Interpreting and Criticizing Modernity

In bringing the philosophical traditions of pragmatism and genealogy to bear upon contemporary debates regarding modernity, the work of both John Dewey and Michel Foucault has been subjected to misinterpretations that portray both traditions in a way that depletes them of the full force of their critical insight. This is unfortunate in part because it has led to a failure to engage with pragmatism and genealogy in the terms in which they offered themselves. This is further unfortunate because it has led adherents of each tradition to regard the other tradition as a philosophical opponent rather than an unlikely ally. There has been, in short, far too little cross-fertilization between pragmatists and genealogists despite a number of rather obvious philosophical affinities. The philosophical project of a history and critique of modernity is just one area where this lack of cross-fertilization can be discerned. This is particularly notable insofar as the history and critique of modernity is a project that has very much been at the center of both of these traditions of thought. It figures heavily, to concentrate on my exemplary genealogist and pragmatist, in nearly all of Foucault’s books, including Discipline and Punish and History of Madness, and in many of Dewey’s most important books, including The Quest for Certainty and Reconstruction in Philosophy. Foucault and Dewey offer complementary perspectives on a philosophical project that deserves increased attention today.

That this complementary aspect of these two traditions has gone unnoticed in the literature is due at least in part to misinterpretations of each tradition, perpetrated in large part no doubt by adherents of one tradition against the other, though those working out of other lineages (most obviously German critical theory and French postmodernism) have proposed interpretations of both pragmatism and genealogy that would overemphasize their differences. In many cases, the source of these misinterpretations is an attempt to squeeze the philosophical projects of pragmatism and genealogy into the mold that shapes the thought of most other participants on both sides of the modernity debates. This mold can in many instances be traced back to the work of influential sociologist, political economist, and philosopher Max Weber. Weberian concepts dominate contemporary critical thinking about modernity, most notably in the form of Weber’s claims that modernity is characterized above all by a grand process of value-sphere differentiation that gives rise to bureaucratized and rationalized separate spheres of society. One unfortunate residue of the subtle dominance of these Weberian concepts in contemporary debates over modernity is that many thinkers who operated largely outside of these concepts cannot be brought into these debates without filtering their thought through this conceptual prism. In the case of Dewey and Foucault, their contributions to our understanding of the history and critique of modernity are widely misunderstood due to being filtered through Weberian concepts that simply were not central in Dewey’s or Foucault’s thinking.

The extraordinary complexity of Weber’s thought helps explain why his interpretation of modernity has proven capacious enough to provide fuel for both pro-modern optimists and anti-modern pessimists. But Weber’s interpretation only justifies either pro-modernism or anti-modernism and yet never both at the same time. Where Dewey and Foucault are interpreted through the Weberian prism, the usual result is to assimilate their critical stances on modernity to either side of this familiar for or against debate. Thus, Dewey is often read as a resolutely optimistic modern thinker while Foucault is read from the opposite perspective as a decidedly pessimistic anti-modern. But I want to suggest that Dewey and Foucault were both operating outside of the orbit of Weber’s understanding of the basic problems of modernity and that this point of convergence is significant insofar as for both thinkers it enabled an alternative evaluation of modernity that cuts across all of the familiar either for or against positions that have left the current debates rather vacuous. Dewey and Foucault were complexly both for and against modernity. This more complex view leads in turn to a more effective critical stance than that mounted by Weber’s approach. My claim is not that Weber’s work on modernity is burdened by a cognitive defect that Dewey and Foucault could help us to repair but rather that Weber’s work is burdened by a critical deficit that Dewey and Foucault enable us to overcome. Weber did not get modernity wrong so much as he left us without any effective means to develop the better aspects of modernity while also resisting its worse parts.

The argument and exposition I develop here can be summarized as follows. Weber’s well-known portrait of modernity is a sociologist’s portrait in which
t the differentiation of various social spheres (for example, science, politics, art) is the major thrust of modernity. In this view, what is distinctive about modernity is the way in which we parcel out our practices into the distinctive spheres in a way that enables us to develop bureaucratic forms of rationality immanent to each. Those working within Weber’s interpretation of modernity either celebrate the basic modern project of differentiation or mourn the lost unity and hope for some future reification. Dewey and Foucault, by contrast, offered an intellectual historical portrait of modernity that focused not on the differentiation of sociological spheres but on the purification of separate modes of thinking. Dewey and Foucault should be read as offering a less sociological and more historical portrait of modernity in which the basic contrast is that between two paradigmatic currents of modern thought, namely utilitarianism and romanticism. While present throughout modernity, utilitarianism and romanticism ascended to prominence over the course of the nineteenth century such that today we might refer to each as indispensable for modernity. It follows from their indispensability that any historical-philosophical evaluation of modernity must be able to accommodate both. Dewey and Foucault painstakingly labored to show that modernity has thus far accommodated both by means of what I shall call purification—referring to our tendency to hold apart utility and romance, reason and imagination, sociality and individuality, public and private. Dewey and Foucault sought to elaborate an alternative means of accommodating these two currents of thought, which I call experimentation—in this model, utility and romance would no longer be opposed currents of thought but would rather be alternative tendencies whose internal tensions it is our task as moderns to explore.

Weber on Modernity

Max Weber was an enormously complex and extraordinarily difficult thinker. Perhaps this is why wide swaths of contemporary philosophers remain ignorant of his work despite the influence of his concepts and theories on much of what goes on in certain branches of philosophy today. Weber’s influence outside of philosophy is well noted by the sociologists, anthropologists, historians, and others who generously borrow from his work. It is well known that Weber was one of the founding figures of modern sociology. As he conceived it, the study of society should be a rigorous inquiry both empirical and conceptual, less positivistic and more hermeneutical in orientation. The goal of such inquiries should be explanatory accounts of the present explaining the forms of our scientific, political, religious, and economic lives. Part of what stands out in Weber’s work is a severe focus on that which conditions our modern religions as religion or our modern capitalisms as capitalism, that is, how these various parts of our lives have come to appear parcelled out and divided off from one another. These are heavy questions at the heart of our modernity. In being one of the first to help us understand how we might even ask these questions of ourselves, Weber bequeathed an embarrassment of riches to modern thought as modern. I cannot here put this full wealth of riches on display. I shall only focus on one fairly standard reading of a core theme in Weber’s thought, for it is this core theme on this standard reading that continues to hold dominance over contemporary theories of modernity in contexts as diverse as philosophy, history, anthropology, macro-sociology, and more.

The common Weberian denominator found across so many of these contemporary theories of modernity is that of social differentiation, with its attendant processes of rationalization and bureaucratization. Weber once referred to social differentiation with a striking image of modernity as a “parceling-out of the soul.” In sum, this parceling-out refers to that modern tendency to splinter off from one another various value-spheres or social spaces such as science and politics. As value-spheres get increasingly differentiated, powerful modes of thought are opened up whereby each domain can push its immanent logic to its furthest limits. This enables an unprecedented development of rationality in all spheres at the seemingly small cost of the isolation of each mode of practice from every other. It is this fact of autonomous internal development that Weber above all else marked as distinctive of modernity: scientific technicization and political emancipation are disconnected in a way that seems to promise an unprecedented development of each. This essentially modern process of value-sphere differentiation-cum-austonomization can be grasped in its broader form in terms of the two-sided process whose external face is bureaucratization and whose internal logic is that of rationalization. Social value-spheres differentiate themselves by developing their own autonomous rationalities and their own autonomous bureaucratic systems.

There remains a basic ambiguity in this theory of modernity. Weber thought that differentiation presents us with precarious opportunities and alluring dangers: “The fate of an epoch which has eaten of the tree of knowledge is that it must know that we cannot learn the meaning of the world from the results of its analysis, be it ever so perfect; it must rather be in a position to create this meaning itself.” So although our modernity is an “iron cage” of obedience, it is also a cage in which we might learn to freely remake the meaning of ourselves. In short, the conceptual constellation revolving around differentiation contains both an idea of the proliferation of instrumental
rationality and an idea of the expansion of self-assertive freethinking, as commentators have not been lax to point out. At the bottom of both estimations is a separation between a certain picture of scientific technicization and a certain picture of political emancipation, that is, a separation between the categories, practices, and social spaces of "objective control" from those of "subjective freedom." Herein lies a central tension in Weber's work.

This generative ambiguity (generative because of the sheer power of Weber's categories) has enabled both pro-moderns and anti-moderns to use Weber's interpretation of modernity as a basis upon which to articulate conflicting sets of evaluations of modernity. While some witness differentiation as a legitimate move that today requires only piecemeal adjustment, others regard it as signaling the demise of emancipation as modernity is increasingly swept up by promises of systemic technicization. The common Weberian core behind both positions suggests that pro-moderns and anti-moderns embrace all the same dualisms: reason versus imagination, intellect versus will, sameness versus difference, social versus individual, technicization versus emancipation. Which is the real meaning of our modernity? It is difficult to say. But perhaps it is not as important to determine which interpretation better reflects the facts as it is to recognize the underlying presuppositions that animate both interpretations. As Bruno Latour urges, "Except for the plus or minus sign, moderns and antimoderns share all the same convictions." The basic contrasts framing both sides, contrasts that are so easily and so often inflated into dichotomies, should be the focal point of attempts to evaluate the viability of Weber's interpretation of modernity. The central question concerns whether or not Weber's interpretation of modernity as an era of differentiation locks us into these contrasts or provides a means for thinking beyond them. My argument is that Weber's theory forces us to leave modernity more or less where he finds it. It is, in other words, critically debilitating.

The opposition between Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida, for example, reflects the Weberian assumptions that typically separate pro-moderns from anti-moderns. If Derrida is concerned to blur the very lines between philosophy and literature that Habermas strives to sharpen, then already both positions are framed in Weberian terms of differentiation, which Derrida is very much against and Habermas is very much in favor of. In working from a Weberian starting point, whether consciously or not, such critics of modernity risk descending into reductive interpretations of modernity that can yield only simplistic for-or-against evaluations. This shows not that the work of Habermas and Derrida is essentially incorrect. It shows rather that thought that is so fecund can be rendered so barren by hewing to an interpretation of modernity that is all too often unquestioningly accepted. In order to adopt a properly critical relationship to modernity, we must first adopt a critical relationship to modernity's interpretation of itself—which means getting away from a certain picture of modernity for which Weber is representative.

**A Deweyan-Foucaultian Alternative to Weberian Sociology of Modernity**

In focusing on modernity, pragmatism and genealogy have together departed from the sociological style of interpretation of which Weber is representative in favor of a more intellectual historical style of interpretation. This difference emerges as crucial if we see as our goal the project of developing critical evaluations of modernity on the basis of our descriptive interpretations of modernity. Those working with Weber's interpretation tend to evaluate modernity in terms of sociological categories such as science, politics, religion, and art. This too often leads to generalizing evaluations such as "science is good" or "religion is dangerous." Such views are rarely helpful insofar as scientific and religious practices are often too complex for canonical sociological boxes. Those working with Dewey's and Foucault's interpretation would do better to focus instead on currents of thought that cut across familiar sociological distinctions. In turning from interpretation to evaluation, focusing on currents of thought enables us to distinguish what we like in scientific and religious practices from what we find troublesome. This means we can stop worshiping and castigating sociologically defined categories such as science and religion in favor of a more complex argument to the effect that scientists and religions ought to play up some parts of their practices while playing down other parts. To see how we might learn to evaluate modernity on these alternative terms, I would like to concentrate on the Deweyan and Foucaultian grounds for such an approach as provided by their interpretations of modernity. Before doing so, allow me to first clear up some interpretive difficulties looming large in the literature.

Countless commentators have suggested that Foucault intensifies all of the key problems formulated by Weber. The standard line is that whereas Weber saw modern rationalization as an "iron cage," Foucault saw it as a something like an "iron cave" that we cannot even see we are in, let alone see our way out of. Indeed, it is difficult not to hear the retroactive echo of Discipline and Punish when reading the passages on discipline in Economy and Society. Such echoes have led a number of otherwise insightful commentators to suggest that Foucault's work builds on Weber's core concern with rationalization and differentiation. This common interpretation of Foucault reflects just how
pervasive the Weberian framework is for contemporary historical interpretations and critical evaluations of modernity.

There are at least two difficulties yielded by such a reading. First, it is tough to square Weber's image of value-sphere differentiation with Foucault's presentation of the increasing interlacing of power and knowledge in modernity. Reading Foucault's work on the entwinement of power and knowledge through Weberian concepts would in fact expose Foucault's thought to many of the traps that it was designed to point out. One of Foucault's most enduring points was that the core problems of our day should not be described in terms of reifying the differentiated modes of knowledge and power, because this would merely be a call for more of the same. A second difficulty for reading Foucault as a Weberian is that it makes Foucault seem far less exceptional than he really is. Is Foucault really just one more protestor in a long line of intellectuals chanting the familiar mantras of anti-modernity? Foucault was certainly critical of modernity, but at the same time he positively embraced what he saw as its most valuable tendencies. Foucault was both for and against modernity. Paul Rabinow claims that Foucault did not proceed "by opposing modernity to post-modernity, but by opposing modernity to counter-modernity," such that his parrhesiastic practice was simultaneously modern and counter-modern. What I am suggesting is that Rabinow is right to see Foucault as both modern and counter-modern and that this sort of complex critical evaluation of modernity simply cannot be made sense of within the usual Weberian frame that so thoroughly dominates contemporary thought about modernity, counter-modernity, and post-modernity.

Turning now to pragmatism, the interpretive situation is a little different, but no better for it. When pragmatism is not altogether neglected by those engaged in the modernity debates, it is usually denounced as either a celebratory philosophy proclaiming all the benefits of the modern age or as a profoundly relativistic doctrine out of step with modern progress. Both of these caricatures borrow much from Weber and gather relatively little from Dewey. In the only important comparative study of Weber and Dewey yet undertaken, James Kloppenberg discerns an important point of overlap in Dewey's and Weber's shared view that differentiating rationalization is the central problem of modernity. Though not wishing to discount other points of overlap concerning ethics and epistemology that Kloppenberg has explicated, I wish to call into question his claim for a more basic point of convergence in terms of their supposedly shared interpretation of modernity.

Weber saw modernity as haunted by a series of divisions that Dewey may indeed have found troubling had he not confronted modern culture as problematized by a more basic dichotomy. If Weber saw modernity as split between science and morality, then Dewey saw it as split between utilitarian rationality and romantic pathos. Dewey's pragmatism is best seen as attempting to develop a conscious integration of utilitarian and romantic styles of thought. He championed an experimentalism that he thought captured what is best in certain early modern scientists but also in certain artists, politicians, novelists, and everyday people. This bears important consequences for Dewey's frequently cited, but also frequently derided, praise of science. Dewey never thought that modernity had parsed itself out into a healthy science over here and a deficient morality over there. His view was rather that the attitude of experimentalism had not sufficiently taken hold throughout the great variety of our modern practices, including our modern scientific practices. Dewey was not interested in praising a differentiated bureaucracy of science but rather an "experimentalism" for which science had provided many, but certainly not the only, exemplars. Only in this view can we understand why in addition to certain scientific practices, Dewey also championed certain aesthetic, religious, political, and ethical practices. Dewey found in each of these the seeds of an experimentalism that he hoped could flower forth practically anywhere. Dewey's view thus enabled him to move beyond many of those critically debilitating categories that have haunted so much of modern thought, including Weber's. This helps explain why Weber retained many of the dichotomies that Dewey thoroughly rejected (for instance, that between facts and values).

Neither Dewey nor Foucault should be read through the prism of Weberian concepts. Dewey and Foucault never argued that power and knowledge, expressions of the supposedly differentiated value-spheres of politics and science, ought to be reunited. They argued that the two had never been separated. Modernity as Weber described it had never taken place. As such, Dewey and Foucault never urged a reunification of the various modalities of experience split off into various differentiated value-spheres. Rather, they responded by urging the adoption of a critical attitude that both of them often referred to as "experimentalism." This much helps us negatively clear away any Weberian remnants inflecting our interpretations of Dewey and Foucault. But what, positively, can those interpretations contribute to contemporary work on modernity?

Dewey on Modernity

My approach to pragmatism thus far takes as one of its points of departure Richard Rorty's fertile suggestion that we think of pragmatism as "romantic
utilitarianism." Rorty's image of pragmatism as an experimentalism that integrates romantic and utilitarian currents of thought signals what is best in the work of John Dewey. Seen in this way, the tradition of pragmatism should be understood as an attempt to further that experimental project of forging productive new relations among modernity's utilitarian and romantic tendencies.

In books such as The Quest for Certainty and Reconstruction in Philosophy, Dewey describes modernity as held captive by a process of purification that rigorously divides reason from its others. Dewey here and elsewhere details the philosophical quest for certainty that emerged during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as truth was increasingly identified with the condition of subjective certainty. Although this quest is unique to modernity, it is central to Dewey's argument that it institutes no deep breaks from the ambition for transcendence that has characterized philosophy since its beginnings. In ancient thought, purity was figured in various conceptions of eternity. In medieval philosophy, the purity standard was similarly articulated as a divine force to which human reason and imagination should chain themselves. In modern thought, purity is relocated in the unassailability of mental certainty. The ongoing quest for certainty simply revamped the ancient and medieval quests for purity in the light of the subjectivism of the modern age. Going forward into the nineteenth century, the full and final solidification of the quest for certainty was witnessed as the currents of utilitarianism and romanticism assumed cultural ascendance. What the simultaneous ascendance of these two opposed currents of thought signals is the meticulous purification of two modes of direct contact with truth. Certainty is enthroned as both a form of reason and a form of intuition or imagination. Utilitarianism crowns certainty in the form of reason, efficiency, discipline, and order while romanticism crowns it in the form of imagination, will, striving, and genius. Dewey aptly summarized this picture of modernity in his description of Immanuel Kant as simultaneously striving for "cognitive certainty in the region of phenomena, practical certainty in the realm of moral authority." The quest for certainty thus entails a separation of pure reason from its others. This separation is the specific problem situation to which Dewey addressed his pragmatism. Without this historical interpretation of the central problem of modernity as its backdrop, much of Dewey's thought remains difficult to understand. But with this backdrop in place, many of his most central concepts can be clarified—meliorism in politics, fallibilism in epistemology, growth as the only moral end. These central concepts can be read as responding to a modernity in which the central problem we face is the separation not between two sociological spheres of experience but between two moods of prosaic utilitarianism and poetic romanticism. From this separation, there follows a whole train of invidious philosophical distinctions that Dewey found misguided: reason versus imagination, sociality versus individuality, public versus private. It is above all against this philosophical thematic, and the modern figure of certainty that has been its outward face, that Dewey's pragmatism was written.

Richard Rorty is better than perhaps any other contemporary pragmatist in advancing Dewey's quintessential skepticism toward the idea that there exists extra-human powers that we mere humans ought to try and get in touch with: "The problem with both universalist metaphors of grandeur and romantic metaphors of depth is that they suggest that a practical proposal, whether conservative or radical in character, can gain strength by being tied in with something not merely human—something like the intrinsic nature of reality or the uttermost depths of the human soul." The promises of grandeur and depth have been exciting for both romantics and utilitarians—the spirit of purity pervades modern thought in both of its major currents, and the further each is pursued, the more refined is its purification. It follows from all of this, however, that the category most central to Dewey's own experimentalism, uncertainty, has been widely absent from most forms of utilitarianism and romanticism. Dewey's experimentalism should thus be seen as an alternative that negotiates around both utility and romance, which is to say that pragmatism is, to borrow from Rorty once again, "an alternative to both universalism and romanticism."

The charges of scientism and aestheticism imputed to various pragmatists by their most hostile critics fail to capture crucial elements of pragmatist experimentalism. These crucial elements, I have argued, are likely to be misunderstood if one understands pragmatism as attempting to come to terms with the kind of modernity described by Weber. Pragmatists regard the various value-spheres such as politics and science as reciprocal rather than differentiated. For the pragmatist, fact and value or knowledge and power travel together, not separately. Pragmatist experimentalism, just like the utilitarianism and romanticism it is meant to replace, is operative not only in science (the scientism imputed to Dewey) or only in literature (the aestheticism imputed to Rorty and sometimes William James) but throughout modern culture. Once we start experimenting on any broad scale, it turns out that science, aesthetics, and politics grow increasingly indistinguishable. Pragmatist experimentalism must therefore work across supposed differentiated social spheres as a quality operative throughout culture. Indeed, the purest forms of utilitarianism and romanticism have rooted themselves in
just this way. Ideals of utilitarian order and romantic organicism have been operative simultaneously in our epistemic and political practices. Pragmatists interpret modernity as a series of decisive transformations reverberating throughout all of culture—the purification of utilitarian reason and romantic imagination that empties from each the corruptions of the other is a culture-wide project occurring in legislatures and laboratories simultaneously and with reciprocal benefit to both. The response to such a modernity bent on purification cannot be the expansion of an experimentalism thus far developed in only one of science or politics (thus replacing a monistic totalization for a purifying totalization) but rather must be an experimentalism that will increasingly pervade both simultaneously. Pragmatists thus urge a reconstruction of modern culture along paths worn by particular cultural moods (an experimentalism about knowledge and politics) rather than by others (utilitarianism or romanticism about knowledge and politics). For this, the Weberian theory of modernity as differentiated social spheres can only be a hindrance.

This is an important point of connection linking pragmatism to genealogy. In his attempt to develop an experimental alternative to prevailing cultural tendencies, Dewey makes much the same point as Foucault did when he envisioned practices of experimentation and transgression that could carry us beyond the dominant confines of modern thought. Both Dewey and Foucault looked forward to a culture that would sustain itself by simply trying things out as an alternative to that cultural self-containment implicit in the modern will to purify.

Foucault on Modernity

The following remark of Foucault's might be read as an index to his entire work: "In every culture there exists a coherent series of gestures of division. . . . [But] the moment they mark a limit, they create the space of a possible transgression." Across the long span of his career, Foucault returns again and again to his central theme of two moments of modernity: division and transgression, or as I prefer to call them, purification and experimentation. On the basis of these two themes, I offer an interpretation of Foucault's history and critique of modernity that, like my interpretation of Dewey, amounts on some points to a significant revision of the standard reception of his work.

Appropriating from Foucault a concept that he used only once and never further developed, I propose a rereading of the histories of modernity developed in History of Madness and Discipline and Punish as characterized by what Foucault once called a "reciprocal incompatibility." The idea of reciprocal incompatibility helps us conceptualize Foucault's points in these texts about the relations between pairs like madness and reason or power and freedom, pairs that are, in his view, at the very heart of modernity itself. Foucault's view was that these pairs are simultaneously reciprocal and incompatible, which is to say that they can neither be fully liberated from nor totally assimilated to one another. There is nothing in this story of the differentiation of these pairs through a process of social bureaucratization and rationalization. To complain that Foucault failed to liberate either side of these oppositional terms from the total repression of the other, as so many critics have, is thus to miss his point entirely. When Derrida insisted that Foucault's work on modern madness and reason was a lament of the domination of madness by reason, and when Habermas insisted that Foucault's theory of modern power and freedom left us devoid of autonomy and totally oppressed by discipline, they were reading Foucault through a Weberian lens that was not really Foucault's. Their influence on subsequent Foucault reflection cannot be overstated, nor can the deleterious effects of this influence.

Take those passages at the end of History of Madness where Foucault seems to issue a lament for Friedrich Nietzsche and other marginalized figures of modern culture. Contrary to the standard reading of these passages, the Nietzsche in these pages is not for Foucault a forgotten madman. What Foucault laments in invoking Nietzsche, rather, is the philosopher capable of reinvigorating a forgotten dialogue between a romanticized madness and a utilitarian rationality. Foucault laments the fact that a new Nietzsche can no longer be "on the border of reason and unreason," since that border is forever banished by modern purification. In such a reading, Foucault's history of modernity does not chart reason's subjugation of madness so much as a more insidious separation of reason from madness. It is not that some former reality of madness is held at bay by the production of reason; it is rather that madness and reason in their modern form are simultaneously produced as incoherent with one another. Only this sort of reading can sustain Foucault's remark that the study of madness and rationality must "go back toward the decision that simultaneously links and separates reason and madness; it must aim to uncover the perpetual exchange, the obscure common root, the original confrontation that gives meaning to the unity, as well as to the opposition, of sense and non-sense." We must, in other words, aim to restore that broken interaction where madness and rationality are interactive with one another. It was in this spirit that Foucault, in an early essay written only a few years after this book, was eager to celebrate "the possibility of the mad philosopher." The mad philosopher would be the kind of experimentalist who could at once be...
mad and be philosophical and in so doing transgress the separation of reason and madness that forms a core problem of our modernity. In praising the mad philosopher, Foucault does not mourn a banished madman but rather that forgotten space of interaction between madman and philosopher. He finds Nietzsche, the paradigm of the mad philosopher, waiting for us there.

There is an important symmetry in these matters between Foucault’s earlier work on modern reason and his later work on modern power. Just as madness can be neither totally subject to nor totally liberated from reason, freedom and power are similarly bound to one another. Seen in this light, Foucault’s point in his work on power and knowledge was never that we are trapped in power. Foucault, rather, sought to elaborate the difficulty we moderns face in our task of simultaneously negotiating freedom and power. The complex idea that Foucault was striving to articulate and that so many of his critics misunderstood was that freedom and power can neither be dissociated nor assimilated. They must be deployed simultaneously so that we can work within the internal tensions of their relationships. Foucault therefore found himself working as an experimentalist at the interstices where freedom and power connect.

As Foucault elaborated this version of his history and critique of modernity in *Discipline and Punish*, the problematization at the heart of our modernity is the production of autonomous freedom and disciplinary power as two reciprocal but incompatible aspects of our political existence. These two presuppose one another but are at the same time incoherent with one another. So it is not that disciplinary power eliminates autonomous freedom, just as it is not that modern rationality eliminates madness. There is no pure freedom to be emancipated just as there is no pure power to repress it. It is rather that disciplinary power and autonomous freedom are simultaneously produced so as to render the latter ineffective as a force pitted against the former. As Foucault succinctly puts it: “The ‘Enlightenment,’ which discovered the liberties, also invented the disciplines.” And so just as madness finds itself in no position to question reason, freedom understood on the modern model of autonomy finds itself hardly equipped to oppose power in the model of discipline. But it was never Foucault’s point that we need regard modernity as a trap. His more modest point was simply that the modern conception of an autonomous freedom totally liberated from power is but a corollary of a disciplinary power that totally cages up freedom. Autonomous individuality is one of the intended effects of disciplinary power rather than a predisciplinary capacity for freedom that might seek revenge on power. This understanding of the problematization of modern freedom and power helps explain why Foucault held that the freedom of resistance must be sought elsewhere than in the romantic ideals of autonomy and liberation. Foucault’s late work on ethics never sought to rehabilitate the autonomous form of freedom that Foucault’s middle work on power had ruled out. Foucault’s late work on ethical freedom is in fact better understood as elaborating the possibility for a modern form of experimental liberty on the basis of the study of premodern practices in which freedom and power were not yet purified as they were to become in modernity. Foucault did not in his late work abandon his earlier theses about modern power in order to elaborate a theory of modern freedom, which these theses had explicitly invalidated. On the contrary, Foucault’s late work elaborates a conception of experimental freedom that specifically aims to address the very problem established by our reciprocal but incompatible practices of modern disciplinary power and modern autonomous freedom.

Foucault’s emphasis on experimental transgression and his concern with the pernicious effects of much that has marched under the banner of modernity simply would not make sense if interpreted through the Weberian picture of modernity. Foucault did not witness the increasing differentiation of the vocations of science and politics. What he witnessed, rather, was the increasing purification, the reciprocal incompatibility, of two great cultural imperatives: emancipatory freedom on the one side and disciplinary control on the other. So it would not make sense to understand Foucault as having rallied against rationalization in the name of enchantment or mysticism or revolt or any other favorite of romanticism. Foucault was never against reason and simply for passion, madness, and freedom. He is better seen as having explored the long and slow formation of those great divisions, those formidable reciprocal incompatibilities, through which we moderns have attempted to erect high walls separating our reasons from our passions, our sociality from our individuality, our utility from our romance. It was these walls that he found debilitating, not the concepts and practices (instrumental rationality, romantic passion) located on either side of them. If Foucault’s critical histories have any positive upshot, then it consists in his articulation of practices of experimental transgression that would aim to scale these walls. These transgressions would not demonstrate that reason and its others are really the same but would open up the possibility of a new phase of modernity in which these two aspects of modern culture are not as rigorously purified as they were in previous phases of modernity. This new phase was envisioned by Foucault not as a reunification of power and knowledge (for that is what modernity has deployed all along) but rather as an intensification of experimental tensions resulting from the blending of powers and freedoms and the
dialogue between rationalities and madnesses. That is why Foucault should be read as neither pro-modern nor anti-modern but as complexly modern in the interests of a future phase of modernity.  

Toward a Genealogical Pragmatist Critique of Modernity

Foucault and Dewey can be read as picking up on a crucial but underdeveloped aspect of Kant's legacy to modernity. Weber, and all those in his train, located Kant's legacy in a modern tendency toward differentiation by which we have carved ourselves up into separate spheres according to the critical limits located in the first two of Kant's Critiques. But Foucault and Dewey located Kant's legacy elsewhere. According to their view, we do not find ourselves divided into the two worlds of experience discerned by a standard quasi-sociological interpretation of Kant's critical philosophy. We find ourselves instead divided into two currents of thought, or two different standpoints for thinking, which Kant's critical system was an attempt to do simultaneously. 

Dewey and Foucault stood together in seeing our modernity as divided from itself above all by this purifying impulse to pry apart our utilitarian selves from our romantic selves. In this they offer a challenging alternative to the more comfortable Weberian model of seeing our selves as riven only insofar as we are here a scientist and there an artist, or here a churchgoer and there a citizen. Utility and romance, along with processes of their purification, cut across these familiar sociological divides. This purification cannot be overcome by reunifying supposedly divided spheres of experience but rather only by experimentally testing the divisions between utilitarian rationality and romantic autonomy that we impose on ourselves. These are two very different orientations toward our present. It might be thought that a great deal depends on which we use to orient our ongoing critical efforts.

The important details of Dewey's and Foucault's conceptions of an experimental critique of ourselves will have to be elaborated on another occasion. What I have sought to focus attention on here is only an important overlap between Deweyan pragmatism and Foucaultian genealogy in their interpretations of the basic problems of modern culture. In closing, I point out that from the point of view of both traditions, this is no small similarity. Both traditions hold that processes such as modernity gain their coherence from the problems they are formulated as responses to, such as the inheritance of utilitarian disciplinary imperatives and romantic emancipatory dreams. Gaining a view of the problems we face is, for both genealogy and pragmatism, a crucial task for thought. In Dewey's view, this is expressed in terms of his account of inquiry as beginning with and aiming at the resolution of a problem situation. In Foucault's view, this is expressed in his articulation of a historiography focused around problematizations, or the ways in which accepted truths come to be problematized over time and as a result propel the new truths achieved by the resolution of these problems. This shared focus on problems suggests an important elective affinity among pragmatism and genealogy that those working in both traditions have thus far failed to take seriously enough.

Despite these similarities concerning their shared focus on thought as addressed to problems, an important difference is that Foucault was largely focused on the creation of problems and Dewey on their resolution. This difference has given rise to the familiar caricatures of Foucault as somewhat too pessimistic and Dewey as somewhat too optimistic, caricatures that are ultimately unfair but nevertheless rooted in obvious predilections of both thinkers. Fortunately, this seeming disjunction is easily overcome. All we need to do is to recognize that, from a robustly philosophical rather than a merely scholarly point of view, pragmatist problem-solving and genealogical problem-specifying are two activities that require one another. Problems that do not invite solutions are as worthless as solutions that do not respond to problems. The prospective orientation of pragmatism is blind without the retrospective orientation of genealogy—genealogy without pragmatism is likewise an empty exercise.

By bringing genealogy and pragmatism into intimate dialogue with one another, we are finally able to realize the important promise that lay at the heart of both traditions: that we moderns can look forward with hope when we face up to the endless uncertainty that threatens continually to undo everything that we have in our history struggled to create. We can characterize both traditions as oriented simultaneously toward problematization and solution, toward past and future, and toward history and philosophy. This characterization fits with what is best in both Dewey's pragmatism and Foucault's genealogy: the practice of a criticism that is simultaneously philosophical and historical.

Notes

This is best seen as a version of the more familiar contrast between Enlightenment and romanticism given central place by many important intellectual historians. Exemplary for their approach (and certainly influential on my own) are Isaiah Berlin (1960; 1965; 1975) and Arthur Lovejoy (1936). See also Maurice Mandelbaum (1971), Hayden White (1973), Charles Taylor (1989), and, taking a much longer view, Harold Bloom's description (2004) of Homeric cognitivism and Hebraic spiritualism as the two great forces of Western wisdom.

Recent revisionist scholarship notwithstanding, the best of which is Lawrence Scaff (1989) and Wilhelm Hennis (1987), most theorists continue to interpret Weber's theory of modernity according to the classic terms of rationalizing differentiation-cum-bureaucratization established by Karl Löwisch (1932), Reinhard Bendix (1960), and above all Talcott Parsons (1937). See Richard Swedberg (2003; 2005) on the current state of Weber scholarship. My presentation of Weber here is not so much an attempt at fine-grained Weber scholarship as it is an attempt to dispute the central Weberian theses that continue to exert tremendous influence on political philosophy and intellectual history. I leave it to others to show how the thought of Weber can today be reinterpreted so as to yield better results—my project is merely to cast doubt on a certain Weberianism dominant in contemporary histories and critiques of modernity.

On the complicated textual context of this metaphor, see Sica 2000, 53.

5. Weber 1917; 1919.


10. On this contrast, see Lawrence Scaff 2000, 103.


12. While the Derrida-Habermas debates have been much discussed, two particularly helpful evaluations are those of Richard Bernstein (1991) and David Høy (1989).


14. See work by John O'Neill (1986), Peter Dews (1987), Colin Gordon (1991), Bryan Turner (1987), David Owen (1994), and Arpád Szakolczai (1998). While few comparative analyses of Weber and Foucault emphasize the differences separating the two, an excellent book by Mitchell Dean (1994) casts doubt on the claim that Weber's rationalization thesis can be meaningfully articulated to Foucault's work on modernity—Dean's argument anticipates aspects of mine insofar as he finds Weberian rationalization too totalizing for Foucaultian purposes and then goes on to use this difference to distance Foucault from the Weber-inspired work of the anti-modernism of Adorno and the pro-modernism of Habermas. Also worth noting is that some commentators have emphasized the affinities between Foucault and Weber on the basis of an interpretation of the latter that abandons the familiar "iron cage" view of Weber in favor of a more nuanced interpretation of Weber emphasizing his self-formation as a problematic thinker attempting to grasp the core problems of modernity—this, for example, is the basis for Paul Rabinow's claims (2003; Rabinow and Dreyfus 1982) on behalf of a Foucault and Weber alliance.


19. In the two other comparative works on Dewey and Weber of which I am aware, Emirbayer (2005) rather loosely argues my point while Roederer (2000) concedes my point within an account that explicitly aims to build on Kloppenberg; Diggins (1999) compares Dewey and Weber only but only summarily.

20. See numerous works by Rorty (1998a; 1998b; 2004). Similar interpretations of pragmatism as between romanticism and utilitarian positivism have been offered by James Livingston (1994; 2001), Thelma Lavine (1991; 1993), and H. S. Thayer (1968). Notable is George Herbert Mead's view in his impressive intellectual history Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century, where he explicitly contrasts pragmatism to the conception of inquiry common to "the Romantic idealists and the rationalists" according to which "knowledge is a simple getting of the nature of the world" (1936, 344).


22. Dewey 1929, 49.


24. Ibid., 136.


26. Foucault quoted in Eribon 1989, 97; this passage is from the longer version of Histoire de la Folie only recently translated into English.


32. Foucault 1975, 222; see also a different version of this view as developed in Foucault's 1978 course lectures: "Freedom is nothing else but the correlative of the deployment of apparatuses of security" (1978, 48).
34. See Foucault 1984a and, for helpful discussion, John Rajchman 1985, 92, 115, and David Hoy 2004, 100.
35. Among those arguing for a basic incoherence between the so-called middle and late works are Peter Dews (1989), Thomas McCarthy (1990), Béatrice Han (1998), and Eric Paras (2006).
36. Among those arguing for important continuities between the so-called middle and late works are Ladelle McWhorter (1999, 189); Timothy O'Leary (2002, 107); Johanna Oksala (2005, 157); Benda Hofmeyr (2006); and Amy Allen (2008, 45).
37. See the interpretations offered by Rabinow and Dreyfus (1986), Hoy (1988), and Rabinow (1994). I further build on the reading of Foucault developed in this section in my forthcoming "Genealogy as Problematization."
38. On these well-known differing interpretations of Kant, see Christine Korsgaard 1996, x.
40. Foucault 1984b.
41. Overlaps between Dewey and Foucault along these lines have thus far been very much unexplored, although an important comparison in similar terms is given by Rabinow (2003; 2008) and John Stuhr (1997, 2003). For other important comparative work, see Randall Auxier (2002), Carlos McWhorter (this volume), James Livingston (2001), and my own work (Koopman 2009, ch. 7; cf. 2007). For a nearly complete survey of the literature on genealogy and pragmatism, see my on-line reference paper (Koopman forthcoming-b).
42. For helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper, I thank Barry Allen and David Hoy. In addition, I also extend thanks to Martin Jay for extensive help on the sections on Weber in his reading of a much longer version of this argument, to Paul Rabinow for insightful discussions of both Weber and Foucault, and to Amy Allen for generosity in offering comments on a longer version of the portions on Foucault. I also thank Paul Fairfield for helpful thoughts on how to improve my arguments and explications. Lastly, I gratefully acknowledge a postdoctoral research grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, which provided me with the opportunity to undertake this work in the context of the larger research project of which it is a part.

References
The literature devoted to the connection between poststructuralism, deconstruction, and pragmatism is as rich as it is divided. Richard Rorty claims that John Dewey and Jacques Derrida share hope and optimism for changing humanity, but whereas the former provides concrete pragmatic solutions, the latter is more of a conversant, fashioning a private self. Rorty remarks, "In my own writing about Derrida I have urged that we see him as sharing Dewey's utopian hopes, but not treat his work as contributing in any clear or direct way to the realization of those hopes." Derrida responds to Rorty's challenge by maintaining that his work is politically relevant. He argues, "Deconstruction is hyper-politicizing in following paths and codes which are clearly not traditional, and I believe it awakens politicization in the way I mentioned above, that is, it permits us to think the political and think the democratic by granting us the space necessary in order not to be enclosed in the latter. In order to continue to pose the question of the political, it is necessary to withdraw something from the political and the same thing for democracy, which, of course, makes democracy a very paradoxical concept." 

John Stuhr points out that the traditional discourse between pragmatism and poststructuralist and postmodern thought in general can be divided along two lines. First, there are those pragmatists who bring the two schools of thought together, seeing in them a relevant dialogue. The second line is dismissive and is critical of the attempt to bring the schools together. Stuhr maintains that thinkers like Vincent Colapietro, Kai Nielsen, and John Ryder have made remarkable advances, showing how both pragmatists and postmodern thinkers converge but also displaying how the significant differences between them open a potent philosophical discussion. Stuhr, however, believes that the debate has been too one-sided. The focus has been on the pragmatists, that is, on what the pragmatists can offer the poststructuralists. More work needs to be done, so claims Stuhr, in the opposite direction, namely, what can
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It is a surprise to no one well versed in both classical pragmatism and philosophy in any of the continental European traditions to hear that opportunities for fruitful conversation are plentiful across this particular boundary of thought, especially in the case of the greatest of American pragmatists, John Dewey. Dewey made no secret of his profound and lifelong indebtedness to the thought of G. W. F. Hegel in particular, and not only during his early period when he was working under the heavy influence of Anglo-American idealism. Whether we are speaking of Dewey in the context of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century America or of phenomenology, hermeneutics, critical theory, or poststructuralism in twentieth-century continental philosophy, we find a common trajectory, or trajectories, of thought all arising from post-Kantian idealism and continuing efforts to come to terms with issues bequeathed to us primarily by Immanuel Kant and Hegel. It is this conversation into which Dewey was initiated during his doctoral studies at Johns Hopkins University in the 1880s, under the direction of George Sylvester Morris, and which provided a basic orientation to his thought throughout a long and extraordinarily productive writing career. Hegel’s thought, together with an equally profound indebtedness to Darwinian biology, informed Dewey’s contributions quite obviously in the fields of metaphysics and epistemology but also in various other branches of philosophical inquiry that equally concerned him, from ethics and politics to education and aesthetics. Despite the simplistic misreadings to which his works were often subject during his lifetime and which remain unfortunately common today, Dewey was an original, subtle, and fundamentally dialectical thinker. Despite waning interest in his works in the middle to latter decades of the past century—an eclipse, it seems, that was temporary and owing not to any actual refutations of his thought but to the popularity of analytic philosophy with which Dewey’s thought is somewhat un congenial—Dewey’s writings remain as relevant today
John Dewey and Continental Philosophy

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