



## **Genealogical Pragmatism: How History Matters for Foucault and Dewey**

**Colin Koopman**  
*University of Oregon*  
*cwkoopman@gmail.com*

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### **Abstract**

This article offers the outlines of a historically-informed conception of critical inquiry herein named genealogical pragmatism. This conception of critical inquiry combines the genealogical emphasis on problematization featured in Michel Foucault's work with the pragmatist emphasis on reconstruction featured in John Dewey's work. The two forms of critical inquiry featured by these thinkers are not opposed, as is too commonly supposed. Genealogical problematization and pragmatist reconstruction fit together for reason of their mutual emphasis on the importance of history for philosophy. In so fitting together they repair crucial deficits in both traditions as they currently stand on their own (namely, genealogy's normative deficit and pragmatism's excessive instrumentalism). The resulting conception of critical inquiry as simultaneously problematizational and reconstructive is offered as a first step toward a crucial philosophical task we face today: articulating normativity without foundations.

### **Keywords**

genealogy, pragmatism, Michel Foucault, John Dewey, historiography, methodology, normativity

### **Introduction**

The philosophical traditions of genealogy, as represented by Michel Foucault, and pragmatism, as represented by John Dewey, are both deeply invested in bringing history to bear on and in our philosophical pursuits. For Foucault, the primary task of philosophy is what he called "problematization", which involves the critical-historical work of clarifying the problems

at the heart of practices and projects we otherwise would take as unproblematic. In Dewey, the primary task of philosophy is what he called “reconstruction”, which involves a critical-normative work of meliorating the historically-contextualized problems in which we find ourselves. The role of history in these two conceptions of philosophy, despite familiar misgivings by critics perched (or entrenched) in each tradition who have mounted serious arguments against those in the other, possess a remarkable degree of mutuality, as has been suggested in recent work by Foucaultian anthropologist Paul Rabinow,<sup>1</sup> pragmatist philosopher Vincent Colapietro,<sup>2</sup> and a number of other thoughtful commentators.<sup>3</sup> I here explicate this mutuality between pragmatism and genealogy along one pathway that happens to be at the heart of both traditions: I show that not only did Dewey and

<sup>1</sup> Rabinow writes: “Both Dewey and Foucault agreed that thinking arose in the context of problems. As neither thinker was ever quite satisfied with their own articulations, refinements and re-statements were frequent. Foucault, like Dewey, asserted and affirmed that thinking arose in problematic situations; that it was about clarifying those situations, and that ultimately it was directed towards achieving a degree of resolution of what was problematic in the situation” (Paul Rabinow, “Dewey and Foucault: What’s the Problem?”, *Foucault Studies*, no. 11 (2011), 11–19, 12; cf. Paul Rabinow, *Anthropos Today: Reflections on Modern Equipment* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2003); Paul Rabinow, *Marking Time: On the Anthropology of the Contemporary* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2008).)

<sup>2</sup> Colapietro writes: “The spirit in which both Dewey and Foucault wrote is that the antecedent conditions are (at best) resources for transforming the historical present” (Vincent Colapietro, “Situation, Meaning, and Improvisation: An Aesthetics of Existence in Dewey and Foucault”, *Foucault Studies*, 11 (2011), 20–40, 22; cf. Vincent Colapietro, “American Evasions of Foucault”, *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 36, no. 3 (1998), 329–351).

<sup>3</sup> For a selection of other work on the relation between pragmatism and genealogy see John Stuhr, *Genealogical Pragmatism: Philosophy, Experience, and Community* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997); John Stuhr, *Pragmatism, Postmodernism, and the Future of Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2003); James Livingston, *Pragmatism, Feminism, and Democracy: Rethinking the Politics of American History* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Randall Auxier, “Foucault, Dewey, and the History of the Present”, *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 16, no. 2, (2002), 75–102; Joan Reynolds, “Pragmatic Humanism in Foucault’s Later Work”, *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 37, no. 4 (2004), 951–977; Barry Allen, “After Knowledge and Liberty: Foucault and the New Pragmatism” in C.G. Prado (ed.), *Foucault’s Legacy* (New York: Continuum, 2009); C.G. Prado, “Educating the Self: Dewey and Foucault” in Paul Fairfield (ed.), *Dewey and Continental Philosophy* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010), all of the articles in my recently guest-edited issue of *Foucault Studies* in Colin Koopman (ed.), “Foucault and Pragmatism”, special issue of *Foucault Studies*, 11 (2011), and my own work cited in note 6 below.

Foucault seek to bring history into philosophy, they both sought to bring history to bear in their pursuits in the form of a historiography that takes as its basic categories our *problems* and the *responses* demanded thereby.

That the historiographical orientations of genealogy and pragmatism bear more than a superficial resemblance to one another can be glimpsed at a first pass by instructive comparison to other familiar positions on the landscape of historiography. Pragmatist reconstruction and genealogical problematization both bear instructive comparison to the historical “logic of question and answer” offered by R.G. Collingwood: “meaning, agreement and contradiction, truth and falsehood, none of these belonged to propositions in their own right, propositions by themselves; they belonged only to propositions as the answers to questions . . . to a complex consisting of questions and answers.”<sup>4</sup> Another instructive initial comparison is with Richard McKeon’s description of a “problematic method” in history: “The subject matter of problematic history is . . . the problems and hypotheses by which the human mind has approached the conditions of a reality not otherwise known than by the hypotheses men have constructed and by which men have approached associations with other men for the solution of common problems and for common action.”<sup>5</sup> Both McKeon and Collingwood thought that it is the task of the historian to excavate *both* questions *and* answers, or *both* the problems that motivated the elaboration of ideas *and* the ideas that were elaborated in response to those problems. In McKeon and Collingwood, the logic of history (both as a discipline and as that discipline’s object of inquiry, but not as a free-standing object) involves the two interwoven perspectives of raising a question and responding to a question. Though these perspectives are tuned in definite different directions, there is no opposition or contradiction at issue here. This last point goes a long way toward a combination of pragmatism and genealogy, for the principled blockage to the mutuality I here affirm has been the assumption that there is a direct opposition between the acts of posing problems and of resolving problems. Claims to the contrary by McKeon and Collingwood thus help frame an important but neglected affinity between genealogical problematization and pragmatist reconstruction.

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<sup>4</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* [1939] (Oxford: Oxford University, 1970), 33, 37.

<sup>5</sup> Richard McKeon, “Freedom and History” [1952] in Richard McKeon, *Freedom and History and Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 186.

I argue here for a philosophical conception of critical inquiry which I call *genealogical pragmatism* and which I have been developing over the past few years in a number of other recent writings.<sup>6</sup> My argument is that contemporary critical inquiry, which for me is a broad term meant to encompass all forms of contemporary postfoundational philosophy, today finds itself in need of resources which a unique combination of pragmatism and genealogy can supply. This combination, and for these purposes, requires going beyond familiar comparative work often invoked when two distinct traditions of thought are set beside one another. This is not to deny that there is much useful comparative work which has been done on pragmatism and genealogy in terms of the following themes: the meaning and basic problems of modernity, philosophical conceptions of experience, redescription of philosophical ethics, a focus on self-creation as a practice of freedom, reconceptualizing selfhood and subjectivity, and the proper role that political philosophy can play in contemporary democratic culture. I of course affirm that there are important thematic continuities between pragmatist and genealogical philosophy. These are richly rewarding and deserve our attention. However, for the purposes of fashioning conceptions of critical inquiry adequate to our postfoundational times we need to draw out of pragmatism and genealogy a pair of complementary methodological strategies rather than a set of shared philosophical thematics. My aim is thus to bring these two traditions together not for the sake of unearthing previously undisclosed compatibilities, but rather for the sake of fashioning a new philosophical position which might afford novel approaches to crucial cultural issues.

In order to develop this conception of genealogical pragmatism, I will bring into focus the two methodological aspects of each tradition already named above. In Foucault's genealogy I will specifically focus on the method of problematization and in Dewey's pragmatism I will attend to the method of reconstruction. I shall show how problematization and reconstruction evince both a need for and an invitation to one another.

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<sup>6</sup> The present essay offers a telescopic view into two related inquiries I have undertaken in the past few years – my goal here has been to tie together a diversity of strands that are spun out in fuller detail in my two book projects on pragmatist philosophy (Colin Koopman, *Pragmatism as Transition: Historicity and Hope in James, Dewey, and Rorty* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009)) and on genealogical philosophy (Colin Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, forthcoming 2012)).

Doing so requires that I address some of the key deficiencies at the heart of both philosophical traditions: in the case of genealogical problematization there is an insufficient attention to the positive work of formulating viable alternatives to existing problematic conditions, and in the case of pragmatic reconstruction there is insufficient thematization of the genesis of the problematic conditions which act as an impetus to pragmatic inquiry. In other words, there is a normative deficit in genealogy that pragmatism can help rebalance just as there is an excessive instrumentalism in pragmatism that genealogy can help temper. The result is a clear view of the need on the part of both traditions for philosophical-historiographical conceptions that are clearly featured in the other.

This discussion bears on contemporary philosophy more widely. Philosophy is today characterized by a postfoundational perspective such that one central philosophical challenge of our present is to develop perspectives that retain normative authority without relying on foundations to do so. A genealogical pragmatism construed as immanent social critique can deliver on these desiderata by way of two interpretive shifts explicating genealogy and pragmatism as *methodologically normative*. Foucault has widely been criticized for lacking a robust conception of normativity – I show how his postfoundational genealogical methodology is an invitation to *normative* determination. Dewey has been criticized by many for borrowing his normativity from quasi-foundational metaphysical strategies – I show how his normative vision can be redesigned along more lean *methodological* lines. The result is a normative methodology, an alternative to both normative metaphysics and purely descriptive methodology.

### **Why Problematization Matters for History in Foucault**

Problematization is the central philosophical device in Michel Foucault's work. His most important contributions to historical methodology, philosophical debates, and critical practice can all be profitably read in light of this analytic concept. Foucault himself insisted as much in a late interview given in the final year of his life: "The notion common to all the work that I have done since *History of Madness* is that of problematization. . . . In *History of Madness* the question was how and why, at a given moment, madness was problematised through a certain institutional practice and a certain apparatus of knowledge. Similarly, in *Discipline and Punish* I was

trying to analyze the changes in the problematization of the relations between crime and punishment through penal practices and penitentiary institutions in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>7</sup> Problematization functions as a profitable lens through which to view the full career of Foucault's work insofar as it helps us see why Foucault thought that history mattered to the critical projects in which he was invested. Why should history matter to a critique of the human sciences, or to a study of contemporary sexuality, or to inquiries into the status of fields as diverse as punishment, rationality, scientific order, and political technology?

Unfortunately, this standard question has too often provoked misleading answers. A standard interpretation of Foucault is that the point of his histories is to show us what is wrong with the underlying structure of certain contemporary political and epistemological practices. This interpretation is unfortunate because it has provoked a rash of criticisms of Foucault to the effect that his supposedly anti-modern or counter-enlightenment projects leave us staring into an abyss which he has shown we cannot climb our way out of.<sup>8</sup> But the point of genealogy for Foucault was not, as per Nietzsche, to use history to denounce as incoherent or deficient some of our most central modern practices.<sup>9</sup> The point, for Foucault, was rather to

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<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault, "The Concern for Truth" [1984] in Michel Foucault and Kritzman (eds.), *Politics, Philosophy, Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 257.

<sup>8</sup> See Richard Rorty, "Method, Social Science, and Social Hope" [1981] in *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1982); Nancy Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions" [1981] in *Unruly Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1989); Michael Walzer, "The Politics of Michel Foucault" [1983] in David Hoy (ed.), *Foucault: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1986); Charles Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth" [1984] in Hoy (ed.), *Foucault: A Critical Reader*; Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* [1985], trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT, 1987); Thomas McCarthy, "The Critique of Impure Reason: Foucault and the Frankfurt School", *Political Theory*, 18(3) (1990), 437–69; Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1990); and more recently Béatrice Han, *Foucault's Critical Project* [1998], trans. Edward Pile (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); for a more balanced but still critical assessment see Richard J. Bernstein, "Foucault: Critique as a Philosophical *Ethos*" in Richard J. Bernstein, *The New Constellation* [1989] (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> This of course is not the only way to read Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* [1887], trans. Carol Diethelme (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1994), but I agree with MacIntyre that it is enormously difficult to ignore this aspect of his work (MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*).

use history to show the way in which certain practices have structured some of the core problematizations which a given period of thought, most notably our own modernity, must face.

Who today does not think that crime and punishment are enormously intractable problems, not only socially, but also ethically? Who today cannot help but be obsessed, at least in the darkness of night midst life's most fragile moments, with the thin line dividing the mad from the rational? Who among us is not obsessed with sexuality, with their sex and its meaning and value for who they are and who they might yet become? The point of a genealogy is to show us that, despite whatever comfort we may coach ourselves into feeling about our present conceptions, there is nonetheless a common and almost constant disquiet with respect to these conceptions that we all know all too well. Genealogies, as such, unsettle us. They provoke questions about that which we would like to take as answered. Genealogy, in other words, throws light on problems that are present but that might otherwise remain in unlit darkness. The unsettlement that we feel at the lighting-up of a problematization deep at the heart of who we are is not the same as the prowess we might feel at a subversive denunciation of some assumption equally at the heart of who we are. If genealogy is taken by some (not only Foucault's detractors, but also Nietzsche's champions) as an aggressive exercise that would shake down modernity in some of its most basic assumptions, then I am suggesting that Foucault's use of genealogy as problematization should be taken rather as expressing a cautious skepticism about some of modernity's most basic assumptions.

In a 1983 interview in Berkeley with Paul Rabinow and Hubert Dreyfus, Foucault was asked if his histories of ancient thought were intended to revive a golden age of ethics which might be a plausible substitute for the unusable moral practices of the present. Foucault's emphatic response: "No!" The question functioned as a provocation for him to carefully specify the methodological intention of his historical inquiries: "I would like to do the genealogy of problems, of *problématiques*. My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do."<sup>10</sup> A proper understanding of Foucault hangs on this subtle distinction

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<sup>10</sup> Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: Overview of Work in Progress" interview by Rabinow and Dreyfus [1983], in Michel Foucault and Paul Rabinow (eds.), *Essential Works, Volume 1: Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth* (New York: New Press, 1997), 256.

between the normative judgment that something is “bad” and the critical evaluation that something is “dangerous” or, in Todd May’s helpful gloss on Foucault, “fraught.”<sup>11</sup> To use history to show that something is bad, presumably because it has sinister origins or emerged in some despicable context, skirts too close to a reduction of justification to genesis – philosophers refer to this as the genetic fallacy.<sup>12</sup> The thought that genetic reasoning is fallacious is noncontroversial enough: something can have immoral or unjustified origins but nonetheless be moral or justified (a racist is not necessarily wrong in everything they say about race even if they are very wrong about what we take to count most). That Foucault clearly distinguished “dangerous” from “bad” suggests that he did not necessarily see his work as disproving or denouncing anything. If so, this means that Foucault did not set out to prove that discipline and biopolitics are massively corrupting, at least not in the way that Nietzsche set out to show that there is something corrupting about slave morality and contemporary religious ideology. Foucault rather sought to show that discipline and biopolitics are dangerous. In another 1983 interview, this one in Europe, Foucault reiterated his crucial distinction in the context of a discussion of his intent in *Discipline and Punish*: “I didn’t aim to do a work of criticism, at least not directly, if what is meant by criticism in this case is denunciation of the negative aspects of the current penal system. . . . I attempted to define another problem. I wanted to uncover the system of thought, the form of rationality that, since the end of the eighteenth century, has supported the notion that prison is really the best means, or one of the most effective and rational means, of punishing offenses in a society. . . . In bringing out the system of rationality underlying punitive practices, I wanted to indicate what the postulates of thought were that needed to be reexamined if one intended to transform the penal system”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Todd May, *The Philosophy of Foucault* (Chesham: Acumen, 2006), 103.

<sup>12</sup> The best discussion of the way in which genealogy flirts with the genetic fallacy can be found in Alexander Nehamas’s discussion of Nietzsche and the genetic fallacy (*Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1985), 107ff.); see also David Hoy, “Nietzsche, Hume, and the Genealogical Method” in Yovel (ed.), *Nietzsche as Affirmative Thinker* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1986) and Paul S. Loeb, “Is There a Genetic Fallacy in Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morals?”, *International Studies in Philosophy*, 27, no. 3 (1995), 125–141.

<sup>13</sup> Michel Foucault, “What is Called ‘Punishing?’” interview with F. Ringelheim [1984] in Michel Foucault, Paul Rabinow and Faubion (eds.), *Essential Works, Volume 3: Power* (New York: New Press, 2000), 382–3.



Once Foucault had made his point about the dangers harbored in our modern conceptions of power and knowledge, who would deny it? But before he made those points, who had ever asserted it? Therein lies the critical power of Foucaultian problematization. Foucault concisely captures this critical force of genealogy in another remark from Berkeley in 1983, this time in a lecture: “The history of thought is the analysis of the way an unproblematic field of experience, or a set of practices, which were accepted without question, which were familiar and ‘silent’, out of discussion, becomes a problem, raises discussion and debate, incites new reactions, and induces a crisis in the previously silent behavior, habits, practices, and institutions.”<sup>14</sup> Problematizations do not show us what is wrong – they show us what is in crisis and what therefore stands in need of critique. Foucault’s point was not that contemporary sexuality is bad and must be tossed off. Foucault’s point was rather that sexuality in the present is in crisis and so we must learn to do it differently. Doing something different about sexuality would require, presumably, equipping ourselves with an understanding of how sexuality became the unique kind of problematization that it is for us, which means equipping ourselves with a history of our sexuality. This history would describe (at least some of) the conditions of possibility of contemporary sexuality such that we might begin the difficult labor of reconditioning our sexual selves. Genealogical problematization can be seen as having two key features. It is *a history of the present* (first feature) that is also *a preparation of the present for the future* (second feature). Explicating these two features of Foucault’s use of genealogy as problematization illuminates how history matters for Foucault, and also how it matters in such a way that Foucaultian genealogical problematization can be seen as compatible with Deweyan pragmatist reconstruction.

*The Present.* What are the focal objects of Foucault’s historical inquiries? Not the past, as we might presume of the work of a philosopher who positioned himself as a historian, but rather the present. Foucault explicitly forwarded *Discipline and Punish* in precisely this sense: “I would like to write the history of this prison . . . Why? Simply because I am interested in the past? No, if one means by that writing a history of the past in terms of the present. Yes, if one means writing the history of the present.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>) Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech* [1983], Joseph Pearson (ed.) (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001), 74.

<sup>15</sup>) Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* [1975], trans. Alan Sheridan (Vintage Books, 1995), 30–1.

Foucault understood his own practice of critique in Kant's sense of that term, as explicating the conditions of the possibility of who we are. Whereas for Kant these conditions must be transcendental because "who we are" is invariant, Foucault was interested in those aspects of "who we are" that were demonstrably subject to variance and whose conditions as such were historical rather than transcendental.<sup>16</sup> Thus Foucault described his work in his 1983 Collège de France course lectures published as *The Government of Self and Others* as "a critical thought which takes the form of an ontology of ourselves, of present reality."<sup>17</sup> What would be the point of a historical ontology of our present selves? Why write such a history of the present? What would it be good for? Foucault wrote, a few years after the publication of *Discipline and Punish*, that the point of the book was to help conceptualize the present: "What I wanted to write was a history book that would make the present situation comprehensible and, possibly, lead to action. If you like, I tried to write a 'treatise of intelligibility' about the penitentiary situation, I wanted to make it intelligible and, therefore, criticizable."<sup>18</sup> History, for Foucault, helps us conceptualize the present and in so doing opens it up to transformative critique. For Foucault history is fundamentally about problematization, or the critical clarification and intensification of the problems at the heart of who we are.

*The Reconstruction of the Present.* In another interview Foucault gave with Rabinow, published in 1984, the following pointed question provoked some very interesting reflections: "What is a history of problematics?" In response Foucault described his work of problematization in terms of "the history of thought" as distinct from "the analysis of systems of representation". He distinguished representation as "what inhabits a certain

<sup>16</sup> As Ian Hacking notes: "Where Kant had found the conditions of possible experience in the structure of the human mind, Foucault does it with historical, and hence transient, conditions for possible discourse" (Ian Hacking, "The Archaeology of Michel Foucault" [1981] in Ian Hacking, *Historical Ontology*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 79).

<sup>17</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others, Lectures at the Collège de France, 1982–1983* [1983], Arnold Davidson, Frédéric Gros, François Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana (eds.), trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 21.

<sup>18</sup> Michel Foucault, "On Power" [1978] in Michel Foucault, *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977–1984*, Lawrence Kritzman (ed.) (New York: Routledge, 1988), 101.

conduct and gives it its meaning” from thought described as “freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem.” The historical analysis of thought requires treating the realm of the conceptual as active, dynamic, and transitional in contrast from a history of passive representational content. History captures thought in this active sense when it focuses on the problematizations that make possible conceptual formation, deformation, and reformation. Thus Foucault says: “[F]or a domain of action, a behavior, to enter the field of thought, it is necessary for a certain number of factors to have made it uncertain, to have made it lose its familiarity, or to have provoked a number of difficulties around it.”<sup>19</sup> As Foucault continues, he is explicit that problematization does not so much aim to denounce certain practices as it aims to shift the attention of the present from assuming that it is already adequately representing itself to asking itself if there are problems that would provoke the work of thought: “This development of a given into a question, this transformation of a group of obstacles and difficulties into problems to which the diverse solutions will attempt to produce a response, this is what constitutes the point of problematization and the specific work of thought.” The history of thought thus studies “the transformations of the difficulties and obstacles of a practice into a general problem for which one proposes diverse practical solutions.”<sup>20</sup> Problematization turns up practical problems capable of receiving practical solutions. Foucault intended his mode of historical problematization as an invitation to those responses which would seek to develop answers to the questions analyzed and clarified by a historical analysis. Genealogical problematization neither credits nor discredits current moral standards – as such it is neither normative nor, as Habermas had argued, “cryptonormative.”<sup>21</sup> But it does invite further work in which these standards will be normatively revised – and in virtue of this invitation it can avoid the relativism too often imputed to it. Even if in his own work Foucault concentrated his attention on posing problems in such a way as to disallow superficial

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<sup>19</sup> Michel Foucault, “Polemics, Politics and Problematizations”, interview by Paul Rabinow [1984] in Michel Foucault and Paul Rabinow (eds.), *Essential Works, Volume 1: Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth* (New York: New Press, 1997), 117.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>21</sup> Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 282.

solutions, there is nothing in this practice that rules out the possibility of more sophisticated responses to the work of problematization.

Foucault's conception of history as both *present*-centered and *problem*-focused is also featured in the work of other contemporary philosopher-historians who have drawn on Foucault.<sup>22</sup> Rabinow, in collaborative work with Nikolas Rose, has drawn much inspiration from Foucault along these lines: "If we are in an emergent moment of vital politics, celebration and denunciation are insufficient as analytical approaches."<sup>23</sup> A particularly instructive example is afforded by the work of Ian Hacking, who has productively appropriated Foucault's label of "historical ontology" as a description of the modest empiricism that, I would argue, Hacking and Foucault both share: "At its more modest [historical ontology] is conceptual analysis, analyzing *our* concepts. . . . That is because the concepts have their being in historical sites. . . . This dedication to analysis makes use of the past, but it is not history."<sup>24</sup> Rather, it is not just history, for it is instead history of the present. The point of this history is not so much to resolve present problems, though it may facilitate such resolution downstream, as it is to analytically specify the problems we face in the present. Hacking writes, in a line that could have been lifted straight out of Foucault, that: "The application [of my work] is to our present pressing problems. The history is history of the present, how our present conceptions were made, how the conditions for their formation constrain our present ways of thinking."<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> In addition to those discussed below see also Arnold Davidson, *The Emergence of Sexuality: Historical Epistemology and the Formation of Concepts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001) and Ladelle McWhorter, *Bodies and Pleasures: Foucault and the Politics of Sexual Normalization* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

<sup>23</sup> Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose, "Biopower Today", *BioSocieties* 1 (2006), 195–217, 215; see also Rabinow, *Anthropos Today: Reflections on Modern Equipment*; Rabinow, *Marking Time: On the Anthropology of the Contemporary*; Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Nikolas Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Ian Hacking, "Historical Ontology" in Hacking, *Historical Ontology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 24–5; the label is borrowed from Foucault (Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" [1984] in Michel Foucault and Paul Rabinow (eds.), *Essential Works, Volume 1: Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth* (New York: New Press, 1997)).

<sup>25</sup> Ian Hacking, "Two Kinds of New Historicism" [1988] in Ian Hacking, *Historical Ontology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 70; see Hacking, "Historical Ontology", 24–5 and for two splendid examples Ian Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability* [1975],

In using history as a way of bringing the problems of the present into focus, the genealogist opens up the present to transformative potentialities otherwise blocked. One way of making this point is to reconsider what the effect of a genealogy might be. Most commentators understand Foucault's genealogies as efforts in denaturalization. To take just one example, Alexander Nehamas praises Foucault's "uncanny ability to discern history and contingency where others had seen only nature and necessity."<sup>26</sup> Nehamas's view, which is the standard view, is that genealogical problematization shows how something that we take as obvious is rather in fact problematic. Genealogical problematization, it is often said, provokes a question by rendering the inevitable contingent. A history of the inevitable makes us forget the inevitability. This standard interpretation of the force of genealogy is not wrong so much as it is limiting. Denaturalization is indeed part of what a genealogy does, but it does much more too. A genealogy also shows us how that which we took to be inevitable was contingently composed. A genealogy does not just show us *that* our practices in the present are contingent rather than necessary, for it also shows *how* our practices in the present contingently became what they are. The history of that which was once presumed inevitable not only makes us forget the inevitability, it also provides us with the materials we would need to transformatively work on that which we had taken to be a necessity. In this way necessities are not only rendered transformable, but they are also opened up for the labor of productive transformation.

Though genealogical problematization provokes transformation, it does not, and by itself it cannot, perform the work of transformation. Rather, genealogy is merely preparatory for transformation. Good as Foucault was at focusing our attention on the problematic abyss of our present, his work does not follow up on these problematizations with the kind of philosophical work that would facilitate a meliorative response to our situation. But we must be careful here. Foucault's shortcoming here is not the result

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second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2006) and Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1990).

<sup>26</sup> Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California, 1998), 170; see for further discussion Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique: Problematization and Transformation in Foucault and Others*, Chapter 4, and Koopman, "Foucault Across the Disciplines: Introductory Notes on Contingency in Critical Inquiry" in *History of the Human Sciences* 24, no. 4 (2011).

of a principled opposition on the part of genealogy to melioration: that problematization by itself cannot facilitate a responsive work on the problems of the present does not mean that problematization is incompatible with other modes of inquiry which would facilitate such responsive melioration. On my reading, Foucault himself was attempting the beginnings of an ethical reconstruction of his present in the final years of his life.<sup>27</sup> Foucault did not live to see these through, nor is what he left us sufficient for our own projects in these regards, but that Foucault himself attempted as much makes it compelling to regard his genealogical problematizations as positive provocations to more reconstructive modes of inquiry. Foucault's greatest achievement was in the way he facilitates our looking backward into the past so that we can see better the problems at the heart of who we are. This is not opposed to looking forward toward better futures in which the problems of the present would no longer put such pressure on who we may be. And yet despite not being opposed to the work of what Dewey calls reconstruction, Foucault himself was not in the first instance a reconstructive thinker. This is a real lack in Foucault. But it pays to remember that a lack is not a contradiction. Absence is not an opposition to presence, for only that which is present can oppose the presence of something which is not. Foucault's lack can be addressed easily enough by supplementing genealogical problematization with pragmatist reconstruction. Before describing how, allow me to first describe pragmatism, which as it happens contains a corollary deficiency which genealogy is in a good position to stand in as a supplement for.

### **Why History Matters for Reconstruction in Dewey**

Reconstruction is the central philosophical device in John Dewey's work. Reconstruction for Dewey can be boiled down to an idea of the purposive transforming of a situation for the sake of its improvement. In his 1929 book *The Quest for Certainty* Dewey described this conception of a directed transition of situation from being caught up in disequilibrium to being in

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<sup>27</sup> See Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: Overview of Work in Progress"; Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Volume 2* [1984], trans. Robert Hurley (Vintage Books, 1990); Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality, Volume 3* [1984], trans. Robert Hurley (Vintage Books, 1988) and Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?".

greater equilibrium as follows: “thinking is the actual transition from the problematic to the secure.”<sup>28</sup> Dewey there conceptualized knowledge accordingly: “knowledge is the fruit of the undertakings that transform a problematic situation into a resolved one.”<sup>29</sup> Given the centrality of reconstruction for Dewey’s overall philosophical vision, it is not surprising that he leveraged the conception in a number of different directions as he roamed an enormously expansive philosophical territory. A whole raft of synonyms for reconstruction can thus be mined out of Dewey’s writings: intelligence, growth, education, scientific method, and even his conception of democracy as a way of life. Though Dewey tended to think of these terms as synonymous, some clearly serve different purposes than others even if only by way of connotation and association. A common theme running throughout these terms is that they are all conceived by Dewey in terms of process. Dewey writes of reconstructing and growing and educating. There is an irreducible historicity and temporality pervading his work. It is the historicity at the heart of reconstruction that makes history matter so much for Dewey.

There are, that being said, different ways in which history might matter for a pragmatist. One way of framing the different understandings of reconstruction that have been offered by commentators is in terms of a familiar debate about whether or not Dewey should be read as a metaphysical philosopher or as a more modest proponent of a philosophical methodology.<sup>30</sup> In his 1920 book *Reconstruction in Philosophy* Dewey wrote that, “Growth itself is the only moral ‘end’ . . . Growing, or the continuous reconstruction of experience, is the only end.”<sup>31</sup> Erstwhile scare-quotes notwithstanding, this is an enormously strong claim. What are we to make

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<sup>28</sup>) John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty* [1929] in Boydston Dewey (ed.), *The Later Works of John Dewey, Volume 4* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1984), 181.

<sup>29</sup>) *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>30</sup>) For contrasting discussions of the role which metaphysics plays in Dewey’s wider pragmatism see Richard Rorty, “Dewey’s Metaphysics” [1977] in *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1982) and, Richard Rorty, “Comments on Sleeper and Edel”, *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 21, no. 1 (1985), 40–48, on the one hand and Ralph Sleeper, “Rorty’s Pragmatism: Afloat in Neurath’s Boat, But Why Adrift?”, *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society in Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 21, no. 1 (1985), 9–20, on the other.

<sup>31</sup>) John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* [1920], enlarged edition (Boston: Beacon, 1948), 177, 184.

of it? In texts such as the 1925 *Experience and Nature*, Dewey would try to cash out this idea in biologicistic terms of a quite explicit “naturalistic metaphysics”.<sup>32</sup> In other texts, including *Reconstruction* itself, Dewey seems to have more modest, because merely methodological, goals in mind.

In his metaphysically-ambitious moments, Dewey tended to describe the work of reconstruction in terms of concepts with a metaphysical and ontological ring. In this strain of his work, we can read Dewey as offering an ontology of thought itself or the basic metaphysical categories according to which thinkers do their thinking in the world, or as Dewey would put it, according to which organisms do their inquiring within their environments. Though many commentators favor this aspect of Dewey’s work, it remains subject to all of the standard critiques that twentieth-century philosophy has raised with respect to the very idea of philosophy as a metaphysical project that could capture the basic categories of reality and thought. These critiques are not unanswerable, but they do raise with force the issue of the necessity of metaphysics for Deweyan pragmatism. If pragmatism can get by without a metaphysics, then shouldn’t it do so, at least until pragmatists (or somebody else) can show how we might engage in metaphysics without falling prey to the old trap of foundationalism?

If there are metaphysical strains in Dewey’s writings, there are also more modest methodological overtones present throughout much of his work. If we read Dewey in terms of these tones, what we find is an emphasis on reconstruction in a merely methodological sense. In this sense, the work of thought as reconstructive is not to be explicated in terms of a naturalist metaphysics or an account of mind and world as they really are. Rather, the work of thought as reconstructive is offered as a philosophical heuristic specifically tailored to what Dewey described in *Reconstruction* as philosophy orienting itself to the “social and moral strifes of [its] own day.”<sup>33</sup> In that text, Dewey explicated reconstructive method in terms of logic: “Logic is a matter of profound human importance precisely because it is empirically founded and experimentally applied. So considered, the problem of logical theory is none other than the problem of the possibility of the development and employment of intelligent method in inquiries concerned with deliberate reconstruction of experience.”<sup>34</sup> Logic on Dewey’s

<sup>32</sup>) John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* [1925] (New York: Dover, 1958), 48, 68.

<sup>33</sup>) Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 26.

<sup>34</sup>) *Ibid.*, 138.



conception is an artifact of successful inquiry. The artifact that is logic involves the reconstruction of problematic situations. This is how Dewey later described logic in his massive late-career text *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*: “Inquiry is the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole.”<sup>35</sup> For the purposes of this conception of logic as an artifact of reconstructive thought we need not assume that logic somehow captures the nature of reality itself, as would be expected of an onto-logic.

There is in fact no need to settle, once and for all, the debate between Dewey as metaphysical thinker and Dewey as methodological thinker. Those of us who prefer the latter, myself included, can freely admit that there are metaphysical strains in Dewey’s work, and yet leave these to the side in exploring how pragmatism works in Dewey. Those who prefer to work out the metaphysics of Dewey’s biologicistic naturalism can do so without offending methodological pragmatists, so long as the metaphysicians do not insist that we methodological philosophers stand in need of their work. Of course, this nub is exactly what the debate between metaphysics and methodology ultimately boils down to. Those on the metaphysical side think that their philosophical work is somehow essential to everything that everyone else is doing, whether everyone else realizes it or not. This ‘high metaphysics’ is grounded in a conception of philosophy that sounds suspicious to our collaborators in the social sciences, to whom it does not occur that their work stands in the need of something like a metaphysics to ground it. If we can undertake the inquiries we are eager to undertake in the service of meliorating those problems in our midst we find most pressing, and if we do not need to explicitly invoke a metaphysics to do so, then we should be left free to do so. Thus, for instance, those of us looking to bring history into philosophy should be free to do so without answering to certain metaphysical questions which are not internal to our inquiries, even if the metaphysicians are of course able to redescribe our work in the terms of metaphysical commitments. But being able to give a description of some form of inquiry in metaphysical terms does not mean that metaphysics is internal to that inquiry any more than being able to give a description of the rhetoric of philosophical discourse means that

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<sup>35</sup> John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* [1938] in Boydston Dewey (ed.), *The Later Works of John Dewey, Volume 12* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1991), 108.

rhetorical concerns are (or should be) internal to the mode of production of philosophical discourse. If metaphysics is not granted automatic privilege in philosophy, then there may be warrant at times for a more cautious methodological approach. I shall suggest below that we have just such a warrant in considering Dewey's conception of reconstruction and the role of history therein. For there is a deficit in Dewey's pragmatism which is easily dealt with if we take pragmatism methodologically but which would prove irremediable if we insist on pragmatism as a metaphysics. To make my way to this point, I turn first to articulating the work of reconstruction as Dewey conceived it.

Taken in its more modest methodological sense Dewey's pragmatist philosophy is best read in terms of his masterful statement in the last sentence of *Reconstruction*: "To further [the] articulation and revelation of the meanings of the current course of events is the task and problem of philosophy in days of transition."<sup>36</sup> Philosophy in this reconstructive key clearly stands in need of history. This brings to the fore why history matters for Dewey. In short, history matters because reconstruction is itself thoroughly historical and temporal, or what I call transitional.

It is important to understand that reconstruction is not just any old transition – some changes are worse than others. Reconstruction functions for Dewey as a normative ideal. Dewey's conception thus refers to those transitions of thought and action in virtue of which we effect improvement. Reconstruction, as such, is an achievement. Since the achievement that is reconstruction is irreducibly transitional, which is to say irreducibly temporal and historical, history is essential to the work of reconstruction. And since reconstruction is at the heart of normative philosophy, history is itself essential to the very work of pragmatist philosophy.

To see how this is so, consider two questions provoked by Dewey's formulation of reconstruction as work on the problems of the present for the sake of improvement in the future. A first question is: Where do the problems we ought to reconstruct come from? Dewey never directly addresses this question. This is a key shortcoming in his pragmatism. But Dewey can be made to indirectly address this question if we consider his stance with respect to a second question, namely: How do we clarify our problems such that we can set to work on reconstructing them? Dewey's answer here must be that part of the task of 'problematization' so conceived is history,

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<sup>36</sup> Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 213.

understood as a form of inquiry and a discipline of thought. This is because Dewey understood problems, at least social problems, as irreducibly conditioned by historical sequence: “social phenomena . . . are inherently historical . . . a sequential course of changes.”<sup>37</sup> An understanding of the social phenomena that are social problems would require, though not necessarily be rendered complete by, historical inquiry. It is notable in this connection that, as detailed below, so many of Dewey’s books frame their discussions by way of introductory historical discussions meant to instruct the reader in the problem that is Dewey’s concern. If I am correct with respect to the second question that history is essential to Dewey’s conception of how to frame the problems which reconstruction meliorates, then it seems to follow with respect to the first question that problems for Dewey come from the past in the sense that the past conditions the problems of the present. The problems on which we work are part of a course of events in which we find ourselves flowing – since we flow through the present from past to future it seems to follow that our problems in the present are conditioned by the inertia of the past. This explains why a historicist perspective cannot avoid the import of history.

Understanding this last point helps us understand Dewey’s most extended explicit discussion of history, in which he argues that history is always history of the present, or a study of the way in which the past bears down on us as we address ourselves to the problems of the present. In his five-hundred-page densely-argued *Logic*, Dewey devotes a chapter to the logic of narration. Therein he distinguishes three distinct kinds of narrative judgments: those about our personal past, those about specific events falling outside of our personal past, and those he calls “consecutive historical narrations.”<sup>38</sup> The third kind refers to historical judgment proper. In his descriptions of the logic of historical narration, two features clearly emerge in Dewey’s account that help situate his account within the contested terrain of critical historiography. For Dewey, historical judgment proceeds from *the present* (first feature) insofar as it furnishes us with *problems in need of reconstruction* (second feature). Note now how Dewey’s historiography shares both of these features with Foucault’s.

*The Present.* Dewey claims that historical judgment is characterized by an attempt to relate “propositions about an extensive past durational

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<sup>37</sup>) Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, 494.

<sup>38</sup>) *Ibid.*, 223.

sequence to propositions about the present and future.”<sup>39</sup> History, for Dewey, is focused on the project of narrating a past sequence in connection with a present. This suggests a view of history as the history of the present. Indeed Dewey endorses this presentism: “all history is necessarily written from the standpoint of the present, and is, in an inescapable sense, the history not only of the present but of that which is contemporaneously judged to be important in the present.”<sup>40</sup> Presentism, for Dewey, is not a flaw but an advantage just insofar as it involves the use of history for the purposes of transforming the present flux in which we find ourselves: “Intelligent understanding of past history is to some extent a lever for moving the present into a certain kind of future.”<sup>41</sup> Pair this with Dewey’s emphasis on the irreducible temporality of intelligent thought and you have a nice little Deweyan argument for the value of history for reconstruction.

*The Problem of the Present.* Dewey is thus a presentist about history. Further, Dewey also understands the history of the present in categorical terms of problems. History is a phase in the general pattern of inquiry involving the reconstruction of a problematic situation. Within this pattern, history functions to inform us about the problems we face in the present so that we may be more intelligent about the reconstruction of these problems toward a better future. The problem-centered character of history is made evident in Dewey’s emphasis on the inevitability of selection in history. That “all historical construction is necessarily selective” is something of a truism.<sup>42</sup> One key issue dividing rival historiographies concerns the principle of selection. For Dewey, selection turns not only on the present, but more precisely on the problems we face in the present. Dewey explains that historical data, which the historian forms into claims about the past, are “relative to a problem.”<sup>43</sup> And it is because of this “connection with a problem, actual or potential” that the historical propositions the historian proposes in the course of inquiry can be said to “correspond strictly with conceptual subject-matter by means of which they are ordered and interpreted.”<sup>44</sup> This is far from perspicuous, but what Dewey seems to be

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

saying here is that historical claims can claim a conceptual structure and thus play a role in the course of inquiry only insofar as they are informed by, perhaps in the sense of being categorially structured by, problems in the present. Just to make a historical claim, in other words, is to conceptually articulate historical facts in light of present problems, dangers, and difficulties.

This conception of a *present*-centered and *problem*-focused history would later be taken up by Dewey's students, including McKeon as noted at the outset, and also John Hermann Randall, Jr., who developed in detail an unfortunately-neglected pragmatist historiography.<sup>45</sup> In a 1937 essay Randall forwarded a Dewey-inspired pragmatist historiography that explicitly positions history as a problematizing form of inquiry setting an agenda for philosophy as a reconstructive inquiry: "History is thus fundamentally problematic: it is always setting problems."<sup>46</sup> The same conception was at work twenty years later in Randall's 1958 *Nature and Historical Experience*: "Historical knowledge 'reveals' the genesis or origin of the problem, points to the active force that is generating a tension, to the points of tension themselves, thus locating the obstacles or 'deflecting forces,' and also to the instrument for dealing with the obstacles."<sup>47</sup> Conceived as such, historical inquiry is internal to philosophical inquiry. This view, though Randall's own, is one he attributed to Dewey, at least according to his 1939 contribution to a tribute volume: "if, as Dewey has learned from the social sciences, knowledge in general and science in particular are rather the ability of a society to do what it must and can, if they are primarily a matter of the intellectual methods whereby a culture solves its specific versions of the universal human problems, then the history of that culture and its problems, and the historical criticism of its methods of inquiry and application, become of the very essence of any philosophy."<sup>48</sup> If Randall is right, this would explain why Dewey, like most pragmatists including also Randall

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<sup>45</sup> My understanding of Randall owes much, especially in terms of motivation, to work by Colapietro (Vincent Colapietro, "Historical Displacements and Situated Narratives: Recovering History by (Re)Reading Randall" (forthcoming). Ms. on file with the author).

<sup>46</sup> John Herman Randall, "On Understanding the History of Philosophy" [1937], *The Journal of Philosophy* 36, no. 17 (1939), 460–474, 471.

<sup>47</sup> John Herman Randall, *Nature and Historical Experience* (New York: Columbia University, 1958), 99.

<sup>48</sup> John Herman Randall, "Dewey's Interpretation of the History of Philosophy" in Paul Arthur Schilpp, *The Philosophy of John Dewey: The Library of Living Philosophers* (New York: Tudor Publishing, 1939), 83.

himself, so often employed history to describe the crucial cultural conflicts for which his philosophy was offered as a reconstructive response. Past history functioned for Dewey as a mode of inquiry which helped furnish the present problems to which a philosophical mode of inquiry could then supply future solutions.

The description I am offering of the Deweyan conception of history as both present-centered and problem-centered could also serve as an excellent description of Foucaultian problematization. This rarely-noticed resonance, however, should not distract us from recognizing that Foucault developed problematization in much greater detail than Dewey ever tried to do and accordingly was able to deploy it with far more rigor. With respect to core issues in historical methodology, Dewey's scant remarks from the chapter of the *Logic* I have been quoting constitute his most sustained engagement with the pertinent questions raised here. With respect to the practical deployment of this historical methodology, I have already mentioned that it is not difficult to locate many instances in Dewey's writings where he directs discussion by way of historical inquiry. We find numerous engagements with the history of philosophy and the history of ideas throughout Dewey's texts.<sup>49</sup> We also find numerous notable engagements with history in Dewey's political writings of the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>50</sup> To take one example, Dewey's 1927 book *The Public and Its Problems* proceeds by outlining the political problem of the present (Chapters 3 and 4) before sketching the conditions of a possible reconstruction of this problem (Chapters 5 and 6). In detailing the problem, Dewey's approach is largely historical. Notably, it is historical in a sense that bears striking resemblance to genealogical method in its description of political forms as emerging via "the convergence of a great number of social movements, no one of which owed either its origin or its impetus to inspiration of democratic ideals."<sup>51</sup> This explicit emphasis on historical contingency and complexity,

<sup>49</sup> See Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*; Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty*; Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*.

<sup>50</sup> See John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* [1927] (New York: Swallow Press, 1954); John Dewey, *Individualism Old and New* [1930] (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1999); John Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action* [1935] (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1999); and John Dewey, *Freedom and Culture* [1939] (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1989).

<sup>51</sup> Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 85.

or what Dewey later calls “a multitude of events, unpremeditated”,<sup>52</sup> is strikingly reminiscent of Foucault’s histories of contingent coalescence.<sup>53</sup>

Despite the clear presence of an *effort* at problematization in Dewey’s political and intellectual histories, it takes an enormous force of will to claim that Dewey’s histories *achieve* rigor and patience in their execution. Dewey offers broad sketches and outlines where we should demand of him all the flesh and crystal that comes from the care of empirical historical inquiry. This is, however, not a result of any principled opposition to historical problematization on the part of pragmatism’s reconstructive center. As I have shown, Dewey thought that problem-centered history was absolutely crucial for the invaluable work of reconstructing the problematic situations in which we find ourselves. Dewey’s shortcomings as a historian are not theoretical shortcomings so much as they are practical shortcomings. Dewey seems to have always been too anxious to get on to the reconstruction to be patient enough with his problematizations. Dewey generally accepts that the problems we face are already given to us such that our task is to get out there and do something to fix things up. This may often be the case, but often enough it is not.

Hidden injustices abound. Unconscious immoralities persist. One realizes, after months or years, that one has been inflicting a harm all along. It is the worse for having gone unnoticed not only by the perpetrator but also by the victim. The worst cases, perhaps, are those in which we imperceptibly inflict harm on ourselves and in which we persist in self-abusive habits despite having had ample opportunity to witness the abuse. Dewey is not blind to these issues, but it takes a massive textual gymnastics to suggest that he offers us tools and strategies that are of much help for learning to see the problems to which we are blind. Herbert Marcuse’s elegant criticism of Dewey’s *Logic* provides a useful paradigm of a familiar constellation of concerns that have always haunted pragmatism – Marcuse locates in Dewey “the shriveling of theory to the methodology of scientific experimentation”

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>53</sup> Though similar with respect to methodological *analytic* (or procedure), Dewey’s approach does diverge from Foucault’s with respect to methodological *object of focus*. Foucault’s histories are best read as histories of practices, or what some might call cultural history. Dewey’s histories, including here, are best read as histories of ideas, or what is usually called intellectual history. Where Foucault discusses the things people did and the practices they enacted, Dewey discusses great names (in this case Locke, Smith, and Mill) and the doctrines they espoused (in this case individualism).

such that “hasty unification of theory and praxis must deliver theory in the whole over to a theory-less praxis.”<sup>54</sup> It cannot be an accident that pragmatism has always been subjected to a family of interrelated criticisms along these lines, including the charges that pragmatism evinces a narrow form of instrumental rationality, that it lacks a theory of power, and that it is blind to the tragic moments of life.<sup>55</sup>

Once our problems are evident and plain to see, it is clear that pragmatist reconstruction is an enormous resource. But if we sometimes need to force ourselves to confront problems where we assume that there are none, pragmatism (especially Dewey’s) is of little help in this project of teaching ourselves to doubt where belief is most firm.<sup>56</sup> It is in this sense that Deweyan pragmatism is not helpful in addressing the question raised above concerning where the problems of the present come from. To the extent that we can tease an answer out of Dewey’s texts, he seems to espouse what amounts to either a kind of naïve realism or common sensism.<sup>57</sup> But this is

<sup>54</sup> Herbert Marcuse, “Review of John Dewey’s *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*” [1940], trans. Phillip Deen, *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 46, no. 2 (2010), 258–265, 264, 263.

<sup>55</sup> On Dewey’s pragmatism as instrumental rationality see Max Horkheimer, *The Eclipse of Reason* [1947] (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), Chapter 1, and a defense of Dewey by Larry Hickman, *Philosophical Tools for Technological Culture: Putting Pragmatism to Work* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), Chapter 3; on Dewey’s pragmatism as lacking a theory of power see C. Wright Mills, *Sociology and Pragmatism: The Higher Learning in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969) and a defense of Dewey by Melvin Rogers, *The Undiscovered Dewey: Religion, Morality, and the Ethos of Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), Chapter 5; on Dewey’s pragmatism as blind to the tragic see Cornel West, “Pragmatism and the Sense of the Tragic” in *Keeping Faith: Philosophy and Race in America* (New York: Routledge, 1993) and a defense of Dewey by Eddie S. Glaude, *In a Shade of Blue: Pragmatism and the Politics of Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), Chapter 1.

<sup>56</sup> This criticism can be offered at a more general level as applicable to the pragmatist conception of inquiry as a motion from doubt to belief as exemplified in Charles S. Peirce, “The Fixation of Belief” [1877] in Buchler Peirce (ed.), *Philosophical Writings of Peirce* (New York: Dover, 1955). What pragmatism does not prepare us for is to undertake inquiries whose motion is in the opposite direction, namely from belief to doubt. I would argue that William James is an exception to this general tendency of the classical pragmatists, and that Richard Rorty among more recent pragmatists is also a thinker of ironizing doubts.

<sup>57</sup> Dewey says in the *Logic* that, “The indeterminate situation comes into existence from existential causes” (Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, 111) – but this explains almost nothing, which is to say that it is the mark of a lack of explanation.



not helpful where structural conditions (e.g., dissymmetries of power, competing interest sets, over-determining conceptual schemes) effectively block us from taking seriously the possibility that our situation just may be problematic despite its rosy appearance.

There is no reason to deny, as contemporary pragmatists too often do, that there is a real lacuna in Dewey's methodological toolkit with respect to the category of problematization. But, to repair at this point to my above distinction between the metaphysical and methodological Deweys, it is only in the context of reading Dewey as a metaphysical thinker that the difficulty is intractable. For if Dewey is doing metaphysics and if his metaphysics contains no account of the generation of problems (and if that metaphysics is meant to be complete even if revisable), then it follows that there is a principled defect in Dewey's metaphysics such that it is not clear that we can do much to address this defect. However, another reading of Dewey renders the difficulty resolvable. Whereas a lack in the context of a metaphysics seems to render a metaphysic structurally unstable, a lack in the context of a methodology institutes a much more modest demand for methodological plurality. Taking Dewey as offering a methodology whilst remaining agnostic about metaphysics is a convenient way of making use of Dewey's insights about reconstruction without forcing reconstruction to do everything for us in the way that a metaphysic would require. A methodological reading of Dewey, in other words, allows us to recognize his limitations concerning the way in which problems are generated and nonetheless hold this lacuna as remedied easily enough and in terms that Dewey himself explicitly urged. No one should expect their favorite philosopher (or philosophical tradition) to have done everything that needs doing. Dewey came up short sometimes. Where he comes up short with respect to historiography, the remedy I propose is to supplement pragmatism with genealogy.

### **Genealogical Pragmatism and Pragmatist Genealogy**

I have sought to make two crucial interpretive points about pragmatism and genealogy: pragmatist reconstruction can be read as methodological rather than metaphysical and genealogical method can be read as problematization rather than subversive. These points help show how we might begin to think about using pragmatism and genealogy together. If

reconstruction for Dewey is not a metaphysics of thought but rather one method for thinking amongst others, then it would follow that pragmatist reconstruction is amenable to being deployed alongside other philosophically-compatible methods. If genealogy for Foucault is an effort of problematization rather than denunciation, then it would follow that genealogical method is amenable to being deployed alongside other philosophical methods focused on how we might respond to the problems we find ourselves facing. A conception of genealogical pragmatism thus follows quite naturally from the interpretations of genealogy and pragmatism I have offered. Genealogy excellently prepares the way for pragmatism and pragmatism excellently follows up on genealogy – a guiding idea for this project is that deep problematization invites sophisticated solutions and that lasting reconstruction requires profound problematics.

Deploying these methods together in this fashion leads to a conception of critical inquiry whose basic categories of critique are *problem* and *response* – as an alternative to *position* and *negation* or *truth* and *error*. Critique, reconceived in this way, puts us on the path to elaborating normativity in nonfoundational fashion. This would be a crucial philosophical achievement.

The strategy I am proposing for this effort can be described as one of delegation.<sup>58</sup> We should delegate the problem-raising work to genealogists such as Foucault and the problem-fixing work to pragmatists such as Dewey. Though the methods of genealogy and pragmatism largely face different directions, there is no principled philosophical opposition that stands in the way of the proposed methodological delegation. There is no deep metaphysics at work in Dewey and Foucault which prevents us from bringing them together at the methodological level of their empirical commitments to a micro-physics of problems and responses. Dewey and Foucault are in agreement on all the important philosophical points. This has led some commentators to suggest that the obvious differences that

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<sup>58</sup>) For further discussion of my proposed strategy of delegation in a different but related context see Colin Koopman, “The Direction of Contemporary Critical Theory: A Response to Amy Allen’s *The Politics of Our Selves*”, *Current Perspectives in Social Theory* (forthcoming; Ms. on file with the author) in response to Amy Allen, *The Politics of Our Selves: Power, Autonomy, and Gender in Contemporary Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University, 2008), and also Allen’s reply to my response (Amy Allen, “Power, Autonomy, and Gender: Reply to Critics”, *Current Perspectives in Social Theory* (forthcoming). Ms. on file with the author).

separate the two are of a mostly dispositional nature.<sup>59</sup> If interpreted as a psychological claim, I am not sure that we have sufficient evidence for even this view. But if interpreted as a comment about a methodological distinction, then we can accept it in the sense that Deweyan method tends to inspire an American hope whereas Foucaultian method tends to arouse a French skepticism. There is, however, no reason why we cannot be both hopeful and skeptical, both cautious about the world in which we find ourselves caught and confident that we can work to disentangle ourselves some. Indeed, my view is that we should take it upon ourselves to find room for both of these moods in our philosophies and our histories.

The interpretations of genealogy and pragmatism I have provided above not only show that there is no principled opposition between pragmatism and genealogy, they also invite a combination-via-delegation of Foucaultian problematization and Deweyan reconstruction in terms that are internal to each tradition. Both traditions share a functionally similar specification of the value of history. Both Foucault and Dewey argue that history matters because it helps us specify the conditions of the problems we face in the present, and helps us so specify in such a way that we might then go on to improve the problematic situations in which we find ourselves. In virtue of this similarity, both traditions are ripe for being put to work alongside one another.

Adherents of genealogy and pragmatism may protest that I am delegating too much to the other philosophical tradition. It may be objected that Foucault gives us all that we need including an ethics such that we ought not to bother with pragmatism, or that Dewey is a philosopher capacious enough to obviate a need for poststructuralist genealogy. I agree that both of the traditions I have been focusing on suggest that both problematization and reconstruction are crucial. My claim is just that each tradition has thus far done a better job of emphasizing and developing *only one* of these aspects. Genealogists like Foucault have focused most of their energy on the problematizing work of historical inquiry while pragmatists like Dewey have been largely interested in the reconstructive work of philosophical inquiry. Sure, Foucault attempted to elaborate an ethics in the final years of his life – and of course Dewey engaged in the work of history at crucial junctures. Although both Foucault and Dewey understood the

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<sup>59</sup> See Rorty, “Method, Social Science, and Social Hope” and Allen, “After Knowledge and Liberty: Foucault and the New Pragmatism”.

value of a historical-philosophical amalgam of these two projects, each in their own work revealed a decided preference, at least most of the time, for only one part of this enterprise. This has led to a persisting lacuna in each approach especially insofar as contemporary genealogists and pragmatists are, predictably, extremely cautious about straying too far from the paths of their masters.

For the purposes of my proposed delegational combination, we need not efface lingering differences. We can admit that Dewey described reconstruction as a response to a problematic situation, but failed to spell out in sufficient detail how we come to recognize situations as problematic. Problems do not appear out of nothing – problems have histories. We can also admit that Foucault described problematization as provoking the work of reconstructive thought, but failed to engage in detailed reconstructive thought to the satisfaction of even his most charitable critics. Problems stand in need of reconstructive responses – that is why we experience them as problematic. What these lacunae in the work of Dewey and Foucault suggest is that Deweyan pragmatism and Foucaultian genealogy stand to gain much by engaging each other more seriously. Pragmatism without genealogy has nothing to do, no work to perform, no problem to solve. Genealogy without pragmatism will get us nowhere, saddle us with insoluble problems, and accomplish very little.

The yield of my interpretations is the possibility of recognizing the importance and value of integrating genealogy and pragmatism into a fluid practice of immanent cultural critique which we could call genealogical pragmatism or pragmatist genealogy. According to this conception, critical inquiry operates along two tracks. On one track it works to problematize or destabilize those of our practices which we effortlessly involve ourselves in (yet this genealogical track need not overturn or reject these practices). On a second track it works to ameliorate the difficulties and dangers we find in ourselves (yet this reconstructive track need not assume the orientation of seeking definitive solutions approximating fixed ideals). These tracks are co-present and negotiated in simultaneity – it is not that there is a chronological sequencing of a time for problematization and a time for reconstruction. Though these tracks operate simultaneously, that which they operate on can be taken as chronologically distinct – genealogy works on the present from the perspective of the past whilst pragmatism works on the present from the perspective of the future. In the midst of this dual-perspectival work on our selves, we need to constantly work at being both suspicious and productive.

Why ought critical inquiry to operate along both of these tracks? Why is problematization plus reconstruction important for our philosophic present? A fuller answer to this broad metaphilosophical question is beyond my scope here, but I can address it briefly by way of conclusion in terms already hinted at above.

The dual-perspective conception of philosophical critique is a fruitful way of satisfying *the most crucial philosophical problematic of our times*: namely, the task of explicating authority without authoritarianism, or what might be called with more rigor but less verve the task of articulating normativity without foundations.<sup>60</sup> This critical task can be summarized in terms of two desiderata which are together characteristic of our philosophical present. The first desideratum is *antifoundationalism* or antiauthoritarianism – gone for us today are all the promises of a surrogate for the vanished divine and the invariant stability connoted therein. The second desideratum is a commitment to an idea of *normativity* or authority – our practices are still deeply dependent upon conceptions of correctness and rightness which we would do well to not lose sight of. My hunch, here only wagered in anticipation, is that a dual-perspective conception of immanent social critique will be able to deliver on these two desiderata. The mutual engagement between genealogy and pragmatism that I propose is therefore a response to central challenges facing contemporary philosophy itself, not only contemporary genealogical and pragmatist philosophies. By bringing pragmatism and genealogy together that we can enact philosophical thought in the midst of the critical cultural flows in which we find ourselves without appealing to something beyond those flows that would sponsor salvation from the outside.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> For a fuller discussion of this task and these two desiderata see Colin Koopman, “Rorty’s Linguistic Turn: Why (More Than) Language Matters to Philosophy”, *Contemporary Pragmatism* 8, no. 1 (2011), 61–84.

<sup>61</sup> This paper draws together diverse strands of work that have benefited from conversations with innumerable interlocutors, friends, and critics. Portions of the time during which some of this research was undertaken was afforded by a Postdoctoral Research Fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. I am especially grateful to senior colleagues at the University of California, Santa Cruz and University of California, Berkeley, the two institutions where I spent my time during that fellowship fashioning connections between pragmatism and genealogy. I am also grateful for the support and edification afforded by colleagues at the University of Oregon, where I completed the remainder of the research involved in my two-brook project.