FIFTEEN

PRAGMATIC INTELLECTUALS

Facing Loss in the Spirit of American Philosophy



y final remarks are not so much a philosophical discourse as an essay or an exhortation from the vicinity of the heart. This stems not from any disdain on my part for philosophical discourses, but from the way I see the question at hand: the question of the future of pragmatism and, perhaps, of American philosophy more widely conceived. It is a question from which I cannot extricate myself. Because I work under the influence of American thinking, any answer I give bears personal consequences. And as was noted in chapter 2, it is precisely this personal dimension that, for some at least, separates pragmatism from philosophy. As Paul Carus put it in response to William James's work: "In the philosophy of a man like William James the personal equation is the most important item. . . . This attitude is desirable in a poet, but not in a philosopher." Thinking about pragmatism's future engages me in a question of and a quest for vocation, and it is on these that my essay will focus. I proceed in the hope that Dewey is right in maintaining that "The future as well

as the past can be a source of interest and consolation and give meaning to the present" (LW, 2:20).

As an invocation I borrow some words from the late Rev. Gary Davis, who was among the best twentieth-century American blues guitarists. Reverend Davis was perplexed by the technical, positivistic attitude of those who came to apprentice with him, mostly young, white, middle-class males. I begin with his response to this phenomenon:

I'm subject to mistakes. All of us are. Sometimes you're going East, and you're actually going West. That's the way it happens with all of us sometimes. Mistakes is the best start in life. You know too much, you understand, then you done made a mistake already. You be too perfect, then the mistake's already been made. But you go to try to do a thing and make a mistake to start off with, then that's the best start in life. It gives somebody a chance to correct you.²

Pragmatic Intellectuals

Pragmatism, by some quirk of fate, was granted its own Indian summer at the close of its first century—with renewed interest in both its originators and its revisers, pragmatism's life has been extended. Yet it has long been a question, especially, perhaps, for pragmatists, what it means to be a "pragmatic intellectual." As a new century brings November to this Indian summer, the question becomes more pressing. Despite their emphasis on practice, pragmatists are, for ordinary persons, simply parts of the aggregate of intellectuals and academics. C. Wright Mills observed in 1942 that "Pragmatists have typically been sons of the middle class rising within these strata into rather comfortable academic professions."3 On the other side, philosophers and other intellectuals have long assaulted pragmatism for its lack of sophistication. Carus, with his noted candor, put it as follows: "I go so far as to look upon its [pragmatism's] wide acceptance as a symptom of the immaturity and naïveté that obtains sometimes even in the professional circles of our universities."4 An even more humorous, more frightening, and, if true, more damning assault on pragmatism's professional place was made by Albert Schinz:

In our days of democracy, philosophic ideas are no longer discussed among the chosen few, but by everybody, by the masses; the result is that philosophy is no longer free to express truths which might be dangerous for the masses. Philosophy must express only useful, moral, pragmatic truth, even though truth itself lie in an opposite direction. . . . Pragmatism is nothing but this adulterated philosophy; philosophy sold to democracy. ⁵

It is difficult not to have a nagging suspicion that Schinz had somehow come across Richard Rorty's "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy" and "Postmodern Bourgeois Liberalism" in 1909. The cultural pressures from both directions continue to effect a sense of doubt concerning their vocation on the part of at least some pragmatic intellectuals.

The terms of the phrase "pragmatic intellectuals"—much like the terms of Emerson's phrase "American scholar"—generate an internal tension as well; they resist yet at the same time demand one another. Pragmatic intellectuals are thinkers whose pragmatism tempers their intellectualism and whose intellectual dimension both underwrites and undermines their pragmatism. Pragmatic intellectuals of the present generation are not only pragmatists but also thinkers averse to various doctrines and features of various pragmatisms: thinkers who are in some part self-aversive.

All of this is perhaps an indirect way of saying that pragmatism, at its heart, is open to its own passing, its own loss. Living into and through this loss is what it means to be a pragmatic intellectual in the early twenty-first century.

The belief that one must face the passing of one's own ideas and, more positively, that one must constantly reawaken to new angles of vision is a persistent one in the tradition of American thinking. Jonathan Edwards's "Personal Narrative," for example, reveals a soul never certain that its latest conversion is genuine and final. Having reflected on his soul's journey through a lifetime of conversions, Ed-

wards, ever hopeful for signs of his own salvation, still finds himself in the precarious environment of doubt. Emerson, throughout his early essays, harps on the importance of self-aversion, of the ability to draw new circles and move to higher platforms: "Speak what you think now in hard words, and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict every thing you said to-day" (CW, 2:33). Thoreau identifies himself repeatedly with chanticleer, always on the verge of announcing a new awakening. The pragmatists, each in his way, captured and systematized this transitional, itinerant spirit of American thinking. Peirce's fallibilism, James's pragmatism and radical empiricism, and Dewey's experimentalism all play on the finitude and contingency of our best thinking. The "scientific spirit," Peirce says, "requires a man to be at all times ready to dump his whole cartload of beliefs, the moment experience is against them" (CP 1:55). We must always think and believe under the possibility of revision—we must always be willing to face the loss of our own thinking and to understand that our failures may, both presently and in some long run, be as instructive as our successes. The pragmatic intellectual emerges from and within this intellectual history—this actual career of thought.

To be willing to face this loss, one must understand oneself always to be located in transition. However, one must also be able to be at home in the transition. This transitional status, as each of the pragmatists has noted, means that not only as professional intellectuals without a clear cultural place, but also as human beings, pragmatic philosophers live in a world of risk and precariousness.

Pragmatism's Loss

What will it mean for pragmatists to give their attention to pragmatism's own transitional and precarious status? How shall pragmatism face its own losses and failures in its own future, as, for pragmatists, I think it must? "Pragmatism," as Carus observed, "appeared cometlike on our intellectual horizon"; moreover, it came advertised by Peirce, James, Dewey, and Schiller as a *method* for establishing meaning and conducting inquiry. As James put it:

It has no dogmas, and no doctrines save its method. As the young Italian pragmatist Papini has well said, it lies in the midst of our theories like a corridor in a hotel. . . . No particular results, then, so far, but only an attitude of orientation, is what the pragmatic method means.⁷

Two items of note appear in this originary description. First is the description of pragmatism as a "method" that "means," pragmatically speaking, "an attitude of orientation." To this I will return below. The second item is that although pragmatism is a method, it does not appear unenvironed: "It lies in the midst of our theories." Thus, as James well knew, despite the suggestive innocence of this particular passage, pragmatism never appeared without having been inoculated with some constitutive worldview or other: Peirce's trinitarian realism, James's articulate pluralism, Schiller's humanism, or Dewey's naturalism. These thinkers arrived not as what Royce called "pure pragmatists"; they arrived as pragmatic intellectuals. As John McDermott puts it:

Despite some surface ambiguity, a careful reading of James will show it to be clear, both textually and thematically, that for him pragmatism is a methodological application of his radical empiricism. In that sense, to call James simply a pragmatist is misleading and, indeed, without radical empiricism as a metaphysical base, pragmatism is subject to the savage philosophical critique it has received.⁸

The point was made less elegantly in 1909, when Edwin Tausch observed that "Mr. James still believes in theoretic grubbing and brooding; he is still a philosopher."

This second item of James's description of pragmatism is especially important to highlight in light of some contemporary readings of the history of pragmatism. The career of pragmatism is and has been dynamic. It is not the career of a method alone, but the career of a method, as attitude, engaged in rethinking and reconstructing particular and idiosyncratic conceptions of experience and nature. Not surprisingly, there is no one, distillable version of pragmatism any more than there was a single mode of idealism at the close of the nineteenth

century. Philosophical movements, in James's way of putting it, "grow," as do our lives, "by their edges"; there is no singular channel of progression. In doing so, the passing of philosophical movements is never wholesale; nor do we ever simply "get over" old ways of thinking. We grow into new thoughts and modes of thinking, and we bring something with us despite our protestations and our claims to significant originality. "The most violent revolutions in an individual's beliefs," James says, "leave most of his old order standing." To think in a pragmatic vein, then, about pragmatism's transitional status and its encounter with its own failures and losses, is to think about its avenues and modes of transition, about the ways it might extend its present edges; it is not to think about its wholesale rejection. I am not, however, concerned to guess at the substance of particular future transitions; rather, the heart of my exhortation is concerned with the pragmatic intellectual's resources for dealing with the transitional status, including the future of pragmatism.

Beyond Pragmatism

The methodological and metaphysical dimensions McDermott notes in James present one exemplary way of articulating the inner tension of pragmatic intellectuals noted earlier. In classical pragmatism it is the tension between the pragmatic dimension as locus of criticism and the intellectual, constitutive dimension as both the order in which criticism occurs and, in part, the object of criticism. James, it appears, could not quite decide whether truth shall be only expedience "in the way of our thinking"11 or satisfaction that must lead, however circuitously, to "reality." Peirce seemed perplexed by the nature of belief. On the one hand, his theoretical, scientific method is the only acceptable and useful method of fixing belief; on the other hand, "what is properly and usually called belief . . . has no place in science at all" (CP, 1:634). Finally, we seem to find, as Rorty and others suggest, two John Deweys: one, a social critic who tinkered with ideas to solve problems, and one, a metaphysician who wished to describe the generic traits of experience.

It is from this situation of ambivalent pragmatic intellectuals that the future of American pragmatism must take its bearings. It is from this situation that two very different suggestions concerning pragmatism's present and future have already developed. My belief is that neither of these more recent suggestions has a chance of taking pragmatism beyond itself, because neither faces pragmatism fully on its own terms. Neither actually faces the loss, the always transitional character, of pragmatism, because neither, as I see it, despite acknowledging the ambivalent situation, comes to grips with the existential condition of pragmatic intellectuals.

The general strategy adopted by each of these two visions of pragmatism is to eliminate the pragmatic intellectual's tension. We are pushed to adopt one James and reject the other, to prefer a little "d" Dewey or a big "D" Dewey, and to choose, as Thomas Goudge did some years ago, between a Peirce who is a solid, analytical philosopher of science and an eccentric Peirce who is a "transcendentalist" inquiring about the practical upshots of religious experience.

The best-known of these suggestive responses to eliminate the tension in pragmatism's condition is the neopragmatism described by Rorty and others. The neopragmatic approach, roughly stated, is to grasp the pragmatic dimension of pragmatic intellectuals and, in an interesting sort of philosophical suicide, to eclipse and belittle the intellectual dimension. In his well-known introduction to *The Consequences of Pragmatism*, Rorty argued that the neopragmatic pragmatist "tries to defend himself by saying that one can be a philosopher precisely by being anti-Philosophical, that the best way to make things hang together is to step back from the issues between Platonists and positivists, and thereby give up the presuppositions of Philosophy." ¹³

Rorty does seem to agree with James's suggestion that humans are afflicted with an "ontological wonder sickness" that drives their intellectual dimension, pushing and leading them into the tasks of "Philosophy" or constitutive thinking. However, he takes it to be a cultural contingency that we can cure simply by getting over it; it is, for him, a psychosomatic sickness or a functional hypochondria. In

this much he works in the vein of the positivists and linguistic analysts who, as Henry Johnstone, Sr., notes, "have not regarded the urge to philosophize as a built-in feature of human nature. They have thought instead that man might be purified or cured of this urge."14 For Rorty, we are "to understand the metaphysical urge, the urge to theorize, so well that . . . [we become] entirely free of it."15 The cure that neopragmatism provides thus involves a thoroughgoing skepticism concerning constitutive thinking.¹⁶ It describes what Josiah Royce characterized in his Presidential Address to the American Philosophical Association in 1903 as the experientially impossible perspective of the pure pragmatist. From this skepticism, the neopragmatist exercises her criticism as a pragmatist but lives without threat of being criticized because she has, effectively, undermined all constitutive orders that might authorize criticism. In this created logical space, the neopragmatist is free, as John William Miller put it, to "snipe at the universe." The neopragmatic response resolves the tension, but leaves pragmatic intellectuals—or American scholars—with no residual vocation; they are asked, in Rorty's version, to inhabit other vocations: those of artists or poets.

The second contemporary suggestion for pragmatism's present and future is what might be called neo-Peirceanism; it is championed by those, such as C. F. Delaney, who see Peirce's conception of philosophy almost exclusively as "a mode of inquiry grounded in and reflective upon mathematics and the experimental sciences."17 Given my own affinity for Peirce's thinking, I use the phrase with some reservation. Nevertheless, the title is appropriate insofar as the thinkers I have in mind have entrenched themselves in what appear to be the least pragmatic moments in the career of pragmatism: in Peirce's early work on cognition and the history of science or in Peirce's later pragmaticism, positivistically interpreted. Peirce, in this guise, serves as an exemplary intellectual's intellectual whose devotion is to a theoretical activity that is fully divorced from practical interests or vitally important topics. This is the Peirce who in 1898 maintained that he was "a scientific man, condemning with the whole strength of conviction the Hellenic tendency to mingle Philosophy and Practice."18 By

adopting Peirce and reconstructing him along these lines, the neo–Peirceans are able to discharge the pragmatic dimension of pragmatic intellectuals, thus resolving the tension in the opposite direction. They cure the ontological wonder sickness not by getting over it, but by exercising constitutive thinking, by intellectualizing. It is a cure, not a treatment, however, precisely because they divorce constitutive thought from any direct concern for the practical, the experienced. Once adopted, neo-Peirceanism tends to preclude any Jamesian, existential wonder sickness from welling up; it has already been taken up into the purely intellectual sphere to be treated as, at worst, a puzzle.

Nevertheless, neo-Peirceanism posits itself as a form of pragmatism because, under the influence of Peirce's evolutionism, it has incorporated a transitional character in constitutive thinking. It sees the dynamism involved in Peirce's conception of truth, but holds out a hope for closure and completeness in a finite career of inquiry. The neo-Peirceans do suggest a vocation: that of the academic professional. They are in agreement with James's colleague Münsterberg when he states that "Philosophy is a movement of thought which demands the thoroughness of the expert, and which can be followed only with concentrated attention." 19

Both/And

As a twenty-first-century pragmatic intellectual I find myself standing in aversion to both of these contemporary suggestions. Both are offered as pragmatisms to revise and replace classical pragmatisms. However, their conception of revision is limited to amputation. Neo–Peirceanism tries to treat philosophical thinking as its own order, divorced from the experience that engenders its questions and that might benefit from its illumination. It does its best to settle in a particular conception of the past. Neopragmatism, while dealing with some features of ordinary experience, would prevent me from dealing with the orders and categories in and through which these features make themselves known and meaningful. It establishes a future at the expense of the past.

Another way to point to the source of my aversion to these new versions of pragmatism is to point to the fact that they have developed, in part at least, from outside the pragmatic tradition. Both draw their inspiration from movements and/or elements of movements within the Anglo-American tradition of philosophical analysis. Whether, as Joseph Margolis suggests, some sort of forced merger between pragmatism and this movement is a good thing is a matter for another essay; however, I do think the future of pragmatism needs to develop more directly through pragmatism, facing its own internal tension. No other angle of vision will offer the same insights into the internal fissures and junctures of pragmatism's career. This difference in pedigree is concretized in the very way in which the tension of pragmatic intellectuals is approached.

Both neopragmatism and neo-Peirceanism feel a need to resolve the *logic* of the tension. Their attitude is shot through with a strict nominalism that breaks experience into ordered bits and pieces, and that therefore reads the tension as a set of disjuncts: either theory or practice, either private or public, either scientific or poetic, and so on. From the logical point of view, it seems necessary to move to one side or the other of each of these disjuncts; we are persistently faced with an either/or. Ironically, in their attempts to find a pragmatic vocation, neopragmatists and neo-Peirceans share a more general vocation: the avoidance of contradiction.²⁰

This approach to the pragmatic tension operates on the supposition that the pragmatists were unwitting victims of logical contradictions—that they were historically placed such that they could not help themselves. We see this way of thinking exemplified in Rorty's discussion of Dewey's metaphysics: Dewey, he argues, "should not be blamed if he occasionally came down with the disease he was trying to cure." What has always struck me as central to the pragmatic intellectual's point of view, however, is precisely the rejection of either/or thinking. Peirce's careful employment of his own triadic categorical scheme, for example, is a studied effort to avoid excluded middles. The pragmatists, as I read them, are both/and thinkers. This is not to say that they are always fully aware of where their thinking takes them

or that they fully understand all the ways in which they are both/anding. Nor does it mean that each of them didn't have favorite emphases. Rather, I am thinking of the attitudes with which they approached dyads and triads. For them, the both/and-ness of the "pragmatic" and "intellectual" dimensions is an experiential, not a merely logical, operation.

Method and Attitude

It is down this both/and road that embraces the internal tension of pragmatism that there appears to me to be a way of facing the future of pragmatism and whatever failures and losses that may involve. Facing the retail losses of pragmatic thinking cannot be a merely passive endeavor. To face the loss, as James might have put it, is in part to create the loss. This creative act seems to me to become a real possibility in the both/and condition of the pragmatic intellectual. For the neo–Peirceans it is swallowed up in the inevitability of things; for neopragmatists it is lost to the irresponsibility of sheer spontaneity.

Pragmatism has often been marked as a philosophy of method. There is without question a truth in this description. Nevertheless, unless the pragmatic meaning of "method" is addressed, this conception of pragmatism leaves unnoticed some important features of the pragmatic intellectual's condition. "Method," in its intellectual guise, suggests epistemological structures whose employment will effect some route to truth or disclosure. Insofar as the pragmatists focus on "method," it is easy to construe their focus as intending a reconstruction of logic and the formal and social orders of inquiry. In light of Peirce's methodeutic, which he built around his stages of inquiry abduction, deduction, and induction—and in light of Dewey's several inquiries into logic, this is no doubt a good part of what the pragmatists meant (see CP, 6:428). However, I am convinced that Peirce was struggling to, and that James and Dewey in fact did, mean more in their conceptions of "method." What they developed in an intellectual vein as formal and social orders were meant to be cashed out existentially. The methods they produced were iconic of and indexical for a more general attitude or bearing: a way of being that keeps constitutive thought alive but attentive to its human abode.

The bearing I have in mind involves traits I identified earlier: both a pragmatic openness to our experiences and an intellectual willingness to risk our own conceptions of the world. Both attitudinal dimensions of pragmatic method are found, in different locations, in each of the classical pragmatists. Their emphases on method thus call us to an apprenticeship to this bearing and attitude of openness in and through which our own questions may emerge.

Perhaps the hardest case to make for the confluence of method and attitude is that of Peirce. Peirce's appeal for neo-Peirceans, after all, is precisely that his work wears the tag of "pragmatism" but, through their amputative vision, also comes across as strictly intellectual. Peirce is relentless in his systematic reconstruction of the logic of inquiry, developing not only his existential graphs and logic of relatives, but also a conception of logic as semiotic. As important and influential as this work is, there lives behind it a concern with the scientific attitude of the inquirer or thinker.

This concern is most overt in Peirce's persistent references to the character requisite for the practice of science. This practice, he says, must be "moved by an intelligently sincere and effective desire to learn" (CP, 1:235): it is "the active wanting to know which implies we don't already—that makes the scientific man" (MS 866:4). Peirce's struggle to see the attitude beneath the method appears in his early work in the unusual closing paragraphs of "The Fixation of Belief," to which we referred earlier. I repeat it here for emphasis. Having spent the entire essay laying out the necessity of the scientific method of fixing belief if one takes the "logical question" seriously, Peirce recognized that a formal, external acknowledgment of the method is insufficient: We must, he said, make "a choice which is far more than the adoption of any intellectual opinion, which is one of the ruling decisions of [one's] life" (EP, 1:122). This choice bears with it the kind of existential commitments Peirce himself embraced in his euphuistic conclusion:

The genius of a man's logical method should be loved and reverenced as his bride, whom he has chosen from all the world. . . . he will work and fight for her, and will not complain that there are blows to take, hoping that there may be as many and as hard to give, and will strive to be the worthy knight and champion of her from the blaze of whose splendors he draws his inspiration and his courage. (EP, 1:123)

These overt references to the scientific attitude are more systematically sustained in Peirce's conceptions of "living habits" and "living beliefs." Habits, for Peirce, are embodied generals or thirds; they are living attitudes or headings through which our concrete action is conducted. In his 1902 essay "Reason's Rules," Peirce says that habits function such that one "will behave, or always tend to behave, in a way describable in general terms upon every occasion (or upon a considerable proportion of the occasions) that may present itself of a generally describable character" (CP, 5:38).

Peirce's conception of habit applied to all lawlike behavior, human or otherwise, but he usually reserved the term "belief" to designate specifically human habits governing conduct. Beliefs are habits. Thus, to believe in scientific method is not merely to make assertions concerning propositions, but to embody the meanings of such propositions in one's life: to be prepared to act in a scientific way. Peirce pointedly, for example, rejected a narrow conception of belief in discussing religious belief:

It is absurd to say that religion is a mere belief. You might as well call a society a belief, or politics a belief, or civilization a belief. Religion is a life, and can be identified with a belief only provided that belief be a living belief—a thing to be lived rather than said or thought. (CP, 6:439)

Method, for Peirce, is inefficacious if it is not lived. "All education," he said in describing his own correspondence course on the art of reasoning, "broad or narrow, is intended to teach the student to *do* something" (W, 6:11).

The move from formal orders to existential attitudes seems to me clearer in the work of both James and Dewey. In focusing on our personal conduct within communities, Dewey gave ongoing attention to education as a process of developing living habits and attitudinal orientations. Ironically, if not tragically, many of those who followed Dewey's lead in pedagogy have seemed to understand his conception of method in a much more mechanical sense. Although the importance of this transition from method to attitude is apparent in his work on both logic and education, it is perhaps most strikingly presented in his central concern with democracy. Unlike many democratic theorists, Dewey did not focus on particular, absolute fixtures of either institutions or processes to define democracy. He looked, rather, to our personal habits, attitudes, and ways of being. For Dewey, successful democratic living depends on attitudes of openness and inclusion, and on habits of setting individuals free through education. All social institutions, he believed, have as their purpose "to set free and to develop the capacities of human individuals without respect to race, sex, class or economic status" (MW, 12:186).

In James's work the case for the continuity of method and attitude is similarly clear. James focused on the individual's affective encounter with the world and tried to exemplify the "radically empiricist attitude" he believed was most suitable to this encounter. Within this attitude, "the crudity of experience remains an eternal element" of the world.²² He then brought the importance of attitude to bear on our intellectual activity. As we noted earlier, James identified the pragmatic method as an attitude. He had already suggested, in an Emersonian vein, that philosophies generally were matters of internal bearing: "The history of philosophy is to a great extent that of a certain clash of human temperaments." Pragmatism, then, must make its own place in this history:

It is a method only. But the general triumph of that method would mean an enormous change in what I called in my last lecture the "temperament" of philosophy.²⁴

I think it fair to suggest that each of the pragmatists exemplified his own method and attitude in his own life: Peirce, the scientific; Dewey, the democratic; and James, the radically empirical. Each defined a way of believing while being open to failure, to otherness, and to revision. We must apprentice not only to what the pragmatists say, but also to their very conduct of life. The apprenticing task is not merely intellectual, though it clearly has an intellectual dimension. Nor is the task simply to think within the constraints of a formal, logical structure. Rather, the apprenticeship is to an attitude of openness in and through which one's own questions may emerge, and of willingness to risk failure in answering one's own questions. It is within this attitude that I see some resources for handling the future of pragmatism.

The Both/And of the Attitude

The fallibilistic and experimental heart of the pragmatic attitude points, as we have seen, to the experiencing of risk, precariousness, and instability. This instability, as the pragmatists see it, engages our actions and our thoughts. Peirce focused on the cognitive dimension of experience in defining his fallibilism as "the doctrine that our knowledge is never absolute but always swims, as it were, in a continuum of uncertainty and of indeterminacy" (CP, 1:71). James's radically empirical attitude focused on our direct encounters of risk in living and thinking. For James, we must be ready to lose if we are to achieve a life worth living; contingency is an essential feature of human experience. From his democratic point of view, Dewey, more dramatically, addressed the whole of our existence:

Man finds himself in an aleatory world; his existence involves, to put it boldly, a gamble. The world is a scene of risk; it is uncertain, unstable, uncannily unstable. Its dangers are irregular, inconsistent, not to be counted upon as to their times and seasons. (LW, 1:43)

In our present academic setting, this heart of the attitude, I think, is easy to lose sight of; it has to some degree been lost, I think, by both the neopragmatic and the neo-Peircean schools of pragmatism.

We seem forgetful of our fragility. In the early twenty-first century, we pragmatic intellectuals, relatively speaking, live in isolation and privilege—a gift of history. Yet, to repeat Dewey's warning:

We have heaped up riches and means of comfort between ourselves and the risks of the world. We have professionalized amusement as an agency of escape and forgetfulness. But when all is said and done, the fundamentally hazardous character of the world is not seriously modified, much less eliminated. (LW, 1:45)

Indeed, it is not just amusement that we have professionalized; in many ways, we have become professional pragmatists. Despite the fact that this professionalization brings with it some ameliorating traits, when it serves a second master and becomes an "agency of escape and forgetfulness," it leads us out of the pragmatic attitude. An apprenticeship to the attitude requires an acknowledgment of an amateur status and an engagement in the confessional thinking this status occasionally demands.

As professional academics, we stand over against "ordinary" persons and philosophical amateurs. The important truth in our professional status is that we can and do speak a language and discuss a history for which there are requisite abilities and modes of expertise: Moreover, when driven through the pragmatic attitude at hand, the professionally informed thinking can bear significant consequences for our culture. The failure in our professionalization is the rejection or denial of the amateur status. As Mills remarked, we have entered into an economy of academic marketing and entrepreneurship.

Insight, joy, and truth are no more strangers to fourth-rate bars than to academic offices; nor are pains and self-deceptions any less rare in the latter. Recovery of an amateur status seems crucial to the health of any future for pragmatic intellectuals. To be an amateur is to recognize one's ordinariness and, in that moment, to recall that philosophy—in both its therapeutic and its constitutive strands—grows out of questions that occur in the ordinary. We need neither demean nor ignore the history of philosophy to recognize that its questions are ours only insofar as we experientially appropriate them.

Formal and distanced accounts of third-man arguments, mind-body problems, and questions of the existence of God provoke no philosophy in us unless, in Thoreau's way of putting it, we find a way to own them as our questions. James's extended depression, Dewey's worry in the little town of Oil City about his own possibilities, and Peirce's awakening at age fifty to the absence of any source of income put Peirce's claim that philosophical inquiry should not begin with "fake doubt" in a somewhat different light. Philosophy Americana grows out of our experiences of better and worse. The naked joys and sheer hurts of existing; the startling silence of a winter storm; the green smell of alfalfa in a summer night; the haunting and lingering wonder of a twelve-year-old boy awakened by the doorbell in the deep of night, who, in a gray Formica-ed kitchen, sees his mother comfort the sobbing, hunched, and beaten form of a friend's mother: such are the origins of pragmatic intellectuals in an amateur status.

In bringing philosophy back home, the amateur status invests thinking with an openness and receptiveness to its culture, its environment. Peirce's "musement"—the living process of making room for ideas to present themselves to us—involves the attempt, open to geniuses and clodhoppers alike, to allow thought to develop from lived hopes and doubts. It is in part, I think, this amateurness that James and Dewey sought to indicate through their respective emphases on "the popular" and "the democractic." They were not seeking, as Münsterberg claimed, to oversimplify their intellectual and professional tasks, but to tether these to their experiential origins. John William Miller, though only indirectly on behalf of the pragmatists, highlighted the role of an amateur orientation:

But philosophy that does not begin with life, with concern over the absolute victory to be won or the absolute defeat to be suffered, will sound no trumpets for battle and usher in no healing peace. Decadence and enervation, perhaps highly ornamented in fine logic, thoroughly urbane and elaborately mannered, is their deadly substitute for a keen abundance of life. Philosophy, like religion, must lay an absolute challenge and be content to accept the sequel for better or worse.²⁵

Apprenticeship to the pragmatic attitude requires another, related resistance to professionalization. Our profession is that of the professor, and the habit of pro-fessing easily becomes an agency for escape and forgetfulness. Inveterate professors, like men driving in unfamiliar cities, often become unable to admit that they can get lost. To resist this degenerative dimension of our professional professing, we must recover an ability to confess: to acknowledge our finitude, our doubts, and our romances.

Confessional thinking articulates a home for philosophical endeavor; it openly admits to the constraints of its environment. It provides a way for us to admit to and live with the possibility of our own failure. In doing so, I think, it also works the popular and the democratic into its language. As pro-fessors, as James noted early on, we are lecturers; we speak at, not with, whatever audience we can find. In professing without confessing, we move toward a sterile isolation in which our talk always seems to be about secondhand problems. "Such are the rules of the professorial game," James complained, "they think and write from each other and for each other and at each other exclusively." This dimension of the professional side of the philosophical vocation has ongoingly worried pragmatic intellectuals; the irony of the present is that we must now worry about ourselves.

Although the pragmatic method begins with living doubts and actual problems, and the pragmatic attitude recognizes and confesses these in their particularity, this is not yet adequate to the pragmatic intellectual's needs. Pragmatism never relinquished commitment to metaphysical or constitutive thinking. Rather, it emphasized the amateur and the confessional in order both to display the local origins that demand it and to temper its creative development. Pragmatic intellectuals have always engaged possibilities-in-view with imaginative and speculative power, which, though acknowledging its finitude, risked describing the natures of things. Thus, as John McDermott notes, "Pragmatism features a paradoxical combination of epistemic modesty and boldness." The ongoing life of recovery that we all face in an aleatory world, in a gambling existence, is one that demands

experientially, not logically, not only local problem solving but also the wider healing effect of thinking through what we are and what sorts of transactions we have with our environment. The third feature of the pragmatic attitude, then, is precisely a willingness to risk constitutive thinking.

The centrality of this willingness is, again, fully apparent in both the content and the practice of the pragmatic tradition. Peirce's fascination with tychism and the creative work of abduction, and Dewey's persistent appeal to creative intelligence, mark this centrality. James demanded not only that we always begin where we are, but also that we always make room for spontaneity and awakening: that we maintain "another realm into which the stifled soul may escape from pedantic scruples and indulge its own faith at its own risk." In performance, as Charlene Seigfried thoroughly illustrates, James reinvigorated his own constitutional thinking with an original analogical and metaphorical vocabulary whose constituents have become staples of our own pragmatic vocabularies: stream of consciousness, radical empiricism, cash value, and so on.

Except insofar as what I say here demands one, I am not concerned with specific constitutive accounts of the world. Rather, I am concerned with the responsibility we have to maintain our world through them. The wonder sickness is not curable, but it is treatable. Constitutive thinking is not, as Rorty suggests, itself a disease, but a treatment whose excesses of presence (dogmatism) and absence (skepticism) must be constantly monitored. Relinquishing this responsibility for treatment, for establishing philosophically gained worlds, will always have the consequence of enabling these excesses to flourish.

Conclusion

The pragmatic attitude involves not only attentiveness to the instabilities of our existence but also the willingness to think toward conceptions of the world that will carry the freight of our experience. As we have already seen, Thoreau, by way of an analogy between thinking

and walking, perhaps more sharply even than the pragmatists, captured the existential demand of this willingness:

If you are ready to leave your father and mother, and brother and sister, and wife and child and friends, and never see them again—if you have paid your debts, and made your will, and settled all your affairs, and are a free man, then you are ready for a walk.²⁹

Allowing this particular both/and-ness of amateur/confessional and constitutive/professional thinking to inhabit us, permits us, I think, to face the losses of pragmatism within the spirit of American philosophy. It enables us to be philosophers Americana. Through it we may both confess our present pragmatic doubts and failures and risk our own reconstructions of the constitutive orders of experience and nature. The vocation of apprenticeship to this both/and attitude and its dual function of bringing us home to ourselves and launching us toward the gambling of constitutive thinking allows us to be at home in transition.

I opened this exhortation with Gary Davis's appeal to the importance of failure; I close with a reflection on another of his habits. Reverend Davis recorded a variety of his guitar work, but always on the condition that there would be no retakes. Retakes, he believed, estranged him from his own risk and spontaneity. As this Indian summer of the pragmatic tradition and our romance with pragmatism come to an end, we might take our apprenticeship in the direction Reverend Davis indicates. In so doing, we might take a run at the sort of philosophical vocation Ralph Barton Perry attributed to William James:

Philosophy was never, for James, a detached and dispassionate inquiry into truth; still less was it a form of amusement. It was a quest, the outcome of which was hopefully and fearfully apprehended by a soul on trial and awaiting its sentence.³⁰