**Introduction**

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Devoting an entire issue of this journal to the theme of “Pragmatism and the Philosophy of History” might require some explanation. Until recently, it was relatively uncommon to see these labels mentioned together.[[1]](#footnote-1) The best-known pragmatist philosophers are not philosophers of history. One looks in vain for anything like an explicit, developed philosophy of history in Peirce, James, or Dewey. Conversely, the most-discussed figures in the philosophy of history are not pragmatists. Hegel, Ranke, and Collingwood are not pragmatists; nor are Hayden White or Arthur Danto. And although some contemporary philosophers of history, such as Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen, have made use of ideas from the pragmatist tradition, these ideas tend to be just one influence among many in their eclectic bodies of work.[[2]](#footnote-2) A more serious problem, perhaps, is that pragmatism and the philosophy of history might not seem like the right sorts of things to be brought into conversation with one another. Presumably, pragmatism is a school or tradition, one that investigates all sorts of philosophical topics, while the philosophy of history is a subfield or area of inquiry that could be investigated by any number of schools. To ask what one has to do with the other might involve one of those “strange cross-classifications” lampooned by Bernard Williams when he divided cars into “front-wheel drive and Japanese.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

From another perspective, however, pragmatism and the philosophy of history have more in common than one might think. While most pragmatists are not philosophers of history, and most philosophers of history are not pragmatists, there is a surprising amount of overlap in the challenges faced by both groups. An obvious example is that pragmatism and the philosophy of history are both contested territories, with little consensus among their adherents about what the enterprises are and what they should do. Ruth Anna Putnam said in 2002 that “I do not know what it means today to be a pragmatist.”[[4]](#footnote-4) But the difficulty in pinning down the movement is actually much older, with some figures seeing it as “a thesis about meaning, reference, communication, or language,” others seeing it as “an epistemological proposal, an account of knowledge, belief, justification, inquiry, or truth,” and still others seeing it as “a metaphysical perspective, a view about reality, nature, what there is, what we should say there is, or what we should say about what natural science says there is.”[[5]](#footnote-5) The philosophy of history is similarly hard to pin down. It is split among several academic disciplines, including philosophy, history, intellectual history, and political theory. It consists of different currents that are sometimes antagonistic to one another (as with speculative and critical philosophy of history) and sometimes indifferent to one another (as has long been the case with narrativist and epistemological philosophy of history). If it is difficult to know what it means to be a pragmatist, it seems at least as difficult to know what it means to be a philosopher of history.

So there are some obvious similarities in the situations of pragmatists and philosophers of history. During the last three decades, however, their situations have converged more and more, to the point that there is a surprising amount of overlap between some of the central debates in recent pragmatism and some of the central debates in recent philosophy of history. One point of convergence concerns the usefulness of the concept of representation. A great deal of recent pragmatism takes its beginnings from Rorty’s *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, a thoroughgoing critique of the view that “to know is to represent accurately what is outside the mind” and that philosophy’s task is to “divide culture up into the areas which represent reality well, those which represent it less well, and those which do not represent it at all.”[[6]](#footnote-6) For Rorty and at least some of his defenders, to see thought as representing a mind-independent reality inevitably leads to mischief, and the only proper response is to “reject those ideas root and branch.”[[7]](#footnote-7) One of the liveliest debates in contemporary pragmatism turns on the question of whether a wholesale abandonment of representation-talk is necessary or advisable. Rorty’s student Robert Brandom, for instance, breaks with him by rejecting “global anti-representationalism,”[[8]](#footnote-8) maintaining that “it is possible to recover a notion of representation that is freed of the burdens and consequences he saw as inevitably encumbering it”[[9]](#footnote-9)—namely, by offering an “expressivist, deflationary, pragmatic account of what one is *doing* in *using* representational vocabulary.”[[10]](#footnote-10) Similar debates preoccupy recent philosophers of history, who wonder whether it is wise or even coherent to think of histories as representations of the past. Narrativist philosophers of history such as Frank Ankersmit have sought to salvage the notion of representation by reconstructing it in new terms,[[11]](#footnote-11) while post-narrativists such as Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen suggest it might be better to reject that tendency root and branch and to embrace “non-representationalism” about historical thinking.[[12]](#footnote-12)

A second point of convergence can be found in debates about the plausibility and limits of constructivism. Once we reject or qualify representationalism—either about thinking in general or about historical thinking in particular—we are left with the question of what we *are* doing when we think, or think about the past. One possibility is to say that in some sense, thinkers constitute or construct their objects of inquiry rather than mirroring them. Hayden White flirted with this sort of constructivism when he called histories “verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented* as *found*.”[[13]](#footnote-13) In the decades since White fired that salvo, philosophers of history have continued to debate the merits and demerits of constructivism, asking what, if anything, can constrain the activity of historians once representationalism is abandoned. Thus Geoffrey Elton worries that to grant such creative power to “the organizing mind of the historian… leads straight to a frivolous nihilism which allows any historian to say whatever he likes.”[[14]](#footnote-14) Others see this worry as exaggerated, with Kalle Pihlainen arguing that “constructivism is not an antirealist or ‘anything goes’ position,”[[15]](#footnote-15) and that it is far more compatible with the intuitions of practicing historians than some might think. A similar tussle between construction and constraint can be observed in recent pragmatism. The pragmatist tradition has always had a constructivist streak: one need only recall James’s lack of interest in “truth that we *find* merely,”[[16]](#footnote-16) or more recently, Rorty’s suspicions of “the very idea of human answerability to the world.”[[17]](#footnote-17) Some of the liveliest debates in pragmatism today concern how far it can go down the constructivist road before arriving at an “anything goes” relativism. Thus John McDowell has argued that in any plausible account of thought, “experience must constitute a tribunal, mediating the way our thinking is answerable to how things are,”[[18]](#footnote-18) while those more sympathetic to Rorty have countered, in David Hildebrand’s pithy formulation, that “*experience should be banned*.”[[19]](#footnote-19)

A third point of convergence between pragmatism and the philosophy of history lies in the attempt, common to both enterprises, to reconstruct the concept of objectivity. Leery of an unfettered constructivism, figures in both domains have tried to develop new views of objectivity that are free of representationalist assumptions but robust enough to keep relativism at bay. Most contemporary pragmatists seeking to reconstruct objectivity do so, as Steven Levine puts it, in “communicative-theoretic terms—i.e., in terms that can be cashed out exclusively by capacities that agents gain through taking part in linguistic communication.”[[20]](#footnote-20) Robert Brandom[[21]](#footnote-21) and Huw Price[[22]](#footnote-22) both offer accounts of this sort. For his part, Levine thinks the rehabilitation of objectivity should proceed “through *experiential theoretic* means”—that objectivity is more than “a norm of rationality embedded in our social-linguistic practices,” and that it is “emergent from our experiential interaction with the world.”[[23]](#footnote-23) A parallel debate has emerged in the philosophy of history, with thinkers such as Kuukkanen trying to redefine historical objectivity. Kuukkanen suggests that talk of historical objectivity should be replaced with talk of “object-sidedness and subject-sidedness,”[[24]](#footnote-24) since “all works of history are combinations of ‘objectifying’ and ‘subjectifying’ elements.”[[25]](#footnote-25) In his view, however, we should not fear this “sliding scale of objectivity and subjectivity,”[[26]](#footnote-26) since the decisive question is whether historians’ claims are “justified, that is, rationally warranted”[[27]](#footnote-27)—and *that* is a matter of whether they can be supported in the practices of reason-giving “shared at least among scholarly historians who… wish to produce consistent, coherent, and well-exemplifying accounts.”[[28]](#footnote-28)

In short, the present moment looks like a particularly good time to bring pragmatism and the philosophy of history into conversation. Figures in both enterprises are wrestling with similar questions, and drawing on similar resources to address them. For readers of the *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, there is every reason to think that an encounter with pragmatism might be fruitful. Our goal in this issue was to help bring about such an encounter. However, before turning to the arguments featured in the specific contributions, we have decided to include an outline of what we mean by pragmatism, including some of the distinguishing features and themes already mentioned above. The term “pragmatism” can be (and has been) used in a number of different, partially overlapping ways; therefore, it seems appropriate to provide a brief overview of some common recent uses of the term which happen to be especially pertinent to the philosophy of history.

A convenient shared point for starting such discussions is afforded by Peirce’s famous *pragmatic maxim*, originally formulated in 1878: “Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object.”[[29]](#footnote-29) However, beyond this general commitment, which itself stands in need of interpretation, there has been (as already mentioned) no real agreement, even among the classical pragmatists, regarding the exact nature of the philosophical outlook the term was intended to designate.

To begin with, there is a general (perpetually contested and evolving) sense of pragmatism’s characteristic commitments, defined with a view to continuing the work of classical pragmatists (Peirce, James, Dewey) as well as the figures essential to but heretofore marginalized by the tradition (e.g., Alain Locke, Du Bois, Jane Addams, Ella Lyman Cabot). Approached in this way, some of the defining commitments of classical pragmatism can be understood in terms of an attempt to extend the best features of modern scientific thinking to the study of philosophy in general. A concern with results rather than first principles, an interest in testable hypothesis formation, and experimental intervention are typical of this facet of classical pragmatism. Experimental exploration of novel possibilities, rather than a search for secure unassailable foundations, can be plausibly seen as one of the central distinguishing characteristics of pragmatist thought in general. The focus on *concrete processes* of inquiry and learning is also responsible for some further notable commitments: for example, pragmatists tend to espouse fallibilism, and consider all conclusions and results provisional and potentially revisable, resisting any terminal closure with respect to non-trivial questions. They tend to endorse and promote methodological pluralism, to draw attention to the perspectival nature of knowledge, and to encourage reflexivity concerning the cognitive, moral, and political effects of different regimes of representation. Because pragmatists are generally inclined to understand knowledge as a product of finite human research practices, they display a propensity to interpret objectivity in terms of (idealized) intersubjective agreement of properly motivated and qualified discussants, emphasizing explicitly the inevitable social dimension of all cognitive, epistemic undertakings.

This, in turn, brings us back to the experimental dimension of pragmatism, which, in Robert Brandom’s words, sees representing and intervening as correlated phases in the dynamic process of developing a practical understanding of the world *as adaptation*.[[30]](#footnote-30) To put it otherwise, pragmatists are interested in the role that thought can play in the experimental determination of proper conduct, including both cognitive principles and guiding values that inform the more promising strategies for coping with the surrounding world. Hence, their typical insistence on the moderately holistic unity of the normative: on the *interpenetration*, to use Hilary Putnam’s term, of fact, value, and theory.[[31]](#footnote-31) The content of our encounters with the world, on this view, is never a mere “given” but is a product of consecutive active attempts to extract some potentially valuable lessons from these encounters. Hence the answers that we end up affirming cannot be appropriately construed as passive reflections or mirror-like representations of a pre-existing “given;” instead, they are always essentially co-determined by our interests, our values, our methods and epistemic resources, by the problems that we consider worth posing and solving. Our pictures of the world, therefore, must be understood as hypothetical theoretical fallible constructions, produced in response to our specifically favored modes of *questioning the world*, deriving whatever validity they may enjoy from the testing of their practically verifiable consequences. Most, although not all, pragmatists understand this process of learning through selective experimental engagement with experience as a quintessentially social, communal, historically unfolding endeavor. Therefore, at the forefront of pragmatism’s moral and political concerns, one can often find a preoccupation with forming a better kind of community with diverse individuals and groups having adequate access to appropriate opportunities for self-actualization in pursuit of worthwhile interests, values and goals. This dimension of social hope is usually captured in pragmatism’s characteristic commitment to meliorism: a belief that, although all progress is contingent, we are right to generally trust in the possibility of a substantial improvement of human life by finite intelligent and well-meaning efforts.

In addition to pragmatism, it is common these days to speak of neo-pragmatism, or the current strain of pragmatist thinking shaped profoundly by analytic philosophy’s post-positivist linguistic turn. This tradition owes as much (perhaps more) to thinkers like Quine, Davidson, and Wittgenstein as it does to classical pragmatist sources; and its present emphasis on systematic pragmatics (the study of the *use* of linguistic expressions) seems to bear a closer resemblance, prima facie, to David Lewis’ discussions of scorekeeping in a language game or Robert Stalnaker’s more recent discussions of “common ground” than to anything one can find in the work of the classical pragmatists. Richard Rorty can probably be rightly regarded as the patron saint of the tradition and the author of the principal lines of its enabling historical narrative; with Robert Brandom being undoubtedly its (by far) most influential and articulate proponent at present. Brandom’s version of pragmatism shares with the classical pragmatists the Kantian emphasis on the central role of judgment (or interpretation) in the constitution of knowledge. In fact, he can be credited with making explicit (following Rorty’s lead) the conceptual import of the original pragmatism’s constructivist and anti-representational tendencies. Representation, in Brandom’s view, is not a matter of capturing or matching some antecedent content by reference to which the accuracy of the resulting representation can be confirmed. Instead, it is a matter of learning how to engage in practices the skillful execution of which entitles one to rightfully claim to have engaged in a successful representation.[[32]](#footnote-32) In other words, the rules of successfully representing can only be derived retrospectively and tentatively from successful (broadly) representational practices.

This reversal accords well with Brandom’s programmatic prioritizing of pragmatics over semantics,[[33]](#footnote-33) or of *knowing how* over *knowing what*. For him, concepts in general must be understood in terms of the contribution they make to the content of judgments,[[34]](#footnote-34) with the notion of conceptual content always understood as a function of a normative theory of conceptual activity.[[35]](#footnote-35) “Explicit theoretical beliefs,” Brandom claims, “can be made intelligible only against a background of implicit practical abilities.”[[36]](#footnote-36) What distinguishes his view from more conventional pragmatist approaches is Brandom’s seemingly exclusive focus on linguistic,[[37]](#footnote-37) discursive abilities and practices, or at least on practices that can be closely modelled on discursive and linguistic ones. The traditional pragmatist emphasis on experience and learning as the conditions of intelligent purposeful conduct in the world is here, accordingly, replaced with the metaphor of a language game, in which conduct is primarily understood in terms of the discursive commitments, entitlements, and moves made within the argumentative context of the game of giving and asking for reasons. Brandom’s pragmatist angle, then, consists in maintaining that the rule-following implicit in such language games is best understood, in the first instance, as a practical ability as opposed to a formal-theoretical one.

Finally, it is worth briefly mentioning yet another, narrower sense of pragmatism, recently used specifically in the discussions of philosophy of historiography. In the most basic terms it amounts to the claim that the epistemic norms of historical inquiry cannot be deduced on purely philosophical grounds without consulting the actual practice of professional historians whose implicit and explicit commitments as a research community should form the primary ground of every appropriate pertinent philosophical reflection.[[38]](#footnote-38) While this view has some palpable affinities with the dominant senses of pragmatism mentioned above, it is much more modest in scope and can be defended without a necessary appeal to an overall pragmatist philosophical orientation. Once again, within pragmatist discourse in general, common themes and points of conceptual overlap yield no more than an outline of the shared structure of conceptual commitments, with differences between the various strands of the tradition often giving rise to principled and intransigent disagreements. If one were, nevertheless, to try and pinpoint a common theme in the pragmatist-leaning approaches to history and the knowledge of the past, one might focus perhaps most plausibly on the notion of the *interpretive indeterminacy* of the past, as conceived in its living contact and relationship with the still-evolving present. The past, in other words, is not seen by pragmatists as a sealed-off and finished compartment of reality whose contents need to be catalogued and occasionally monumentalized for all eternity. It is seen instead as a constitutive moment in a transition to the open-ended future, as a party to the dialogical exchanges conducted in the present regarding what we are to make of ourselves (and of our past). Here one may think appropriately about the contrast once drawn by William James between pragmatism and traditional rationalism: the latter regards reality as “*ready-made and complete from all eternity*,” while for the former “*it is still in the making, and awaits part of its complexion from the future*.”[[39]](#footnote-39) Perhaps something similar could be said *mutatis mutandis* about the pragmatist attitude towards the reality of the past.

It is probably unsurprising, therefore, that the relationship to the past from the perspective of the present has emerged as one of the recurrent, unifying themes in the otherwise rather different contributions to this volume. None of the authors appear to contest the basic constructivist pragmatist insight that the past is necessarily engaged with in the language of the present and in light of its perceived problems; instead, their critical discussion focuses on questioning the normative status of our present perspective and the tendency, in the name of privileging the present and the future, to forget or elide the past when engaging with it becomes ideologically inconvenient. For example, Elizabeth Portella, in discussing Dewey’s historical treatment of liberalism, argues that in this case, Dewey appears to have forgotten his own warning that narratives of the sort he was proposing tend to perpetuate their own implicit conceptual presuppositions, which then stand in need of an explicit articulation and rational questioning. Insofar as the presuppositions of the narrative he offers are also political, the narrative itself becomes an ideological vehicle for “the very mode of uncritical historical reproduction which [Dewey’s] philosophy ostensibly cautions against.” On Portella’s view, this special instance points to a more general and insidious issue: namely, before writing history not only from the perspective of but also *in the interest of the present*, we may want to have some principled way of deciding whether the particular interests of the present are *legitimate*. In other words, Portella suggests that pragmatist philosophy of history stands in urgent need of a theory of critical reflection on the normative status of the present and its needs, and she thinks that in developing such a theory, pragmatism would have to “critically and self-consciously inquire into its [own] relation to history.”

This concern with the normative status of our present needs can be further elucidated in light of the distinction introduced by Marnie Binder between “the useful” and the humanly “significant”: a distinction that classical pragmatists frequently neglect to articulate. Usefulness is relative to interests, and our interests, once again, may prove illegitimate or legitimate, trivial or momentous, admirable or despicable. To the extent that present interests are indiscriminately taken to have equal claims on our engagements with the past, the writing of history stands in danger of becoming an acritical mechanism for perpetuating our present concerns, present values, present notions of usefulness and significance, present power relationships, including the present relationships of oppression. This acritical attitude, then, Portella argues, may prevent us from thinking about our present and future in terms of a genuine transformation, resulting in the unwelcome possibility of “entrapment in the dominant views of a particular historical moment.”

The theme of entrapment is further developed in Corey McCall’s paper, as he calls into question the pragmatist tendency to elude the burden of the past, by simply revising it to fit the perceived requirements of the present moment. Specifically, he draws attention to the conspicuous failure on the part of the classical pragmatists to engage in any substantial manner with America’s prominent history of slavery and racial oppression. Here, the inability to engage with the “inconvenient” past, which may dampen the optimistic mood of the present, results in a willful blindness both moral and epistemic. Excluding the past from the conversation of the present does not make it go away; like Bonnie Sheehey in her paper on the crisis of temporality in William James, McCall here emphasizes what Sheehey calls the “persistence of history” by which we are shaped. Hence, he cites James Baldwin to remind us that until the history that has shaped us is understood, we cannot be released from its pernicious influence. Like a trauma concealed in a neurotic consciousness, the unrequited past continues to manifest itself in symptomatic distortions of our historical narratives and, more importantly, our everyday conduct towards others. In McCall’s view, Dewey, who had done so much to expose and criticize the rationalist epistemic need for certainty and integration, ascribing it to a misplaced psychological need for existential security, has also managed to overlook, surprisingly, how a similar need for security, both emotional and political, guides the historical impulse towards narrative normative integration, *despite the past.*

Sheehey’s paper on the temporality of crisis derived from the writings of William James takes up once again, in the spirit of James Baldwin and Walter Benjamin, the imperative need to come to terms with historical experiences of trauma, tragedy, and irreparable loss, all too frequently overlooked by the pragmatist progress-oriented mentality. Thus, while pragmatists generally acknowledge the contingency of progress, their melioristic disposition (“hope in the future possibility of moral and social improvement”) urges them to press on without dwelling too much on the present and its relationship to the past, since both present and past are meant to be superseded in a melioristic striving for the future. Sheehey, on the contrary, argues for what she calls the temporality of crisis, the model for which is derived from the psychological writings of William James. The intention of her argument is to affirm “ambiguity at the heart of hope insofar as it assumes an uncertainty toward the quality or direction of change.” In this sense, Sheehey’s conception of crisis may be seen as related to another one, made familiar at the start of the twentieth century by Husserl, whose conception of historical cultural crisis has been actually described by David Carr in terms of a “medical metaphor” where “the patient in crucial condition may live or die;” except, unlike Husserl, Sheehey has no intention of rescuing us from the crisis by an appeal to some transcendentalized notion of humanity’s destiny, abstracted (effectively) from the historical progressivist project of the enlightenment. Instead, she sees the moment of crisis as an opportunity to reckon with the past, to attend to it, to avow it; and, through undertaking this critical reflection on the present by means of a renewed conscientious examination of the past, to develop a sense for the “the profound insecurity of life” which contains both “redemptive possibilities and irredeemable losses.” Similarly to McCall, Sheehey also draws attention to the troubling relationship between progressive pragmatism’s drive towards narrative integration aimed at obtaining a false sense of security and the historical contexts of oppression, discrimination, and cruelty within which such visions of progress have been known to thrive. Their joint perspectives, then, are liable to make us more suspicious, by casting them in a new light, of pragmatist accounts (e.g. Richard Rorty’s) arguing for the permissibility of an optimistic rewriting of the past as a story of progress despite the trenchant resistance of those who hesitate “to identify the meaning of life with getting what we want, with imposing our will.”[[40]](#footnote-40)

The problem of historical appropriation, of telling the history of the past as the history of a “pragmatist’s progress,”[[41]](#footnote-41) is tackled, in a somewhat different context, in Yael Gazit’s discussion of Robert Brandom’s relationship to the history of philosophy. Brandom’s defense of the legitimacy of pragmatist appropriation as an interpretive strategy in dealing with philosophy’s intellectual history, on Gazit’s view, follows his inferentialist analysis of judgment: to make a judgment (for Brandom) is to rationally integrate new commitments (concepts) into our existing ones by following certain norms of integration. The content of past thought, therefore, can be re-constituted or played out against different inferential backgrounds by being properly integrated into them in accordance with the interpreter’s own philosophical commitments—as long, that is, as the interpreter is forthcoming about the commitments that have shaped her interpretation. The real measure of the interpretation’s worth, then, does not consist in its proximity to the original inferential context of the historical author but in its demonstrated ability to gain acceptance within a contemporary (intellectual) social structure, held together by the shared normative attitudes and commitments of its participants.

Gazit’s paper offers an overall sympathetic treatment of Brandom’s appropriation strategy and its aspiration to produce “as many historical stories as we can” in the course of our engagement with the past. While defying the norms of the less radical approaches to interpretations, such appropriations (as evidenced, for example, by Richard Rorty’s and Brandom’s own work) can substantially enrich philosophical discourse through the introduction of new interesting readings and intellectual possibilities. Furthermore, it seems reasonable to suppose that Brandom’s inferentialist account of pragmatics can supply a very compelling model for analysis of argumentative discourse, including the professional discourse of historiography.[[42]](#footnote-42) However, the difficulties already raised with respect to pragmatism’s relationship to history in general still apply to Brandom’s account. Brandom’s appropriation still remains at heart a strategy of narrative stabilization through inferential integration. As Gazit argues, Brandom may enable us to make sense theoretically of the possibility of an interpretation being wrong, yet he does not provide any concrete conceptual tools for determining when our own overall attitudes and commitments (as opposed to specific commitments and attitudes) happen to be genuinely misguided. Because of this, on Gazit’s view, Brandom’s strategy of interpretation “achieves only self-confirmation,” and remains incapable of effecting “a deep normative change, for such a change must be governed by norms that lie beyond its reach.”

Given these concerns, it may be appropriate to question a) the degrees of similarity and difference that obtain between the discourse of history and philosophical-literary discourse with which much of pragmatist thinking has traditionally been concerned, and b) the relationship, in general, between the academic discourse of the humanities and wider social, political, and cultural discourse. History, as a process, is not merely shaped by our historiographical interpretations; it has shaped and continues to shape who we are, including (among other things) the way in which we interpret our past: the ways in which we are inclined to appropriate history may themselves be the outcome of the ways we have already been appropriated by it. Our argumentative language-games tend to unfold against the background of the language-games of power, with which history as a discipline cannot help but be concerned. Insofar as pragmatism in general has been concerned with developing a conceptual framework for thinking about how ideas and ideals accrue meaning in history by transforming our social practices, insofar as it has been oriented towards the experimental articulation of novel human possibilities of thought and action, it cannot responsibly avoid the engagement with practical political realities of history, emphasizing the importance of Cornel West’s contention that pragmatism must be now “inextricably linked to oppositional analyses of class, race, and gender and oppositional movements for creative democracy and social freedom."[[43]](#footnote-43) This, of course, does not mean abandoning constructivism and anti-representationalism in favor of a “deeper contact” with some mythical historical *given*; what it indicates instead is an urgent need for a *re-construction* in the light of a renewed critical awareness of the normative status of our own historically formed presuppositions. After all, historical narratives, as Kalle Pihlainen points out, constitute the “prime vehicles for perpetuating received ideologies,”[[44]](#footnote-44) making the analysis of historical “constructedness of all sense and meaning … first and foremost an ethical-political issue.”[[45]](#footnote-45)

Already implicated in this critical discussion of the pragmatist theories of *historical judgment*, is the pressing need for contemporary pragmatist thought to develop (the heretofore absent) substantial engagement with philosophy of history. “There is no explicitly developed theory of history among the classic pragmatists,” points out Joseph Margolis provocatively; “worse still, there is no sustained discussion of history among them: nearly every summary ventured is a third person’s interpretive analysis or gloss of scattered remarks cited from one or another of the original authors.” The surprising nature of this (arguably) momentous omission starts to come into view as we consider Oretga-y-Gasset’s critique of the lack of historical consciousness in earlier pragmatism, as critically examined in the essay by Marnie Binder. Ortega, according to Binder, argues that although history *is* necessarily a history of human perspectives, a mere proliferation of such perspectives in response to the interests of the present does not constitute an adequate understanding of history: some perspectives prove to be central, significant, enduring; while others are eventually recognized as trivial, passing, or misguided. An adequate philosophy of history, then, depends on the philosophically interpreted history of the human understanding of reality. The reason that we need such philosophy of history, in turn, itself consists in the historicity of human thinking, rendering an adequate philosophy of history indispensable for a responsible reflection on the nature and genesis of our guiding normative principles and intuitions, both ethical and cognitive. The insistence on our historicity, as Binder puts it, is meant to highlight the fact that “we do not have a nature because history *is* our nature when we define our historicity as our hereditary past by broadening [the meaning of] “hereditary” beyond the biological.”

According to a powerful argument which forms the core of Margolis’ paper (following the introductory discussion of Mead), “human consciousness proper is characterized by historicity from the outset,” i.e. from the moment when the internalization of a fully constituted natural language (developed somehow in the course of the prior *biological* or *natural* *history* of the species) transformed “the primate (infant) homo sapiens” into a self or a person “reflexively occupied with its own integral history.” This moment of the internalization of the natural language, the moment of entry into history proper, according to Margolis, “signifies what amounts to an ontological change, since it yields, in maturing, an immensely absorbing interior mental life accessible to reflexive thought and reportage.” According to Margolis, acknowledging the essential historicity of the human nature thus understood precludes the pragmatists from theorizing any core constitutive interests or obligations (including the putative obligations to the transcendentally or rationalistically posited *reason*) that would transcend or antedate history itself. Nor can such a priori intuitions about what constitutes rationality be shored up by the *ad hoc* invocations of the presently popular *naturalizing* maneuvers, metaphorically assimilating the processes of cultural growth to the selectional structure of biological evolution of the species.[[46]](#footnote-46) Instead, what is required, in order to produce a philosophically responsible critical account of the principal norms that guide (or have previously guided) our judgment, is a sustainable pragmatist (provisionalist, fallibilist, perspectivalist) account of how viable forms of consciousness develop (and devolve) in history, considered thoroughly in close connection with the pragmatic “mundane” interests of the concretely instantiated forms of historical life. Joseph Margolis’ impressive body of work, in both pragmatism and philosophy of history, requires no introduction; and so, considering the exceptional expertise of the author, the best we can do as editors is step aside and yield the floor to him. First, however, we would like to express, once again, our sincere gratitude to the authors of all the submissions we have received, including those that for the usual logistical reasons could not be included in the present issue.

1. One sign of increased interest in the links between the two is the appearance, in 2016, of a special issue of the *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, edited by Roberto Gronda and Tullio Viola, on the theme “Pragmatism and the Writing of History.” See *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* [Online] 8:2 (2016). Accessed 23 July 2019. URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/ejpap/611>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See, for example, Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen, *Postnarrativist Philosophy of Historiography* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), especially Chapters Four and Eight. Kuukkanen embraces the eclecticism mentioned here, calling *Postnarrativist Philosophy of Historiography* “an eclectic mix of theoretical influences” that “should not be seen as propagating any single existing tradition” (3). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Bernard Williams, “Contemporary Philosophy: A Second Look,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy*, 2nd ed., ed. Nicholas Bunnin and E.P. Tsui-James (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ruth Anna Putnam, “Taking Pragmatism Seriously,” in Hilary Putnam and Ruth Anna Putnam, *Pragmatism as a Way of Life: The Lasting Legacy of William James and John Dewey*, ed. David Macarthur (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Robert Talisse and Scott Aikin, *Pragmatism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2008), 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Robert Brandom, “Global Anti-Representationalism?” in Huw Price, Simon Blackburn, Robert Brandom, Paul Horwich, and Michael Williams, *Expressivism, Pragmatism, and Representationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid., 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid., 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid., 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See, for example, Frank Ankersmit, *Historical Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); and Frank Ankersmit, *Meaning, Truth, and Reference in Historical Representation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Kuukkanen, *Postnarrativist Philosophy of Historiography*, 64. It should be noted that Kuukkanen does not characterize his position as “‘antirepresentationalist,’ even though [his] intention is to outline a non-representationalist account of historiography with regard to its most important scholarly products” (65). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Hayden White, “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact,” in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Geoffrey Elton, *Return to Essentials: Some Reflections on the Present State of Historical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Kalle Pihlainen, *The Work of History: Constructivism and a Politics of the Past* (New York: Routledge, 2017), xxi. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. William James, *Pragmatism*, in *William James: Writings 1902-1910*, ed. Bruce Kuklick (New York: The Library of America, 1987), 515. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Richard Rorty, “The Very Idea of Human Answerability to the World: John McDowell’s Version of Empiricism,” in *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers, Volume 3* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. John McDowell, *Mind and World, With a New Introduction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), xii. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. David Hildebrand, “Introduction,” *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* [Online] 6:2 (2014), 7. Accessed 7 May 2019. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ejpap/277>. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Steven Levine, *Pragmatism, Objectivity, and Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See, for example, Robert Brandom, *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), Chapter Eight. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See, for example, Huw Price, “Truth as Convenient Friction,” in *Naturalism Without Mirrors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 63-183. Price’s argument in this paper is actually concerned with truth rather than objectivity, but it resembles Brandom’s account in its insistence that “a norm stronger than justification… plays an essential role in a linguistic practice of great importance to us” (182-183). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Levine, *Pragmatism, Objectivity, and Experience*, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Kuukkanen, *Postnarrativist Philosophy of Historiography*, 173. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid., 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid., 172. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid., 195. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Ibid., 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Charles Sanders Peirce, “How to Make Our Ideas Clear,” in *The Essential Peirce*, Volume 1, ed. Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Robert Brandom, *Perspectives on Pragmatism: Classical, Recent, and Contemporary* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Hilary Putnam, *Pragmatism: An Open Question* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1995), 57, 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Brandom, *Perspectives on Pragmatism*, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Ibid., 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Ibid., 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Ibid., 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Compare Brandom, *Perspectives on Pragmatism*, 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Marek Tamm defended a version of this view in generalized terms in “Truth, Objectivity and Evidence in History Writing,” *Journal of the Philosophy of History 8* (2014) 265–290, and Paul Roth’s analytic philosophy of history has been described as pragmatic in a similar sense by Serge Grigoriev in “A Pragmatist Critique of Dogmatic Philosophy of History,” *Poznan Studies in the Philosophy of the Sciences and Humanities* 110 (2017): 95-115. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. James, *Pragmatism*, 599. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Richard Rorty,"Heidegger, Contingency, and Pragmatism" in *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers, Volume 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 27-49, 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. See Richard Rorty, “The Pragmatist’s Progress: Umberto Eco on Interpretation” in his *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin, 1999) . [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. See, for example, Kuukkanen, *Postnarrativist Philosophy of Historiography*, Chapter Eight. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 210. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Pihlainen, *The Work of History*, 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Ibid., xxii. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. In lieu of empirical justification, such metaphors are groundless and, given the prima facie differences between biological and cultural mechanisms of reproduction, inheritance, selection, and transmission, potentially misleading. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)