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Recovering Pragmatism's Practicality: Four Views

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ABSTRACT: In this paper, I evaluate three views of philosophical pragmatism's practical implications for academic and non-academic or public discourses, as well as offer my own view of those implications. The first view is that of George Novack. In an underappreciated tract, *Pragmatism versus Marxism*, the American Trotskyite and union organizer launched a vicious attack on John Dewey's career as a professional philosopher. He alleged that Dewey's ideas were inaccessible to all but a small community of fellow academicians. While Novack conceded that Dewey's philosophical inquiries had a cross-pollinating influence on other academic fields, he doubted that the beneficial products of those inquiries traveled far beyond the walls of the so-called 'ivory tower.' Larry Hickman offers a second view. He understands Dewey's claim in *Experience and Nature* that philosophy serves as a "liaison officer" to mean that philosophers should provide a common lexicon that translates between the languages of distinct disciplines. In other words, for Dewey, the role of philosophy, including philosophical pragmatism, is to facilitate interdisciplinarity. Since interdisciplinary sharing is usually confined to academic discourse, Novack's challenge is perfectly compatible with Hickman's interpretation of Dewey's 'liaison officer' claim. Both Novack and Hickman are mistaken, though in different degrees and for different reasons. The third, and more promising, view is advanced by Robert Talisse. He cites the life and works of Sidney Hook, one of Dewey's better-known students, as an exemplary case of a pragmatist who consistently realized his pragmatic commitments in public discourse. The most important reason for qualifying Hickman's interpretation of Dewey's 'liaison officer' claim is that the measure of pragmatism's value is not solely the ability of pragmatists to facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration, but their ability to also insert their ideas into public discourse. In my view, philosophical pragmatists, and philosophers generally, should both facilitate interdisciplinarity in academic discourse and introduce philosophical notions into public discourse—that is, serve in the dual capacity of interdisciplinary scholar and public intellectual.

If his [Dewey's] intellectual interests were centered on academic philosophy, they radiated widely into other fields. –G. Novack¹

[P]hilosophy as a critical organ becomes in effect a messenger, a liaison officer, making reciprocally intelligible voices speaking provincial tongues, and thereby enlarging as well as rectifying the meaning with which they are charged. –J. Dewey²

In this paper, I evaluate three views of philosophical pragmatism's practical implications for academic and non-academic or public discourses, as well as offer my own view of those implications. The first view is that of George Novack. In an underappreciated tract, *Pragmatism versus Marxism*, the American Trotskyite and union organizer launched a vicious attack on John Dewey's career as a professional philosopher. He alleged that Dewey's ideas were inaccessible to all but a small community of fellow academicians. While Novack conceded that Dewey's philosophical inquiries had a cross-pollinating influence on other academic fields, he doubted that the beneficial products of those inquiries traveled far beyond the walls of the so-called 'ivory tower.' Larry Hickman offers a second view. He understands Dewey's claim in *Experience and Nature* that philosophy serves as a "liaison officer" to mean that philosophers should provide a common lexicon that translates between the languages of distinct disciplines. In other words, for Dewey, the role of philosophy, including philosophical pragmatism, is to facilitate interdisciplinarity. Since interdisciplinary sharing is usually confined to academic discourse, Novack's challenge is perfectly compatible with Hickman's interpretation of Dewey's 'liaison officer' claim. Both Novack and Hickman are mistaken, though in different degrees and for different reasons. The third, and more promising, view is advanced by Robert Talisse. He cites the life and works of Sidney Hook, one of Dewey's better-known students, as an exemplary case of a pragmatist who consistently realized his pragmatic commitments in public discourse. The most important reason for qualifying Hickman's interpretation of Dewey's 'liaison officer' claim is that the measure of pragmatism's value is not solely the ability of pragmatists to facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration, but their ability to also insert their ideas into public discourse. In my view, philosophical pragmatists, and philosophers generally, should both facilitate interdisciplinarity in academic discourse and introduce philosophical notions into public discourse—that is, serve in the dual capacity of interdisciplinary scholar and public intellectual.

In terms of organization, the paper contains five sections. In the first section, I present Novack's critique of Dewey's career as an academic philosopher. The second section is devoted to reconstructing a Deweyan response to Novack's challenge as well as canvassing Hickman's exegesis of Dewey's claim that philosophy's function is to serve as a liaison officer. In the third section, I argue for a more expansive, and what I think is an improved, interpretation of what Dewey's 'liaison officer' claim means. The penultimate section examines Robert Talisse's account of Sidney Hook's career as a pragmatist and public intellectual. In the conclusion, I articulate my own view of the proper role of philosophy and philosophical pragmatism in academic and non-academic discourses.

¹ Novack (1975), 52.

² Dewey (1996), LW 1:306. Citations follow the conventional method, LW (Later Works) or MW (Middle Works) or Early Works (EW), volume: page number.

Novack's Challenge

Novack had a debt to pay to his mentor, Leon Trotsky, and it was one motivated by the concern that Dewey's pragmatism posed a substantial threat to Trotsky's brand of Marxism. He was encouraged by the revolutionary Marxist to "undertake a Marxist critique of the pragmatic method."³ Dewey chaired the Commission in Mexico that exonerated Trotsky of the charges he was earlier convicted of at the Russian Show Trials. While Dewey had been friendly to Trotsky, the two engaged in a brief debate in the late 1930s that revealed some fundamental differences in their two philosophies.⁴ Novack was faithfully allied with his fellow Marxist and mentor to the end. He served as the secretary to Trotsky during the Commission's inquiry. He contributed to the debate with Dewey on Trotsky's side. And he carried on a correspondence with Trotsky until his death. It is therefore unsurprising that Novack would heed the advice of Trotsky and write a book criticizing Dewey's philosophy from a Marxist perspective. However, it would not be until the mid-1970s, over fifteen years after Dewey's death and thirty-five years since Trotsky's assassination, that Novack would finally repay his debt to Trotsky with the publication of *Pragmatism versus Marxism: An Appraisal of John Dewey's Philosophy*. In the short and long term, its reception was relatively muted.⁵

For the purpose of this paper, what is noteworthy in Novack's work is his criticism of Dewey's career. In the third chapter, "From Puritanism to Pragmatism," the author retraces the development of American thought from colonial to modern times, paying close attention to the way in which philosophy became increasingly professionalized. By the late nineteenth century, he notes, "teaching philosophy offered a reputable and secure, if not lucrative, life work." Employing the Marxist method, Novack reveals the material conditions under which America's homegrown philosophy, pragmatism, developed. He criticizes the process by which free thinkers became professional scholars, particularly for the tendency among administrators and university presidents to subordinate philosophy to the exigencies of "free trade" and capitalist enterprise. With the segregation of universities into departments by subject areas, "academic philosophers sought a private province which they, as specialists, could cultivate as their own." Thus began the growth of a chasm between the ordinary life of Americans and the life of the professional philosopher. According to Novack, philosophy "became pedantic and genteel, shrinking from controversy [,] . . . obsessed with the traditional difficulties of its own past and fussed over its special techniques, slighting the great social and scientific questions of the time."⁶ While pragmatists went some way towards attempting to return philosophy to the concerns of ordinary life, the pull of professionalization was unforgiving.

Dewey was no less a product of his times. Novack writes:

He [i.e., John Dewey] was one of the first Americans to prepare himself for an academic

³ Novack (1975), 3.

⁴ Trotsky, Dewey and Novack (1969); Dewey (1996), LW 13:349-355; Ralston (2007).

⁵ Fortunately, at least one review of the book was positive: "Novack shows convincingly that on many fundamentals Dewey's philosophy is incompatible with Marxism." Milton Fisk (1977), 269.

⁶ Novack (1975), 51-2.

career as a philosopher, and from the beginning to the end of this career it was primarily to an audience of professional philosophers that he directed his arguments.⁷

Although Novack acknowledges that Dewey's ideas about education, psychology, politics, and other subjects diffused broadly into a host of other disciplines (or as he writes, "radiated widely into other fields"), he claims that the beneficiaries were limited to a small circle of fellow academics. So, on Novack's account, Dewey's philosophy never affected the lives of ordinary people, or those outside of academia, whether teachers, clinicians, policy-makers or other day-to-day practitioners of the arts and trades.

A Deweyan Response

Most mainstream Dewey scholars enthusiastically defend John Dewey's credentials as a public intellectual. Still, they have either ignored or overlooked Novack's argument that the results of Dewey's inquiries were fit solely for a small circle of fellow academics. With the narrowing of philosophy's function to a peculiarly professional enterprise, Dewey was unable to bridge between his academic interests and the everyday affairs of ordinary people. So, he could not convince them of the value of the pragmatic method in its application to a wide range of non-academic concerns.⁸ Since no direct response to Novack's challenge can be found in the literature, one will have to be reconstructed here. Following this reconstruction, I present Hickman's interpretation of Dewey's 'liaison officer' claim and identify a problem in its scope.

The Reconstruction

Overall, Novack's critique of John Dewey's career will strike the orthodox Dewey scholar as faulty. It questions the authenticity of Dewey's stated concern with "the problems of men" without providing evidence of disinterest. Moreover, it underestimates the practical utility of the pragmatic method for addressing those self-same problems. Dewey wrote a multitude of articles tackling the social and political issues of his day, applying the pragmatic method in a manner that was accessible to average citizens and, it is possible to speculate, swayed public opinion. These included his involvement in the Outlawry of War Movement, chairing the Trotsky Commission and authoring a series of articles criticizing the policies of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and opposing his re-election.⁹ Finally, Novack's attack on Dewey's career ignores the pragmatist's many involvements

⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁸ More recently, Robert Talisse has echoed this criticism: "[A]s Dewey's own career demonstrates, philosophers are not necessarily particularly deft when it comes to public policy analysis." Talisse (2007), 114.

⁹ On the outlawry of war involvement, see Dewey (1996), "If Law Were Outlawed," MW 15:110-5, "What Outlawry of War Is Not," MW 15:115-22, "War and a Code of Law," MW 15:122-128. On the Trotsky affair, see Dewey (1996), "Significance of the Trotsky Inquiry," LW 11:330-336 and Farrell (1950). On his opposition to F.D. Roosevelt, see Dewey (1996), "Democracy Joins the Unemployed," LW 6:239-46, "Prospect for a Third Party," LW 6:246-253 and "After the Election—What?" LW 6:253-257. For summaries and commentary of Dewey's involvements in these

in civic-minded groups and activist organizations addressing the issues of his day, from serving as a charter member of the New York Teachers Union and the American Civil Liberties Union to his research on the Polish question, to mention only a few.¹⁰ Notwithstanding this reconstructed response, Novack's critique to the effect that Dewey's ideas never found much reception beyond the walls of the 'ivory tower' remains unchecked by contemporary Dewey scholars.

Though he might agree with my reconstructed response, Larry Hickman interprets Dewey's claim that philosophy fulfills the role of a liaison officer in a way that falters in the face of Novack's challenge. He understands Dewey's claim to mean that philosophy should serve as an intermediary, a translator, and a facilitator for interdisciplinary communication. According to Hickman, Dewey "indicated his view that one of the most important functions of philosophy was to act as a liaison officer, rendering the languages of these various disciplines intelligible to one another."¹¹ If this is its meaning, then the non-philosopher would likely recoil at the hubris of Dewey's claim, namely, that a professional philosopher would have the audacity to pretend that she could accomplish the herculean task of constructing an interdisciplinary lexicon.¹² However, my concern is not to defend Dewey's claim against this kind of objection. Rather, it is to appreciate how Hickman's interpretation affords the critic an opportunity to insist, as Novack does, that while the professionalization of philosophy has indeed bequeathed it an interdisciplinary mission, it has also insulated the discipline from the concerns of average persons. As we shall see, while Hickman's interpretation is *perfectly* consistent with Dewey's comparisons of philosophy with a liaison officer, it is also, unfortunately, *perfectly* compatible with, and thus lacks the resources to check, Novack's challenge.¹³

Philosophy's Liaison Function Reconsidered

So, what did Dewey mean in asserting that philosophy should serve as a "liaison officer"? One possibility is Larry Hickman's interpretation, namely, that the philosopher is especially well equipped to translate between linguistic and conceptual conventions of diverse disciplinary discourses. Besides the slight conceit that this interpretation betrays (i.e., that philosophers *alone* have the training appropriate to fulfill this translation function), Hickman's interpretation has the prominent disadvantage of permitting Novack's objection to stand, if not gain traction. In other words, Hickman's exegesis of the 'liaison officer' claim does not block, and to some extent encourages, the objection that exposure to Dewey's philosophical insights was limited to the members of the academy, and never percolated into the ideational brew of the wider society.

matters, see Westbrook (1991), 26-274, 480-482, 449, 451, 458, and A. Ryan (1995), 212-5, 247-8, 292-4.

10 On Dewey's contributions to these organizations and causes, see Eldridge (2002), Zerby (1975) and Dewey (1996), "Confidential Report of Conditions Among the Poles in the United States," MW 11:259-331. For summaries and commentary, see Westbrook (1991), 479, 278, 214-223, and Ryan (1995), 295-7, 169, 172-3, 198-9, 207.

11 Hickman (2007), 62.

12 Mike Howard suggested this insightful point.

13 In a personal conversation with Hickman, he stated that he does agree with this more expansive interpretation of Dewey's liaison officer claim. Nevertheless, as Hickman interprets the claim in his essay, it is restricted to the thesis that philosophy should solely facilitate interdisciplinarity.

Improving on Hickman's account demands that we take a closer look at Dewey's writings. Reference to philosophy's 'liaison' function occurs in two texts: *Experience and Nature* and *The Quest for Certainty*. In the former, one can detect a critique of the growing compartmentalization of the academy and a call for promoting interdisciplinary dialogue:

Overspecialization and division of interests, occupations and goods, create the need for a generalized medium of intercommunication, of mutual criticism through all-around translation from one separated region of experience into another. Thus philosophy as a critical organ becomes in effect a messenger, a liaison officer, making reciprocally intelligible voices speaking provincial tongues, and thereby enlarging as well as rectifying the meaning with which they are charged.¹⁴

If one exclusively examines this first source, it becomes readily apparent how Hickman arrived at his interpretation of the claim. However, if we consult the second source, *The Quest for Certainty*, a more expansive view of philosophy's liaison function emerges. There, Dewey writes, "It [Philosophy] is a liaison officer between the conclusions of science and the modes of social and personal action through which attainable possibilities are projected and striven for."¹⁵ In other words, philosophers should also translate the outcomes of specialized inquiries into terms suitable for "social and personal action." Consequently, these inquiries may enrich the common, everyday experience and practices of laypeople and non-academics. Hence, the expansive interpretation of Dewey's 'liaison officer' claim states that it is the function of philosophy to both translate between distinct disciplinary discourses and between academic and non-academic discourses. By appealing to this more encompassing interpretation, it becomes possible to repel Novack's challenge. Thus, what it means for a philosopher to perform as a "liaison officer," in Dewey's double-barralled sense, is to be *both* (i) an interdisciplinary scholar and (ii) a public intellectual. While there is no doubt about the first barrel, Novack directly questions whether Dewey avoided hypocrisy and lived the second barrel. As we have seen in the reconstructed response to Novack (above), Dewey's distinct calling was to be a liaison officer between those intellectuals inside the ivory tower and those ordinary people outside it—that is, to be a public intellectual. Indeed, this is a paradigmatic case where, as Friedrich Nietzsche and (more recently) Robert Sinclair remind us, biography becomes philosophy.¹⁶

Talisse on Hook's Pragmatic Politics

In his recent book, *A Pragmatist Philosophy of Democracy*, Robert Talisse argues that Sidney Hook, a philosophical pragmatist, philosophy professor and one of Dewey's best-known students, realized his democratic vision in his democratic practice. Hook's ideas entered into the public

14 Dewey (1996), "Existence, Value and Criticism" in *Experience and Nature*, LW 1:306.

15 Dewey (1996), "The Copernican Revolution" in *The Quest for Certainty*, LW 4:248.

16 Nietzsche wrote: "It has gradually become clear to me what every great philosopher has hitherto been: a confession on the part of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir..." Nietzsche (1973 [1886]), 37. Sinclair (2005).

discourse, and though they did not become the norm, they at least had a fairly wide circulation beyond the walls of the 'ivory tower.' Drawing a sharp contrast between Hook and Dewey's careers, Talisse contends that "Dewey's own . . . demonstrates . . . [that] philosophers are not necessarily particularly deft when it comes to public policy analysis."¹⁷ Unlike Novack, Talisse does not allege that Dewey's ideas had little or no influence outside of academic discourse; rather, they influenced the public discourse, but in ways that were neither positive nor helpful.¹⁸

According to Talisse, Hook attempts to move public discourse in the direction of post-partisanship. The trajectory of Hook's own career covered the whole ideological spectrum, from a Marxist in his early career to a vehement anti-communist and neoconservative in his later years.¹⁹ However, there is an underlying thread of consistency in Hook's theoretical approach to practical politics: his support for the principles of civil discourse, an understanding of reasons as the drivers of good judgment and his rejection of ideological categories as barriers to consensus-directed inquiry. According to Talisse, it is "on Hook's view" that,

. . . democracy as such is neither liberal nor conservative, neither left nor right. In fact, the model of democratic citizenship that follows from Hook's conception of democracy entails that we should *reject* ideological categories such as "liberal" and "conservative," and "left" and "right": these are blocks to inquiry, mere dogmas.²⁰

For Hook, political discourse should be governed by a set of rules that ensure civility, critical inquiry, personal responsibility and informed judgment. For instance, Hook's second rule of discourse is that "[e]veryone involved in a controversy [or discourse over a controversial issue] has an intellectual responsibility to inform himself of the available facts."²¹ Moreover, for Hook, cardinal sin" occurs when controversy obstructs the "looking for truth of fact or wisdom of policy, particularly because of a participant's "refusal to discuss, or action which blocks discussion."²² In other words, this conception of democracy requires that citizens push beyond partisan labels and engage in reason-giving discourse aimed at clarifying and (hopefully) resolving their differences on policy issues.

¹⁷ Talisse (2007), 110.

¹⁸ Unfortunately, Talisse provides little evidence to support this claim. If we look at Dewey's actual involvements in political debates of his time, he was at times prescient (e.g. on the ill effects of economic imperialism), sometimes wrong (e.g. his opposition to F.D. Roosevelt's reelection), sometimes willing to admit that he was wrong (e.g. his support for Woodrow Wilson's prosecution of the First World War), but on average, more often right about his policy prognoses. *Op cit.* note 9. Talisse's move to defend Hook's political practice and criticize Dewey's similar activities is motivated by his desire to show that Deweyan democracy is flawed, while Peircean democracy, which he sees Hook as an unaware advocate of, is decidedly superior.

¹⁹ Talisse writes: "According to a standard view, Hook began his career as a prominent Marx scholar and a powerful voice on the left, but he eventually betrayed leftist politics and adopted an obsession with anti-communism which drove him to neo-conservatism." Talisse (2007), 123. Nicholas Capaldi claims that this orthodox account is a "myth": "That myth is a historical drama whose genesis was Hook's endorsement in 1932 of the Communist candidate for the presidency of the United States (in opposition to Roosevelt and Hoover) and whose climax is Hook's presence at the Hoover Institution, considered the most prestigious conservative think tank." Capaldi (1983), 18.

²⁰ Talisse (2007), 123.

²¹ Hook (1980), p. 122; cited in Talisse (2007), 119.

²² *Ibid.*

One objection to Hook's rules of democratic discourse is that they are fine in theory, but flawed in practice. The U.S. Circuit Court judge, economist and legal academic, Richard Posner, urges a more refined version of the objection, viz. that we should be skeptical of modeling discursive activity in actual democracies after a "faculty workshop."²³ For a "faculty workshop is a productive forum for deliberation," while a group of ordinary people, whose average I.Q. drops well below one-hundred, is definitely not.²⁴ However, this objection fails to hit the target because Hook's rules are not intended to model the constraints on public discourse after those placed on academic discourse. Indeed, norms such as not obstructing discussion and responsibly informing oneself about public issues are not peculiar to academic discourse. Rather than a matter of I.Q. or individual endowment, civil discourse in a democracy relies on cooperative problem-solving (or pooling cognitive resources), and cooperative problem-solving presupposes a commitment to responsible discussion. So, Hook asks and answers a question that concerned many of his fellow citizens, not merely his colleagues and fellow academics: How do we address controversial policy issues in ways that are collaborative, non-ideological and do not "tend to undermine [the bonds of] democratic society"?²⁵

According to Talisse, Hook's involvement in three controversies was a testament to how he could realize his theoretical commitments to democracy via his own contributions to public (non-academic) discourse. Rather than assessing the acceptability of his positions *on their own* (or independent of the reasons offered in their defense), such a demonstration requires a careful examination of Hook's rationale for taking the positions he did. Talisse insists that "a proper evaluation of Hook's own democratic practice must focus not simply on the *conclusions* he reached but the *reasons* he offered in support of those conclusions."²⁶ Next, we turn to consider Hook's contributions to the public discourse about three controversial issues of his time: (i) the legitimacy of protests against the Vietnam War, (ii) the acceptability of members of the Communist Party (CP) serving as public school teachers and (iii) the defensibility of the Supreme Court's bans on spiritual activities, such as prayer and Bible readings in a public school setting. According to Talisse's account, Hook inserts three ideas into these public discourses: one, that there is a difference between internal and external criticism of the democratic order; two, that high-stakes democratic decisions call for civil discourse and dedicated inquiry; and three, that secularization of public institutions should result from democratic choice, not judicial fiat.

On the Vietnam War Student Protests

During the 1960s, Hook's critique of the Vietnam War student protests might seem out of character for a secular humanist who disagreed with American military involvement in Southeast Asia. Indeed, Dewey biographer Robert Westbrook draws direct comparisons between the Deweyan pragmatism that Hook so avidly defended and the manifesto of a prominent 1960s anti-war student group: "Perhaps nowhere did Dewey's ideals echo more resoundingly than in the 'Port

²³ Posner (2003), 107.

²⁴ Ibid., 135.

²⁵ Hook (1980), 117; cited by Talisse (2007), 119.

²⁶ Talisse (2007), 124.

Huron Statement' (1962) of the Students for a Democratic Society [SDS].²⁷ Nevertheless, Hook publicly criticized SDS and other anti-war student groups for their coercive tactics. Talisse explains Hook's reasoning:

Hook opposed the student anti-war movement in the 1960s not on the grounds that he thought American intervention in Vietnam was justified, but rather because the students employed anti-democratic methods of expressing their objections: they destroyed private property, obstructed the free movement of their fellow citizens, actively prevented their fellow students from attending classes, and, in general, attempted to gain by force and intimidation what in a democracy can be gained only by argument and persuasion.

Hook's complaint was that the student protesters used undemocratic means—coercion and violence, rather than discourse and inquiry—to achieve democratic ends. Branding the protests as a “war against the democratic process,” he identified the war's aggressors at Columbia University and the University of California-Berkeley.²⁸ Thus, Hook showed the courage to engage in the rough-and-tumble politics and often bitter public discourse over the Vietnam War, expressing a nuanced position that reasoned dissent was acceptable while direct and violent action was not.²⁹

Even though it was an unpopular position to take, especially for a university professor, Hook's opposition to the student protests was entirely in keeping with his theory of democratic discourse as well as his own Dewey-inspired pragmatism. Talisse notes that Hook distinguished between internal and external criticisms of the democratic order: “On any democratic view, a distinction must be drawn between tolerable and intolerable modes of dissent, between opposition and revolt, or, in Hook's nomenclature, between heresy and conspiracy.”³⁰ Whereas an internal critique conforms to the rules of discourse and other norms of association within the democratic community, an external critique defies those rules and norms. The students protesting against the Vietnam War clearly employed an external critique of democracy, and thus, on Hook's view, their activities were deserving of repression, not toleration. Hook's position is also consistent with the thesis of an earlier work by Dewey. In the 1939 essay “Democratic Ends Need Democratic Means for Their Realization,” originally given as an address to the Committee for Cultural Freedom at the outset of the Second World War, Dewey expressed concern about the argument, prevalent among elites during the 1930s, that preserving democracy will, at times, require the use of non-democratic means, such as violence, propaganda and torture.³¹ Dewey observed the menace of totalitarian governments in Germany, Japan and Italy, and noted that the problems of “repression of cultural freedom” in these countries is not solely attributable their fascist political regimes. The ills of totalitarian rule are also symptomatic of a larger cultural environment. Warning that “our chief problems are those within our own culture,” Dewey decried the use of undemocratic

27 Westbrook (1991), 549.

28 Hook (1969, 1975).

29 Indeed, Hook was widely criticized for his position on the Vietnam War student protests. For instance, Philip Rahv, an editor at the *Partisan Review*, attacked Hook for being among those “political philistines . . . who at opportune moments still choose to call themselves socialists but who in practice support and defend the American capitalist drive for world hegemony.” Cited by C. Phelps (1997), 11.

30 Talisse (2007), 129.

31 Dewey (1996), “Democratic Ends Need Democratic Means for Their Realization,” LW 14:367-9.

means for the sake of securing democratic ends.³² Therefore, Hook, similar to his teacher, John Dewey, argued that undemocratic means (or methods associated with an external critique of democracy) cannot be tolerated within a democratic community.

On CP Members as School Teachers

While Dewey had his own difficulties with orthodox communists and teachers' unions,³³ Sidney Hook advocated a much stronger position than his teacher on the issue of whether members of the Communist Party (CP) should be permitted to serve as teachers in public educational institutions. Hook insisted that card-carrying members of the CP who were public school teachers ought to receive suspensions from their duties until authorities could complete a full investigation of their activities. In response to this highly controversial position, some philosophers have judged that Hook's pragmatism was thoroughly unacceptable when put into practice.³⁴ For instance, John Capps interprets Hook's position as tantamount to the view that someone is "unfit to hold positions of public trust" if he or she is a "member of the CP."³⁵ Talisse objects that Capps overlooks a series of premises in Hook's argument that would make membership not a sufficient condition, but only a necessary condition that would lead to the conclusion that a public school teacher "should therefore be suspended":

(1) The CP is a conspiratorial organization under the direct control of a dictatorship that aims to undermine American democracy.

(2) Members of the CP must, as a condition of membership, pledge allegiance to the Party and its stated aims and methods.

(3) Among the methods explicitly stated by the CP of dissolving American democracy is the willful indoctrination of students in the principles approved by the CP.³⁶

Given these premises, Hook's argument for temporary suspensions followed by background inquiries appears less objectionable, though still somewhat suspect. Even a temporary suspension with the possibility of full reinstatement could surround the CP teacher with an aura of perceived guilt and threaten her with the prospect of future ostracism—an outcome that, on a large scale, could rival the black-listing of suspected Communists during the McCarthy Era.

³² *Ibid.*, LW 14:367.

³³ Eldridge (2002). For Dewey's critique of the Marxist Leon Trotsky's views, see Dewey (1996), "Means and Ends," LW 13:349-55.

³⁴ Talisse mentions John Capps (2003) and James Good (2003).

³⁵ Capps (2003), 72; cited by Talisse (2007), 126.

³⁶ Talisse (2007), 127. This is a formalization of Hook's argument in Hook (1953), 206-207.

Yet, by appealing to Hook's reasons against the student Vietnam War protests—viz., that democratic ends require democratic means—his argument becomes more cogent. To appreciate this point, it is instructive to examine Dewey's debate in the 1930s with the Marxist revolutionary Leon Trotsky. In the essay "Their Morals and Ours," Trotsky reacts to widespread allegations that his writings and actions reflect the Jesuit maxim 'the end justifies the means.'³⁷ He agrees that ends *do* lend support to means. However, Trotsky distances himself from the position that Marxist ends justify any means whatsoever; in his words, "*not* all means are permissible."³⁸ Why? For Trotsky, consistent with the dialectical logic of Hegel and its materialist adaptation by Marx, history is a dialectical progression of contradictions, between a flawed capitalist economic system (i.e., the thesis) and alienated workers (i.e., the antithesis), which inevitably results in class warfare, the overthrow of capitalism and the consolidation of worker control in a dictatorship of the proletariat followed by the emergence of a classless communist society (i.e., the synthesis).³⁹ Given the laws of this dialectical movement of history, a single means is necessary: namely, revolutionary class struggle.⁴⁰

In Dewey's response to Trotsky, entitled "Means and Ends," he identifies the core fallacy at work in Trotsky's argument. Insofar as the Marxist theory of history prejudices the selection of means, it undermines Trotsky's claimed interdependence of means and ends. Since the means of class struggle alone can be, in Dewey's words, "'deduced' from . . . an alleged law of history," the Marxist must forego a critical examination of alternatives, thereby rendering the determination of means independent of the end; according to Dewey, "the end is dependent upon the means but the means are not derived from the end."⁴¹ Moreover, to treat class struggle as the exclusive means for securing Marxist ends ignores the ever-present possibility that other means might prove to be more effective for obtaining the end. So, if Trotsky and other orthodox Marxists wish to achieve their goals, they should adopt an inductive method of tailoring means to ends, as well as ends to means, through observation, experimentation and choice--that is, through intelligent inquiry.⁴²

While both Dewey and Hook rejected orthodox Marxists' advocacy for the employment of violent means in order to achieve revolutionary change, Hook took a significantly stronger position than Dewey on the matter of CP members serving as public school teachers. Still, Hook's

37 Trotsky (1969), 11-17.

38 *Ibid.*, 37.

39 Marx and Engels (1967), 12-20.

40 Trotsky writes, "there is no way of building a bridge to that [communist] society save by revolutionary, that is, violent means." Trotsky (1969), 27. Indeed, Trotsky's two reasons for resisting a morally neutral path toward socialism, according to Steven Lukes, are, one, "that no significant line can be drawn between peaceful class struggle and revolution" and, two, "that there is no way of building a bridge to communist society save by revolutionary, that is violent means." Lukes (1981), 344.

41 Dewey (1996), "Means and Ends," LW 13:351-2. He explains further: "The professed end—the end-in-view—the liberation of mankind, is thus subordinated to the class struggle as the means by which it is to be attained." *Ibid.*, LW 13:352.

42 Writing only a year after their debate, Dewey calmly reflected, "[w]e must know that the dependence of ends upon means is such that the only ultimate result is the result that is attained today, tomorrow, the next day, and day after day, in the succession of years and generations." Dewey (1996), "Democracy and America" in *Freedom and Culture*, LW 13:188. Still, in Dewey's response to Trotsky, he conceded that he too held that the end justifies the means: "I hold that the end in the sense of consequences provides the only basis for moral ideas and actions, and therefore provides the only justification that can be found for means employed." *Id.*, "Means and Ends," LW 13:350.

means—namely, conducting background inquiries and examining the activities of those teachers who are CP members—are entirely compatible with the Deweyan maxim that democratic ends require democratic means (i.e. intelligent inquiry) for their realization.

On Judicially Required Secularism in Public Schools

The last of Talisse's three illustrations of Sidney Hook's pragmatic politics also demonstrates how pragmatism proves to be practically relevant to public discourse. In his public life and book *Religion in a Free Society*, Hook expressed his discontent with the Supreme Court's 1960s rulings that effectively banned prayer and Bible reading voluntarily undertaken in public schools.⁴³ Talisse distinguishes Hook's rationale for opposing state-imposed secularism and conservatives' similar, though differently reasoned, position:

Hook's opposition is not based on a belief that prayer is wholesome or necessary for the cultivation for virtue. After all, Hook was a vehement secular humanist and atheist throughout his life. Instead, Hook objected to the process by which the secular position was secured.⁴⁴

And again:

But even a cursory canvass of the conservative literature on these matters reveals the vast difference between Hook's reasons and those offered by self-described conservatives. When the latter defend prayer in public schools, they do so on grounds of moral wholesomeness of Christianity and the alleged fact that the United States is a "Christian nation" . . .⁴⁵

Talisse claims that while the conservative basis for resisting state-imposed secularism is moral in character, Hook's justification is actually epistemic. Since democratic choice depends on average citizens deploying well-reasoned arguments, then the choice of secular practices over sectarian ones should likewise require recourse to inclusive and democratic mechanisms, not exclusive and oligarchic ones (such as the wisdom of nine appointed Supreme Court Justices).

Another way of highlighting Hook's position and its differences with political (and even judicial) conservatism is to show how it aligns with a jurisprudential position known as 'judicial restraint.' One well-known person who argued for judicial restraint was the American jurist Learned Hand. In the Holmes Lectures at Harvard, Hand declared that,

For myself it would be irksome to be ruled by a bevy of Platonic Guardians, even if I know how to choose them, which I assuredly do not. If they were in charge I should

⁴³ Hook (1967), 63; cited by Talisse (2007), 124.

⁴⁴ Talisse (2007), 124.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 125.

miss the stimulus of living in a society where I have, at least theoretically, some part in public affairs.⁴⁶

The “bevy Platonic Guardians” Hand refers to are those Supreme Court Justices who would impose their supposedly enlightened judgments on the will of the majority, so that the average citizen would lose “the stimulus of living in a [democratic] society.” Threatening such an outcome are activist judges who believe that striking down statutes as unconstitutional (in a process known as ‘judicial review’) is a legitimate way of remedying substantively poor, though democratically enacted, public policies. By doing so, these judges undermine the majority’s will and subvert democratic choice, for both majority rule and democratic decision-making are tied, at least indirectly, to acts of legislation through the popular election of those who legislate. So, similar to Hand, Hook sought to defend the democratic principle and, in particular, average citizens’ prerogative to participate in the democratic decision making process, not the authority of nine appointed judges who would pretend to know what is best for them.

Conclusion

In the previous pages I have presented and compared the views of Novack, Hickman and Talisse concerning the proper function of philosophy in academic and non-academic (or public) discourse. To conclude, I would like to defend my own view on the matter. Notwithstanding the title of the paper, my argument is not confined to the practical implications of philosophical pragmatism or the ideas of its adherents; it extends to philosophy and the ideas of philosophers, generally.

Given the prior analysis, there appears to be at least three possible candidates for what or who fulfills the liaison officer function: (i) philosophical tools (or a philosophical tool-kit), (ii) professional philosophers, and (iii) the profession of Philosophy. On the first account, philosophy offers academic inquirers a method or set of tools to better understand the nature of their own inquiries, to provide a broader theoretical vantage from which to effectively criticize their presuppositions—what Dewey called the “criticism of criticisms.”⁴⁷ On a charitable reading, Hickman understands Dewey’s liaison officer claim in this way.⁴⁸ However, this candidate does not overcome the objection that the function of philosophy has little impact beyond the walls of the ivory tower—that is, the crux of Novack’s challenge. Philosophy’s tool-kit still contains only instruments for translating between distinct disciplinary discourses, unless of course those conceptual tools are understood as equally accessible to non-academics, and for purposes other than facilitating interdisciplinarity.⁴⁹ The second account states that professional philosophers

46 Hand (1958), 73.

47 Dewey writes: “These remarks are preparatory to presenting a conception of philosophy; namely, that philosophy is inherently criticism, having its distinctive position among various modes of criticism in its generality; a criticism of criticisms, as it were.” Dewey (2006), “Existence, Value and Criticism” in *Experience and Nature*, LW 1:298.

48 Mark Tschaepé suggested these three candidates and the more charitable reading.

49 There is some evidence to support this more charitable reading. Hickman includes the “professions” in addition to “various disciplines” as beneficiaries of philosophy’s liaison function: “He [Dewey] thought of philosophy as a kind of ‘liaison officer,’ a kind of go-between, helping the various disciples and professions within a culture communicate

fulfill the role of liaison officers. The weakness of this account is two-fold: (i) It could be objected that the philosopher's self-conception as a liaison officer is an unjustified conceit and (ii) it is unclear whether the liaison officer function merely facilitates interdisciplinarity or, interpreted more broadly, permits better communication between those inside and outside of the academy. If Novack's critique of Dewey's career is to have any force, then it depends on rejecting this second candidate and restricting the professional philosopher's function to facilitating interdisciplinary sharing. To end the paper, I turn to the final candidate for a liaison officer: viz. the profession of Philosophy.

My argument that Dewey's 'liaison officer' claim should be interpreted more expansively has several far-reaching implications for the profession of Philosophy. In the past century, the increasing professionalization of academic philosophy in the United States has become an undeniable fact.⁵⁰ Reconsidering philosophy's function and advocating for a more expansive view of that function are of inestimable value if philosophers are to reverse the trend by which their own discipline has become increasingly marginalized within the academy. Since philosophy departments rarely attract grant funding, they tend to be the last to receive new tenure-track lines, capital and resource improvements as well as research support. The majority of philosophy professors fulfill the role of general education instructors, teaching undergraduates required courses in logic, ethics and critical thinking. Unsurprisingly, the acceptance of this limited role for philosophy in the academy has generated unintended and, at times, deleterious consequences. At many institutions, it frustrates ambitious philosophy faculty who feel that their scholarship is undervalued. Sometimes it also produces friction between philosophers and members of other faculties whose research receives more generous financial support. However, frustration and friction only prove counterproductive for the cause of widening philosophy's place within the academy. When widely expressed and frequently encountered, these unintended consequences have the effect of alienating philosophers from faculty in other disciplines, as well as from those standing outside the ivory tower. My hope would be that philosophical pragmatists, and philosophers more generally, would opt instead to reconstruct the function of their discipline, seeing themselves as liaison officers in Dewey's double-barrelled sense, that is, as thinkers capable of translating *both* between different disciplinary discourses and between academic and popular discourses. In other words, to counter their own marginalization within the academy, philosophers should remake themselves in the image of interdisciplinary scholars *and* public intellectuals—or in the image of John Dewey and Sidney Hook, among others.⁵¹

effectively." Hickman (2008), 189.

50 For a more comprehensive history of the professionalization of the discipline of Philosophy in the U.S., see James Campbell (2006). In a review of the book, Michael Eldridge draws attention to Campbell's commentary on the 1916 address by the then-APA President, Arthur O. Lovejoy, in which Lovejoy stressed how philosophy required increasing specialization: "Campbell comments that Lovejoy 'seems' thereby 'to be deliberately driving a wedge between the work of academic philosophers and the intellectual interests of the general, educated public' (179)." Eldridge (2007), 380.

51 I am not claiming that contemporary philosophers do not already, to some degree, fulfill both these roles. Indeed, to name only a few representative examples, John Murungi and Gary Backhaus, have for several years run an exciting interdisciplinary conference on environment, space and place at Towson University, combining philosophical inquiry with geographical subject-matter. Also, experimental philosophers, led by Joshua Knobe and Stephen Stich, have breached the barrier between philosophy and the sciences, probing and testing various intuitions and hypotheses in the areas of ethics, philosophy of mind, and philosophical psychology. Several high profile philosophers in the U.S. and Canada, such as Richard Rorty, Ronald Dworkin, and Charles Taylor, have assumed the role of public intellectuals

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