Foucault Studies

INTRODUCTION

Foucault and Pragmatism: Introductory Notes on Metaphilosophical Methodology
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ABSTRACT: Being an introduction to a special issue on the theme of "Foucault and Pragmatism" this article offers a brief set of metaphilosophical comments on the project of building bridges across familiar philosophical divides. The paper addresses questions in metaphilosophical methodology raised by the pairing in the issue title: What is at stake in the comparison of philosophical figures like Michel Foucault and John Dewey? What is at stake in the comparison of philosophical traditions such as Genealogy and Pragmatism? How can we most effectively develop comparative work across the entrenched divides, which such comparative work often labors to overcome?

Keywords: Metaphilosophy, Genealogy, Pragmatism, Foucault, Dewey.

Philosophical Bridgework
The papers collected in this special issue of *Foucault Studies* all fit well under the heading of "Foucault and Pragmatism"—but that heading itself expresses a basic disanalogy that any effort in comparative philosophy must confront. The disanalogy is rather obvious as soon as it is pointed out. Foucault is a figure, a philosopher, and a thinker. Pragmatism is an intellectual tradition, a philosophical milieu, and a style of thinking. What is the use of comparing the work of thought across two registers that function differently, demand different modalities of scrutiny, and which ought to be subjected to different kinds of criticism? A number of good answers to this question are implicit (and indeed quite often explicit) in the eight essays (and one review essay) that follow. In this introduction I shall briefly clarify the comparative terms of the articles that follow by describing two possible interpretations of the basic project of this issue, which is to say, two different interpretations of how one might set about the task of bringing Foucault and Pragmatism into conversation with one another. There are, of course, many other ways besides these two of launching, and then sustaining, comparative conversation in philosophy. With respect to the terms here under comparison, however, these are the most obvious and probably also the most demanding and provocative routes currently available.

Before describing these two basic methodological options, I would like to begin with a brief set of comments concerning the value, motivation, and justification of the comparative task itself. This special issue was constructed, and most fortunately executed, as an attempt at

building a bridge over a self-imposed gap. Allow me to construct an image of this. Picture, if you will, the following.

Camps of philosophers cordon themselves off from one another by drawing lines in the still sands of a breezeless desert. There they entrench, intently looking each other down from opposite sides of the line for some rather long period of time. Still sands separate steady stares. But eventually they tire of looking across the divide, and so begin to fraternize with only those philosophers in their proximity. Later they forget about the philosophers on the other side of the line, and when the occasional hawkeyed upstart or pesky defector announces the existence of a seeming country of philosophers not too far away, they retort that those on the other side of the line are not 'real' philosophers. They are, the upstart and the defector are told, philosophical poseurs at best, or philosophical perverts at worst. The language that is used, in fact, is exactly *that* contemptuous and contentious. After a generation or two, nobody remembers why the line was drawn, or what function it serves. But it is defended as vigorously as ever. Sometime soon thereafter, newly-indoctrinated apprentices begin asking questions that those keeping the line can barely comprehend, let alone answer. "Why don't we read Deleuze here? Have you read him? He's really interesting to me. And what about Foucault?" "Why do you insist that Quine is dry and unimportant? Have you read him? He's really quite interesting to me. And what about Dewey?" Soon the line-keepers abandon their fortifications, but of course nearly everyone continues to talk only to those philosophers in their immediate proximity. The apprentices, meanwhile, begin building bridges over the lines in the sand. Even though they are but thin lines in a breezeless desert, nobody knows how to cross over them in the familiar manners of walking, and the only way the apprentices can manage to muster a conversation is to carefully artifice means of passage from one camp to the other. These bridges, sometimes quite garish constructions, mediate. They function as avenues of conversation, transaction, and mutually-informative intervention. Eventually, it is hoped, the bridges will begin to seem unnecessary, and philosophers will effortlessly walk across those tiny little lines, eventually rubbing them out with their footprints, as they stare up in wonder at the spectacular sculptures above that stand as a memorial to a not-too-distant time when all philosophers were afraid to walk paths that are now frequently trod by just about everyone.

This little story describes, in the very rough sense that is the best that can be achieved by such a depiction, the past, current, and possible future state of professional academic philosophy. The moral of the story can be put in a somewhat pedantic and brash idiom if need be (as sometimes is the case): the entrenched impasse between 'Analytic' and 'Continental' philosophy is now more worthless than ever. The same can, and should, be said of other standing impasses perhaps less firmly entrenched but yet just as divisive. There is now more reason than ever to abandon the divides that separate 'Pragmatist' or 'American' philosophy from those other two constituencies just mentioned. All of these divisions are obstacles to productive philosophical work on the critical problems we face in the present, as a culture and society, as a discipline and profession, and as ethical matters we all feel the force of in intensely personal ways.

This special issue is a twofold effort according to this little story. First, it is an effort to continue building those bridges across traditional divides, according to the blueprints and

plans that have now been in place for at least a decade or two. Second, it is an effort at learning to walk across lines in a breezeless dessert without the aid of elaborate bridges, in such a way as to invite philosophical work that directly, forthrightly, and unapologetically draws on themes, topics, figures, and concepts that span artificial divisions that other philosophers continue to unproductively impose upon themselves. This little story and these two goals are not meant as a revolutionary call, a manifesto, or a program. All this is offered, much more humbly, as a description that lends some concreteness to certain efforts in philosophy that are already underway. That this work is already underway is rendered most visibly in those areas of philosophy focused on problems more than on traditions and figures: critical race theory, feminist philosophy, environmental philosophy, and many subfields in moral, social, legal, and political philosophy. It is also underway, and increasingly so, in the context of work in 'core' subfields which often take as their (perhaps unconscious) focus the body of work constituted by a tradition or a figure, or (increasingly so) traditions or figures in the plural. Further, it is underway in the context of other forms of bridgework, including most importantly cross-disciplinary engagements amongst philosophers, anthropologists, historians, sociologists, and other interlocutors conversing across familiar disciplinary divides.[1]

It is time to gain more self-consciousness about all this work we are doing. It is my hope that this collection of papers can contribute to this increasing self-consciousness.

All articles included here were written by authors who were chosen with an eye toward the excellence of their philosophical scholarship, the range of their philosophical curiosity, and above all the plurality of their own philosophical orientations. Both individually and collectively they have achieved far more than I could have hoped for. I am, as I should have expected to be, truly impressed to witness this work of their thought. Allow me, then, to tender an expression of gratitude to them for this work: thank you for the opportunity.

I shall not here attempt a gloss or summary of the papers that follow, as is a standard practice in introductions of this sort. In this case at least, the authors have provided their own abstracts, which the reader may consult. I have conceived of my editorial role as that of collection, and in many instances also that of recommendation, but not of interpretation. That is now your job, should you wish to assume it. Where the papers stand in need of interpretation, I have either asked the authors in advance of publication to clear up the difficulties in question, or I have judged these matters of interpretation appropriate to the act of reception.

Having offered something of a metaphilosophical justification for this collection, I return now to the issues of metaphilosophical methodology mentioned at the outset. I shall address these by describing two different approaches for building bridges between Foucault and Pragmatism. One approach involves taking up the task of comparative philosophy at the level of philosophical traditions. Another involves working comparatively at the level of individual thinkers. These two approaches are not incompatible but they are distinguishable and so I shall here treat them as analytically separate for the purposes of exposition.

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[1] On cross-disciplinary uses of Foucault, as well as Foucault's status across the disciplines, see my introduction to another special issue on Foucault I am presently curating, tentatively entitled "Foucault Across the Disciplines" and forthcoming in the 2011 volume of *History of the Human Sciences*.

Two Traditions: Genealogy & Pragmatism

In two books, one recent and one forthcoming, I have advanced an argument on behalf of a philosophical combination of genealogy and pragmatism.[2] The gist of my argument, forcing myself to boil the details of hundreds of pages down to a concise but not pithy formulation, can be put as follows:

Pragmatism is best seen as a forward-facing practice of philosophical critique that looks toward the responsive reconstruction of problematic situations in which we sometimes find ourselves—pragmatism teaches us to bring solutions whenever we bring problems, to focus on the meliorative attunement to difficulties at hand, and to furnish for ourselves possibilities of improvement on the basis of resources made available to us by the wider environments, in which we sometimes find ourselves blocked and bottlenecked.

Genealogy should be seen as a historical backward-facing practice of philosophical critique that looks to articulate, so as to intensify, the problematizations which condition our possibilities for doing, thinking, and being in the present. Genealogy teaches us to take our problems very seriously indeed so as to focus on the severity of the situations in which we often find ourselves rather than dissimulating ourselves with the promise of glib solutions.

According to these interpretations, it might seem as if pragmatism and genealogy would face us in opposite directions, and so have little ambition to truck with one another. However, such a conclusion could only be drawn too quickly. In fact, pragmatism and genealogy stand in need of one another. Any full-scale practice of critical inquiry requires the fulfillment of both intellectual desiderata of reconstruction and problematization—hence critical inquiry itself calls for something like pragmatism that provides a reconstructive service as well as something like genealogy that performs a diagnostic service. To perform only one of these services is to chagrin the responsibilities we have assumed in embracing the task of thought as work. We must kick up the dust, and then work to settle it again. We must meliorate in the midst of a problem, and then look hard to see what new problems we may have inadvertently facilitated.

It is not only the case that pragmatism and genealogy stand in need of one another as traditions of critical inquiry. Going even further, we can say that they also positively invite one another. This is so insofar as both traditions train the work of thought to focus on problems-and-resolutions. To put this differently, the basic categories with which both the pragmatist and the genealogist work are problems and responses, rather than, say, truth and falsity, or thesis and antithesis. Both philosophical traditions are present-centered in the mode of what R.G. Collingwood often referred to as the logic of question-and-answer. The genea-

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[2] See Colin Koopman, *Pragmatism as Transition: Historicity and Hope in James, Dewey, and Rorty* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009) and Colin Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique: Problematization and Transformation in Foucault & Others* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, forthcoming). See also my (earlier) draft review of the existing literature (through 2007) on these subjects in Colin Koopman, "Pragmatism and Genealogy: An Overview of the Literature", unpublished at *SSRN* at <http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1011513>. My project, with respect to the metaphilosophical issues discussed here, further develops work along pathways initially laid down by only a handful of others, but especially Paul Rabinow, *Anthropos Today: Reflections on Modern Equipment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) and John Stuhr, *Pragmatism, Postmodernism, and the Future of Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

logist begins in the present, with a problem inchoately sensed or felt, and works historically to expose and articulate the conditions that make the problem possible. The pragmatist also begins in the present, with a problem roughly sensed or perhaps already described in fine, and works with the future in mind to articulate and innovate practices that promise a resolution of the problematic situation.[3]

In sum, a combination of pragmatism and genealogy is exactly what is needed to accomplish what we ought to expect of ourselves as critical inquiries. Critical inquiry requires a genealogical pragmatism that knows how to diagnose as well as to anticipate, to problematize as well as to reconstruct.

Two Figures: Foucault & Dewey, or Foucault & James, or Foucault & Rorty, & c..

Having advanced in very capsule form my arguments about the *traditions* of genealogy and pragmatism as diagnostic and reconstructive respectively, allow me to turn briefly to some of the paradigmatic *figures* in virtue of which these traditions of thought are constructed. For here we can come to terms with a quite different comparative model in virtue of which we might relate the two terms that are the conceptual focus of this issue: Foucault and Pragmatism. A quick scan of the table of contents reveals that most (indeed on some reading, *all*) of the papers comprising this issue advance the comparative effort here described in terms of comparisons between philosophical figures. We have papers on Foucault and Dewey (Rabinow, Colapietro, May, Gayman), Foucault and James (Edmonds, May, Marchetti), Foucault and Follett (Pratt), Foucault and West (Stone), and Foucault and Rorty (Malecki, May). The papers themselves can better speak than I to this second of the two comparative approaches distinguished here, but a few final comments are in order so as to further elucidate some of my own claims in the previous section.

One criticism I frequently hear of the argument sketched above about the traditions of Pragmatism and Genealogy is that both traditions, in fact, show signs of a commitment to both reconstruction and problematization. It is sometimes urged, in other words, that insofar as the critic must fulfill their charge by assuming both tasks of diagnostic problem-raising and melioristic problem-solving, then the philosopher can do this wholly within the confines of the traditions of pragmatism, or genealogy. Those who identify as pragmatists frequently urge upon me their view that Dewey is not only a reconstructor, but also a problematizer. Those who identify as genealogists frequently suggest that Foucault is not only a problematizer, but also a reconstructor. This is probably true in both instances. Nevertheless, it would betray a provincialism of taste for pragmatists to reject genealogy on these terms alone, or for genealogists to ignore pragmatism for no other reason than the sense that they do not stand in need of resources, which they can already glean from their own tradition.

Further, there remains the question of distinguishing Dewey as thinker from Dewey as pragmatist, and Foucault as thinker from Foucault as genealogist. No doubt every thinker exceeds at times (perhaps oftentimes) those traditions for which they become paradigms. Locke is not in *every* instance an empiricist nor is Descartes in *all* respects a rationalist. We construct

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canons and traditions by selectively emphasizing certain elements of the great dead philosophers in virtue of which such construction is made possible.

Dewey was not *always* a pragmatist about everything. Indeed he often preferred other labels, other –isms such as instrumentalism, to name his work. Peirce firmly rejected the pragmatism label after James hijacked it. Indeed, James is the only pragmatist who seems to have been entirely comfortable with the label, with the requisite caveat that he could accept it only if he were allowed to combine it pluralistically with other –isms, including pluralism and radical empiricism. Perhaps Rorty too can be read as a pragmatist, but no pragmatist's claim to the label was ever more contested than Rorty's. He has been the subject of vociferous and continuous criticism of his credentials with respect to pragmatism.

Foucault was simply not *always* a genealogist about everything. Foucault always described himself as writing genealogies rather than as endorsing some philosophical position that might someday assume the form of an –ism. It is well known, and now widely acknowledged after many years of misleading though perhaps requisite dispute, that Foucault was also committed in the final years of his work to the task of transforming and reconstructing the terms of modern subjectivity. It is probably also the case that Foucault was always committed to this positive task of self-transformation. There is, to put it simply, a great deal in Foucault that cannot be squarely or easily comprehended under the rubric of genealogical diagnosis.

The lesson here is obvious, once you think about it: figures are not equivalent to the traditions for which they later become paradigms. It is, then, no surprise that Foucault, Dewey, James, Rorty and Nietzsche were all reconstructors and problematizers, diagnosticians and meliorists, agents of productive change as well as of unrelenting critique. This, however, does not determine our answer to two important and related questions. First, at what did they excel? Second, in virtue of what do they belong to the familiar philosophical traditions with which we so often categorize the great philosophers of the past?

Did Dewey excel at diagnosis as much as he did at reconstruction? Only the most entrenched pragmatist would take Dewey's rather amateurish intellectual histories as seriously as we ought to take the work of more contemporary intellectual and cultural historians (Foucault included), whose lives are (or were) lived in the archives. Dewey, of course, attempted something of genealogical diagnosis in many of his works. One finds a brief intellectual history of philosophy itself in the pages of *Reconstruction in Philosophy* and *The Quest for Certainty*. The middle chapters of *The Public and Its Problems* similarly take the form of a brief (all-too-brief) history of the present with respect to the conditions of political communication and interaction. Dewey was clearly committed to the work of thought known as historical diagnosis and exemplified by genealogists from Nietzsche to Foucault and beyond. But Dewey was not as successful at this form of inquiry as he was at other modalities of philosophy. Nor did he explicitly thematize it with anywhere near the degree of clarity that he thematized thought in its reconstructive mode. Dewey knew that historical problematization was important. But he knew how to show how and why reconstruction was important. The difference here is critical. For it is in virtue of this difference that we can clearly locate his primary achievement as a philosopher. It is with respect to pragmatist reconstruction that Dewey made a name, is remembered as a great philosopher, and is still read today. This is why everyone knows that Dewey is a *pragmatist* and only the most committed Dewey scholars

would even suggest that Dewey can be read as a genealogist. Perhaps he can be read that way. But what is the use of such a reading other than worshipping the feet of the master at which one sits? If one wants to do genealogy (or some other form of history compatible with a pragmatist historiography), one should perfectly well admit that this is consistent with every-thing that Dewey said about pragmatism, and was in fact thoroughly encouraged by Dewey himself. This being said, one need not insist that one can learn from Dewey everything that one ought to know about genealogy. Much of the same also holds for James and Rorty, though in their case I believe that one finds a more nuanced conception of diagnosis, self-critique, and irony than one does in any of the other pragmatists. Still, that which makes them pragmatists, that in virtue of which they continue to light fires for us today, has more to do with forward-facing reconstruction than it does to do with historical-facing genealogies. To achieve the latter, those of us immersed in the works of Dewey would do well to turn to Foucault for lessons about how to construct a historical problematization of the present.

Did Foucault accomplish as much in the context of ethical reconstruction as he is in-famous for in the context of problematizing current political and epistemic formations? Before I offer my answer, I beg the reader to note the formulation of the question. The question does not pose the possibility of an indictment of Foucault's ethics so much as it asks us to compara-tively assess the relative gravity of Foucault's achievements. Noting the formulation, then, the answer to this question, for almost every reader of Foucault outside of self-described Foucaul-*tians*, is clearly negative. Foucault is known to us as a great problematizer, a great skeptic, a famously suspicious thinker who helps us to be critical of ourselves. Nobody need deny that Foucault, at least in his later work, turned his attention to the possibilities of an ethical res-ponse to the enduring problematizations of modern powers and freedoms we find ourselves enmeshed in today. Nobody need deny that Foucault's conception of an ethics of self-trans-formative freedom promises much, especially in the midst of those modern morality systems which would ask us to reduce ethics to the formulation and following of rules, codes, and principles. Yet when it comes to specifying the specific forms that the general architecture of self-transformative freedom might take today, Foucault has offered us little more than those promises. Whether in his writings about pleasure or *parrhesia*, most of his readers have found Foucault's ethics wanting when put up against his impressive diagnostic problematization of modern moral selfhood. The most compelling line of defense for Foucault's ethics from fa-miliar charges is that they leave open the possibility of an ethical self-fashioning in the present rather than prescribing to us some particular code of action. Surely this is true, so far as it goes. And yet this insight is not Foucault's alone. Others have gone as far as Foucault, if not further, in describing how specific practices of self-transformative freedom might offer pro-mising paths for responding to some of the more intractable problematizations that condition us today. Foucault's importance was in his mode of diagnostic thinking, not in his accom-plishments in directly helping us to reconstruct the conditions in which we find ourselves today. For the latter, Foucault needs something like American pragmatism or Frankfurt cri-tical theory or Anglo-American analytic ethics in order that we might put him to work in pro-ductive ways that are anticipated, but not yet actualized, in his work.

Without Conclusion

For all that I have urged here, this is but an outline of an argument that must proceed in a fuller way elsewhere. Having only skated over the surface of that argument here, a simple but important reminder remains to be made. The biography of Foucault is not the history of genealogy, nor is an episode in the history of pragmatism the entire biography of Dewey. In comparing Foucault and Dewey (or Foucault and any other figure in the pragmatist tradition), it behooves us to compliment the entire range of thought exhibited by the thinkers in question. The papers that follow, since the terms of their comparison are more at the level of figures than of traditions, perform this task excellently.

The papers collected here thus act, in at least one respect, as an excellent counterweight to some of my own prior efforts in a comparative analysis of pragmatism and genealogy. This is even the case where my comparative efforts have proceeded, using various figures (Foucault, Williams, Dewey, Rorty) as mouthpieces for the traditions that are the primary object of scrutiny. I hasten to issue the reminder that counterweights do not cancel one another out, so much as they balance a broader edifice that might otherwise topple. The bridges we are in the midst of building will surely be elaborate just insofar as the obstacles they must weave around are many. Counterweights, placed in the most unexpected and awkward parts of the overall architecture, will accordingly be necessary. Anyone partaking in such endeavors should be in possession of humility sufficient for fostering the pluralism that is not only the goal of such bridge-building but also the methodological means by which anything of this type may come to be constructed.

The essays collected here demonstrate that the kinds of work I have been discussing make for an immensely challenging labor. For that reason, but not only that, it is an immensely rewarding labor, both when we succeed on our own terms in reconstructive fashion and also when we find ourselves confronting those problems which afford real possibilities for learning. If there is any message that is common to genealogy and pragmatism it is exactly this: there is enormous value in educating ourselves about our selves. May we always continue to learn after this fashion.[4]

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