

Preface



Pragmatism is experiencing resurgence. This is especially so among scholars interested in cognitive science, with the field undergoing a pragmatic turn away from representational models and many embracing embodied approaches, standpoints obviously favored by classical figures such as William James and John Dewey. Anthony Chemero, Shaun Gallagher and Richard Menary are among the more prominent scholars involved in this. Ranking neuroscientists, such as Antonio Damasio and Jay Schulkin, embrace classical pragmatism too. Relatedly, a burgeoning neuropragmatic movement is gaining traction, which, in spite of its brain-centered name, does not simply import science into philosophy. It in fact criticizes growing neurohype and emphasizes the relevance of pragmatism not only to the sciences, but also to culture, politics and more, with the aim of humanizing science and scientifically informing philosophy. It was with all this in mind that researchers from 11 countries gathered at the American University in Cairo in October 2015 to discuss pragmatism in the context of cognitive science. Speakers applied pragmatic thinking to areas ranging from neuroscience and plant cognition to artificial intelligence and computational models of emotion to politics, ethics, art and cognitive science of religion, while also addressing longstanding quandaries such as skepticism and the mind-body problem. This issue of *Contemporary Pragmatism* offers a selection of papers, on some of these topics, collected from this international event.

The first article, by Tibor Solymosi, who coined the term “neuropragmatism,” focuses on an issue that centrally preoccupied Dewey—democracy—and the threat posed to it by what Mark Tschaeppe calls “dopamine democracy.” Solymosi begins by reviewing Dewey’s early, middle and late thought on the mind, brain and nervous system, then ponders how mass addiction to digital devices diminishes what Dewey understood to be healthy functioning, and discusses the troubling ramifications that follow. Solymosi considers how neuropragmatic outlooks might be employed to meet political challenges generated by recent technological advances.

The second paper is in the open and critical spirit of pragmatism and philosophy generally. Conor Morris identifies areas in neuropragmatism that he finds problematic. Specifically, he asks whether the two foremost advocates of neuropragmatism—Tibor Solymosi and John Shook—advance a questionable understanding of Dewey's principle of continuity, thereby undermining the very melioristic dimensions that their movement proposes. Morris's critique revolves around the assertion that changes introduced by culture and especially language mean that human domains such as ethics cannot fruitfully be understood as predominantly neuroactivities or even biological ones. One virtue, among others, of Morris's piece is that in the process of criticizing neuropragmatism, it offers a concise yet thorough introduction to the reader who wishes to know more about it.

The last four articles in this special issue are linked by the concept of embodiment. The first of these is authored by Lana Kühle, and deals with a classic quandary: the hard problem of consciousness. To address this, Kühle focuses on James. She explores his embodied theory of emotions in light of current cognitive science; and she offers a Jamesian account of inattentive interoception that, as she argues, opens avenues of progress on the hard problem. Kühle is particularly versed in enactive cognitive science and phenomenology. So, in addition to the above mentioned, she adds to a growing body of scholarship linking pragmatism to phenomenology and enactivism.

The next contributor, Ewa Chudoba, focuses on matters close to Dewey's heart: art and aesthetics. She takes up a critique of Richard Shusterman's work on somatic consciousness. She attends particularly to the Deweyan concepts of pervasive and unifying quality, important in Dewey's aesthetic thought, and concludes that these ideas cast doubt on some of Shusterman's views, specifically his emphasis on internal control of bodily processes. In a Deweyan vein, she points out that mechanisms that Shusterman promotes for inner control—for example, breathing exercises—involve interactions with air and hence surrounding environment, so that the rhythm of the lungs and quality of the experience partly depend on altitude, dustiness, odors, humidity, temperature, in other words, on factors not in our control. She concludes that Shusterman strays in unfruitful directions just where he most emphatically departs from Dewey.

Following Chudoba is Roman Madzia's extraordinarily interesting paper in which he advances a Deweyan situated account to argue that plants have cognition. Pragmatists and contemporary embodied theorists both emphasize movement, and Madzia points out that plants engage in life-sustaining movements. He specifically proposes that root systems integrate sensory input into adaptive behavior and thus can be seen as sensorimotor organs. Plants have

signaling systems that employ chemicals such as dopamine, glutamate and serotonin. Shoots, roots and flowers move to better reach nutrients or sunlight, to avoid dangerous soil conditions or parasites and to engage in sexual reproduction. Some plants even selectively respond with chemical defenses to ward off predators. Moreover, some appear to communicate aerially via organic compounds and other mechanisms. Regarding plant cognition, Madzia urges that representationalist discourse should be avoided and that we should interpret their activities in terms of organism-environment coupling, self-organization, emergence and perhaps Gibson's theory of affordances, which was, of course, pragmatically inspired.

Rounding out the collection is Matthew Crippen's "Embodied Cognition and Perception: Dewey, Science and Skepticism." In line with Madzia's piece, Crippen argues that Dewey anticipated 4E cognition, especially enactivist views. He locates inspiration for Dewey's account in the science of his day, especially biology but also physics, and contrasts his conception of mind with dominant Modern era ones and recent standard models, which both emphasize an inner-outer divide wherein the world is represented inside the organism—an outlook clearly motivating skepticism. Crippen maintains that Dewey's situated view combats skepticism by insisting that things registered by us, whether firsthand or through scientific instruments, are consequences of our conduct, and should therefore be evaluated according to action-scenarios generating them; and that this lends epistemic basis for everyday experiences and scientific knowledge since both are generated by changes occurring in our surroundings, as opposed to just our heads.

In small and various ways—but ones I cannot resist mentioning—this collection marks some historical firsts. It is generated from what was likely Egypt's first international conference on pragmatism and certainly its first on pragmatism and cognitive science; and we had, delivering his first keynote address, Tibor Solymosi, who first used the term "neuropragmatism." Much more importantly, however, this collection is an example of philosophy doing what philosophy has historically done, and living up to the pragmatic ideal of tackling issues and problems that have import beyond the world of professional, academic philosophy.

Matthew Crippen

Department of Philosophy, American University in Cairo, AUC Avenue,
P.O. Box 74, Cairo 11835, Egypt
crippenm@aucegypt.edu