

Summer Institute in American Philosophy
Pre-Institute Seminar
A Social Science Methodology Pragmatism Can Call its Own

The Department of Educational Studies and the Department of Philosophy at the University of Oregon invite participants in the Summer Institute in American Philosophy (July 26-31, 2010) to join a pre-institute seminar on pragmatism and social science. The pre-institute seminar will be held on the University of Oregon campus from 9:00 am until 5:00 pm on Monday, July 26, 2010.

Thus the recognition that intelligence is a method operating within the world places physical knowledge in respect to other kinds of knowing... There is no kind of inquiry which has a monopoly of the honorable title of knowledge. The engineer, the artist, the historian, the man of affairs attain knowledge in the degree they employ methods that enable them to solve the problems which develop in the subject-matter they are concerned with. As philosophy framed on the pattern of experimental inquiry does away with all wholesale skepticism, so it eliminates all invidious monopolies of the idea of science. By their fruits we shall know them.

John Dewey, *Quest for Certainty*
(LW 4:175–176)

The thesis which emerged in the third decade of our existence as a sort of settlement creed that the processes of social amelioration are of necessity the results of gradual modification...[and]... requires the cooperation of many people and because... it is impossible to get the interest of the entire community centered upon any given theme, we gradually discovered that the use of the current event is valuable beyond all other methods. ... In time we came to define a settlement as an institution attempting to learn from life itself in which undertaking we did not hesitate to admit that we encountered many difficulties and failures

Jane Addams, *The Second Twenty Years at Hull-House*
(1930, pp. 407-408)

One of the cardinal insights of classical pragmatic philosophy is that intelligence operates by building selective attention to environing conditions. This construction of attention, according to the pragmatist view, is simultaneously an affective, cognitive, and social process, with real consequences for the human organism and human communities. An individual or community can be said to act intelligently insofar as they attend to things in ways that may bring about desirable forms of continuity and growth. It is therefore an unfortunate irony that the recent renaissance of interest in pragmatic philosophy has not included sustained attention to the practice of social science research. Such research informs the development of public policy and professional practices that are intended to foster the well-being and growth of individuals and communities.

In the social sciences there is a tendency of occasional readers of the classical pragmatic philosophers to emphasize their insights about the human condition and ignore their ideas about *how such insights should be generated*. For example, John Dewey has long been read by educators for his insights about curriculum and pedagogy, but is only rarely read as a source of insight about how to produce knowledge about curriculum and pedagogy. More recently, William James has been revisited by contemporary neuro-psychologists for his insights about the relation between affect and cognition in human experience. Too little attention, however, has been paid to James' radical empiricist conception of what it meant to produce knowledge about human experience. In

general, pragmatic philosophy is often cited when efforts are made to rethink the ontology of an object of social science inquiry. Pragmatic philosophy, however, is rarely cited in discussions about research methodology in the social sciences.

This tendency is mirrored in the work of philosophers who specialize in pragmatic philosophy. There is a tendency even among philosophers specializing in the pragmatic tradition to emphasize insights the classical pragmatists offered about the human condition and to ignore their ideas about how such insights should be generated. Part of this oversight is understandable. Neither Peirce, James, Dewey, Addams, Du Bois, Royce, nor Follett developed anything that could legitimately be called a social science research methodology. And subsequent writers in the pragmatist vein—the Chicago school of sociology notwithstanding¹—have yet to fill this lack.

This failure to develop methods of social science research is unfortunate for at least two reasons. First, pragmatic philosophy, in most of its variations, is premised on the idea that knowledge claims must be evaluated based on the consequences they have for future possible experience. The social sciences are the fields of study through which our conceptions of knowledge are most often translated into public policy and professional practice. The lack of a uniquely pragmatic methodology of research on human experience cedes the areas of public policy and professional practice to problematic epistemic norms.

Second, it is through application to social sciences that many philosophical traditions have wielded their greatest influence. Post-positivism and critical realism underwrites and clarifies the hypothesis testing practices most of contemporary experimental social science research. Phenomenology generated the method of eidetic reduction, which has been applied extensively to fields such as psychology, sociology, and women's studies. This has in turn influenced the continued development of phenomenological philosophy. Hermeneutics has provided the most consistently influential source of philosophical influence on the field of cultural ethnography and interpretive sociology, which has in turn sustained attention to hermeneutic theory beyond the field of literary criticism. Marxism underwrites contemporary critical ethnography, which has in turn influenced the evolution of critical theory and has drawn more readers to the critical theoretic tradition. Foucault's transformation of Saussurean structuralism into his method of genealogical social research has inspired social scientists in fields ranging from sociology, to anthropology, to women's studies, to post-colonial

¹ The Chicago School of sociology developed an interpretive approach to sociological research called symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969). The most notable members of this group were George Herbert Meade, Herbert Blumer, and Irving Goffman, as well as anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz and Victor Turner. All were well known to have been influenced by the writings of James and Dewey. This influence, however, was primarily on their interpretations of how *others* made meaning, not on their own mode of meaning making as scholars. The symbolic interactionist research project remained an exclusively descriptive one, holding as its regulative ideal the achievement of an accurate account of the meaning of others' experience. They did not adopt a pragmatic standard which would have been skeptical of the possibility of a "one right" interpretation of the experiences of others. In the second section of this essay I argue that a pragmatist social science would evaluate representations of human experience based on the possible consequences such interpretations open up for future experiences.

studies, to queer studies, to become students of post-structuralist semiotics. Pragmatism, however, has produced no signature methodological innovation and as such has not enjoyed the benefits of the dialogue such a thing provides a philosophical tradition.

An Invitation

In an effort to begin to address this gap in pragmatic philosophy, scholars interested in pragmatism and social science are invited to apply to participate in a pre-conference seminar about pragmatism and social science methodology. Brief excerpts from a variety of key readings on the topic will be circulated before the institute. These will be offered primarily as provocations. The primary focus of the seminar will be speculative. Participants will be encouraged to imagine what the development of a sustained conversation between pragmatic philosophers and social science methodologists could generate in the form of innovative practices, including but not limited to...

- The construction of objects of inquiry: what is worth studying?
- The identification of relevant data: whose voices and experiences count?
- The nature of social scientific claims: what is their audience, scope, and purpose?
- Appropriate modes of representation: surveys, narratives, multi-media, action?
- Practices of criticism within the social sciences.

The discussion will be moderated by Professor Jerry Rosiek, Head of the Department of Educational Studies. Participants will be provided lunch and a small stipend of \$100 to cover the costs of early arrival.

Since space is limited to twelve, interested faculty and graduate students are asked to apply by sending their CV and a statement of interest to Professor Rosiek at jrosiek@uoregon.edu by June 1, 2010. In addition to these materials, graduate students should provide a faculty letter of support for their participation in the seminar. If you have questions, please feel free to contact Professor Rosiek.