future

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Abstract

Panel Participants:

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

”The Pragmatists’ Approach to Injustice”

(2) Shannon SULLIVAN, Professor of Philosophy at University of North Carolina at Charlotte (USA):

”Pragmatism and Epistemic Justice”

(3) 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”

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

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

Individual abstracts available in the attachment below (website)

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.

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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 full 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 but also with implications for European football, Tarver's paper uses William James's work on war to highlight the militarism and violence involved in football. 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 have gone beyond what human energies can deal with. As the idea of the Anthropocene emphasizes, humanity has become a geophysical force changing the planet that cannot be humanly controlled. 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 calls for human beings to energetically tackle problems such as racism, sexism, injustice, and war without the hope of a future that avoids human mass extinction.

Keywords: justice, epistemic injustice, feminism, sport, environmental ethics, Dewey, James