

Introduction

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Introduction

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- 1 The present boosting interest for pragmatism and pragmatist approaches within the social sciences has developed somewhat confusedly in the absence of a shared conception of what a pragmatist outlook might imply for both theory and method. To overcome this failing, numerous analytical approaches have been devised over the course of the last two decades which either directly reclaim a pragmatist ascendancy or indirectly acknowledge a pragmatist influence, particularly at the methodological level, as in the case of ethnomethodology, realist interactionism, “Grounded Theory,” and Social Studies of Science and Technology.
- 2 All these approaches share the same intuition: action is the site of the emergence and expression of knowledge. Which is to say that to account for what individuals are doing when they act together, analysis must take into consideration the material and conceptual features which bear on the concrete unfolding of action and on the manner in which its intelligibility emerges in the course of its accomplishment: initiation, sequentiality, mutual understanding, perception, the order of interaction, etc. Many researchers have been working for a long time, in philosophy and in sociology, to flesh out such a dynamic perspective on action. They have been giving a similar priority to “practice” in their analyses, by paying particular attention to practical reasoning, practical knowledge, know-how, ordinary knowledge and emotions. It is in this context that these approaches have come to rediscover the importance of the theses developed by pragmatism, and of pragmatism as one of the most important philosophical precursors of the movement today known as “practical turn.” Awareness of these complex interrelations sets the grounds for constructive exchanges and interactions among philosophers and social scientists interested in putting pragmatism to use in the context of contemporary debates.
- 3 In this special issue of the *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* we present a selection of the papers that were discussed during three workshops which have taken place at Villa Vigoni (under the auspices of the DFG and of the FMSH) between 2012 and 2014. They illustrate some trends of contemporary research in

pragmatism and illustrate the reach of this old philosophical tradition in a vast array of current debates in philosophy and in the social sciences.

- 4 This special issue is dedicated to our dear colleague Stefan Beck. Stefan Beck, born in 1960, was a professor of European Ethnology at the Humboldt University in Berlin. Great sadness spread from the Department to colleagues worldwide as we learnt that Stefan had suddenly passed away on March 26, 2015 during vacations in Australia. Besides his eminent empirical works on Ethnographic research of everyday life, Science and Technology Studies and Social Anthropology, he was also a great thinker of Pragmatism and Practice Theories. Stefan was part of our European pragmatist network. At the Villa Vigoni in 2012 he presented an excellent paper illustrating his personal engagement with pragmatist themes in empirical sociology, titled “On the problem of expertise: from experience to skillful practices to expertise. Ecological and Pragmatist Perspectives.” Stefan had no time to revise his paper for this publication, and we present it here to the reader in the form Stefan gave it for the purposes of internal discussion. We thank his wife Gisela Welz for her permission to publish it in this issue as a sign of Stefan’s timely contribution to the debate. As one of our contributors, Thomas Scheffer, says, “Stefan was a comrade and a mate, someone to count on and to have fun with. He was a thinker, unconventional, anti-authoritarian, inventive, sharp. I loved meeting him – here and there over all these years. He was a vital figure for the kind of science and academia that makes me love my job.” We do miss him.
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