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Anarchism and the Philosophy of Pragmatism

Philosophy and Revolutionary Anarchism

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Anarchism and the philosophy of pragmatism can add to each other. Pragmatism is explained as a philosophy of active experience and experimental naturalism. Pragmatism advocates radical, decentrlized democracy and industrial self-management, which is very close to anarchism. However pragmatists have often opposed reformist perspectives to revolution. The case for revolution is presented.

Part I: Pragmatism and Anarchism

Unlike Marxism, anarchism does not have an official, orthodox, philosophy. For Marxism, this is "dialectical materialism." (By now there are so many different interpretations of dialectical materialism–as there are of Marxism–that it may be inappropriate to regard it as one philosophy.) Of course, anarchists, like everyone else, have opinions on the major issues of philosophy: What is reality? What is truth? How do we know anything? What is ethically good? What is aesthetically beautiful? What is a good society? And so on. Most people have inconsistent, un-worked-out, sets of answers. People committed to socialist-anarchism are likely to also adopt one of the thought-out philosophical systems.

Many anarchists have taken up some version of dialectical materialism. In his "Modern Science and Anarchism," Peter Kropotkin (2002; pp 146—194), rejecting dialectics, developed a rather mechanistic materialism. However some maintain that he was less mechanistic in other works (Cohen 2006; DeHaan 1965). Todd May (1994) and others have seen anarchism as consistent with poststructuralism and postmodernism. In his "anarchist critique of Marxism," Ronald Tabor (2013) rejects materialism for the belief that "the fundamental reality of the universe consists not of matter but of ideas" (p. 263). Jesse Cohen (2006) has discussed anarchism in relation to representational and anti-representational philosophical views, advocating a critical realism. The anarchist Murray Bookchin (1996) invented his own philosophy, which he called "dialectical naturalism." There have also been religious anarchists, such as Leo Tolstoy or Dorothy Day, the founder of the Catholic Worker movement. And so on.

I am going to discuss the philosophy of pragmatism, as developed by John Dewey and others. I am not proposing pragmatism for the official philosophy of anarchism. Anarchism's current state of philosophical pluralism is satisfactory to me. Many pragmatists find it useful to be in dialogue with philosophers from various traditions. I think that anarchists would benefit from at least considering pragmatism—as pragmatists would benefit from thinking about anarchism.

"Pragmatism," in popular speech, is regarded as meaning a shallow opportunism. This is not its philosophical meaning. Philosophically, it means, literally,

"practicalism" or "praxis." William James (who initiated the pragmatic movement) called much of his philosophy "radical empiricism." John Dewey (who continued to develop pragmatism) preferred the label "instrumentalism" or "experimentalism."

Some anarchists might protest that, far from being anarchists, almost all pragmatists are or have been liberals or social democratic reformists. Certainly Dewey was. This is essentially true, although not entirely true, as I will discuss.

What is Pragmatism?

Before giving my views on what pragmatism is, I must raise two warnings. The first is that pragmatists disagree among themselves. Dewey and James saw some things differently. They both had disagreements with Charles S. Pierce (who first used the term). The most prominent philosopher in the revival of pragmatism in the 1980s and '90s was Richard Rorty. Yet many of his fellow "neopragmatists" argue that he has incorrectly rejected parts of Dewey's heritage (Guignon & Hiley 2003; Kloppenberg 1996; Westbrook 2005).

The other caveat is that, while I am an anarchist (who has also been influenced by aspects of Marxism), I am not a philosopher, except at the most amateur level. This is my best understanding of the philosophy of John Dewey and other pragmatists, as well as I can explain it. For those interested, they should read further. Short books which cover Dewey's trend of thought include Hildebrand (2008) and Hook (1995). A good selection of Dewey's writings may be found at McDermott (1981). Two fine biographies (which consider Dewey's politics) are Ryan (1997) and Westbrook (1991).

Pragmatism is an "experimental naturalism," which means it rejects all supernaturalism, without necessarily rejecting everything which goes under the heading of "religion." It accepts that there is an autonomous reality which does not depend on us for existence, and which interacts with human organisms in the creation of experience (this is a type of "realism"). Such an independent reality has its own structure, processes, and patterns of movement which also do not depend on us. Our "scientific laws" are our best effort to deal with these patterns. ("Naturalism" is consistent with certain versions of "materialism.")

Pragmatism does not regard any of reality as "unknowable" in principle. A hypothetical aspect of reality that cannot affect our experience in any way whatsoever, directly or indirectly (e.g. by an electron microscope), would never be real for us. But reality is infinitely complex and infinitely large, while we are limited. We can never know all of reality or all about any part of reality, beyond any possibility of being wrong. We have no "God's eye view" of the world. For us there is no "absolute truth." (Accepting that we may be wrong about anything

is "fallibilism." But pragmatism rejects the idea that we cannot know anything at all, which it calls "skepticism.") All we can know about anything is to create the best, most "truthful" belief—to produce enough evidence to make a "warranted assertion."

Central to pragmatism is the idea of "lived experience," or active experience. Experience does not exist in our heads or in our bodies but in the active interaction (or transaction) between our selves and the world. We act on the world and it acts on us. Our actions change the world, as it changes us. We experience our actions and their consequences. "Actions" include touching and moving things as well as looking and thinking about things. Our experience is not a passively mirrored reflection of external reality (according to a crude "correspondence" theory of truth). Rather it is an active creation of sensations, pictures, models, and operations which we use to cope with reality. Faced with some problem, we have to work out a way to solve the problem, by enquiry. We may rely on those things which are not problematic at this time, develop hypotheses as to how to deal with those that are, and then act on the problem to see if our hypothetical solution will resolve the uncertainty. This is a "scientific" approach to enquiry, although not literally using the exact same techniques of physics or chemistry in solving social difficulties.

The basis of pragmatism has sometimes been formulated as "The truth (or the good) is what works." To pragmatists, this does not mean that "the truth" is what makes us feel good in the short term, or that "the good" is what is immediately expedient. By "works," it means works overall, over time, and for a community of enquirers. Nor does the formula mean that there is no objective reality. Exactly the contrary. A hypothesis can only be said to work if it somehow matches with independent reality. A key can only work to open a lock if it fits the lock, which does not mean that it looks like (or "represents") the lock.

For example, if I look at a valley from a hilltop, I may have a road map of the region, or a realtor's map of property boundaries, or a geologist's map of raw materials, or a topographic map of land heights, or a painting of the valley in the sunset as it appeared to an artist. Which one "represents" the valley in "truth"? They all do, depending on my purposes, whether I want to drive somewhere or buy a house or dig a mine or have an aesthetic experience. They are instruments of satisfying my needs, reaching my goals, and realizing my values, and therefore resolving my problems. They were each made through someone's actions (including measuring and digging, or painting). They may be checked for accuracy by my further actions (such as driving on the roads or digging for minerals).

Our experiences are never just between us and the physical environment. They are social. We could not think without the language and concepts that came from

our cultural environment. Our experiencing is communal, as is that of science. Like scientists, we do best when we can exchange ideas and experiences, share thoughts, and argue out competitive solutions. Enquiry is social and works best when cooperative.

Pragmatism is a commitment to this idea of cooperative enquiry and experiencing in all areas. This is the ground for its belief in participatory democracy. It rejects rule by "enlightened" experts. The more that the people themselves are directly involved in working together to develop their culture and satisfy their needs, in pooling their experiences, the better they will do. This means a pluralistic openness to the experiences of the marginalized, the outcaste, and the oppressed: the working class, African-Americans (West 1989), women (McKenna 2001), and others.

Pragmatism distinguishes between "democracy" as an ideal to be striven for and "democracy" as a label—and not a very accurate one—for the existing state. Similarly there is a distinction between "democracy" as the machinery of a state and "democracy" as a way of life, something which pervades every aspect of a society: its politics, its culture, its religion, its economy, and its relationships

Pragmatism does not accept the distinction between "facts" and "values." Even the most objective science involves the value of truth. In our experiences, we will have problems with values, conflicts between different moral standards, questions about the right way to behave. Factually, human beings have moral and other values (leaving aside a few psychopaths). All our values are never in question at once. Basing ourselves on those values we are not questioning at this time, and on whatever facts are relevant to the situation, people can do the same as with other problematic situations: work out hypotheses, and then act on them to see if they can resolve moral problems.

From this perspective, means and ends interpenetrate. Ends "justify" means, but only if the means really lead to the desired end (the "end-in-view") and do not have negative side products (other, unwanted, consequences). Dewey also applied his method to aesthetics. His key concept here was that art aims at "consummatory" experiences, which are fulfilling in themselves, even as they lead on to the next experience.

The whole point of philosophy, to Dewey and James, was to deal with the problems of people, not only professional academics. Pragmatism aims to provide methods for coping with difficulties in culture, science, politics, economics, and social thinking and behavior.

Radicals may notice the similarity of pragmatism to some of Karl Marx's views (Gramsci called Marxism "the philosophy of praxis"). Here are some excerpts from Marx's 1845 "Theses on Feuerbach":

"The chief defect of all previous materialism (. . .) is that things, reality, sensuousness, are conceived only in the form of the object, or contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively. . . .The active side was set forth abstractly by idealism. . . .The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the this-worldliness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking which is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question. . . .The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it." (Marx, 1938)

So far as this goes, I do not see any difference from Deweyan pragmatism. There is a basis for the similarity. In Germany, Marx and Engels had been members of a group of young men studying the idealist philosophy of G.W.F. Hegel–as was Michael Bakunin. (Philosophical idealism holds that everything is Mind or Spirit.) Put simplistically, they abandoned Hegel's idealism for materialism, but maintained much of his dialectical dynamics: "the active side set forth abstractly." Decades later and on another continent, Dewey also began his philosophical career as a Hegelian. When he rejected Hegel's abstract idealism for naturalism, Dewey also continued aspects of Hegel's views. This included Hegel's holism and nondualism, his interactionism, and his dynamism. ". . .Jurgen Habermas. . . remarked that American pragmatism should be seen as the 'radical-democratic branch of Young Hegelianism'. . . " (Westbrook 2005; p. 124). But Dewey completely rejected Hegel's determinism and teleology. (Teleology is the belief that processes have inevitable ends built into them—such as the Marxist belief that "socialism is inevitable"). He saw the world as still open, still being made. Perhaps he went too far in rejecting historical determination, as I will argue in Part II.

Pragmatism, Democracy, and Anarchism

Dewey had a radical conception of democracy. As mentioned, he was a liberal. He supported the US imperial state in World War I and II, the Korean War, and the Cold War, and he opposed any idea of revolution. But unlike most liberals, he did not support Roosevelt's New Deal. He tried to build a third party to the left of the Democrats. He came to reject capitalism and advocate the socialization of the economy. He defended the rights of women and of African-Americans. He supported union organizing and the struggle for teacher unionism. He was active in the anti-war movement before Pearl Harbor. He played a key role in giving the exiled Leon Trotsky a hearing in Mexico after his frame-up by Stalin (the "Dewey Commission"). Of course, he was the leader of the movement for progressive education. None of this makes him an anarchist, but neither was he a moderate sort of wishy-washy liberal.

Dewey's vision of democracy was participatory and decentralized. He advocated a federalism which would be rooted in local communities with directly democratic decision making. "In its deepest and richest sense a community must always remain a matter of face-to-face intercourse . . . . Democracy must begin at home, and its home is the neighborly community" (Dewey, quoted in McKenna 2001; p. 121). Writing about Thomas Jefferson, who had been greatly impressed by the New England town meetings, Dewey praised him for ". . . the importance he attached to self-governing communities of much smaller size than the state or even the county" (Dewey 1940; p. 31). "The identification of the idea of democracy and the idea of community may be Dewey's most characteristic doctrine" (Manicas 1982; p. 143).

Dewey rejected state socialism in favor of worker management of cooperative industries. "He was drawn to various forms of decentralized socialism" (Westbook 2005; p. 96). This included an attraction to the British guild socialists (a reformist version of anarcho-syndicalism). He wrote that he wanted a "cooperative society where workers are in control of industry and finance as directly as possible through the economic organization of society itself rather than through any superimposed state socialism" (quoted in Westbrook 2005; p. 92). "Dewey was thinking of workers' management and education for workers' management" (Goodman 1970; p. 84). Workplace democracy he saw as important not only for political reasons but for the sake of the worker's creative and personal growth. (For more information on Dewey's views on industrial democracy, see Ryan 1997 and Westbrook 1991, also Stikkers 2009.)

Whatever Dewey thought, there is not a big step to anarchism from a program of decentralized and participatory democracy, including workers' management of socialized industry. It is virtually the anarchist goal. When everyone is involved in governing then there is no government. Anarchism is democracy as a way of life, without the state. A federation of workplace councils, community assemblies, and a popular militia (so long as it is needed) would be capable of coordinating society, developing from-below economic plans, and protecting its people. It would be the self-organized people and not a state. That is, it would not have a socially-alienated bureaucratic-military state machine standing separate and above the rest of society.

Dewey's disciple, Sidney Hook (who was far from being an anarchist) noted that Dewey rejected anarchist "propaganda by the deed," or ideas of a society without "authority." But Hook wrote, "The heart of Dewey's social philosophy is the proposal to substitute for the existing modes of social authority the authority of scientific method" (1995; p. 151). And "with anarchism as a faith in the capacity of human beings to settle their differences without coercion, [Dewey] was more sympathetic. But he interpreted this as a directive to use intelligence as a method

of social reconstruction and authority so as to reduce the amount of coercion in the affairs of men . . . " (pp. 163—164). Anarchists believe that it is possible to "substitute for the existing modes of social authority" a society in which people settle their differences with almost no coercion, through the use of intelligence, scientific enquiry, and cooperative discussion (but not in this existing society!). Here too, there is barely a step from Dewey's democratic vision to the program of anarchism.

While Dewey never called himself an anarchist, his pragmatist predecessor did. In his last decade, William James came to identify himself as an anarchist (Coon 1996). In his 1907 Pragmatism, publically published, he declared that there were two types of people with attitudes toward "government, authoritarians and anarchists" (James 1981; p. 9). He went on to criticize the "airy and shallow optimism of current religious philosophy" (p. 16) by referring to the work of a well-known radical who had championed the homeless and unemployed: "that valiant anarchistic writer Morrison I. Swift. Mr. Swift's anarchism goes a little farther than mine does, but I confess that I sympathize a good deal . . . " (p. 16).

He wrote to a number of friends saying that he was an anarchist. "I am becoming more and more an individualist and anarchist and believer in small systems of things exclusively" (quoted in Coon 1996; p. 80). "I am getting to be more and more of an anarchist myself, in my ideas" (quoted on p. 85). He suggested that anarchists set up communities to demonstrate the value of cooperative living. Deborah Coon concludes that James had in mind a "pacifist, communitarian anarchism, strongly individualist, but holding community to be important" (p. 86). James developed his anarchism in the same period in which he became active in the Anti-Imperialist League, which opposed the US war with Spain and the brutal US invasion of the Phillipines. (Mark Twain and other prominent intellectuals were also involved in the Anti-Imperialist League.) As cited already, he developed a strong dislike for "bigness": big government, big corporations, and big military actions. Instead he advocated individualism and decentralization, which fit anarchism.

For a considerable period there was hardly anyone else who fulfilled the anarchist potential of pragmatism. But in the 1960s, probably the most well-known anarchist was Paul Goodman. He clearly identified himself as a pragmatist in his many books. In one of his last works, he declared, "It was the genius of American pragmatism, our great contribution to world philosophy, to show that the means define and color the ends, to find value in operations and materials, to dignify workmanship and the workaday, to make consummation less isolated, more in-process-forward, to be growth as well as good" (1970; p. 199). In his books, he argued that the promise of Dewey's progressive education, industrial self-management, and decentralized democracy had been thwarted (he usually

also cited Jefferson). Goodman's pragmatism was integral to his anarchist critique of US politics, culture, and economy. (For a review of Goodman's anarchism, see price 2010.)

In the 1970s and '80s, a professional philosopher, Peter T. Manicas, made contributions to the study of the relation between pragmatism and anarchism (Manicas 1974; 1982). He proposed to "take a fresh look at [Dewey's] writings from the vantage point of anarchism" (1982; p. 134). He concluded, "Dewey's idea of democracy . . . is anarchist . . . contain[ing] a view of an ideal, noncoercive, nonauthoritarian society; [and] a criticism of existing society and its institutions, based on this antiauthoritarian ideal . . . " (p. 136). Influenced by Murray Bookchin, Manicas declared that "the democratic community presupposes radical decentralization—the dissolving of the dinosaur industrialized nation-state and the disintegration of the monster institutional complexes of present-day societies" (1974; p. 251). Pointing to ecological and other problems of oversized and overcentralized industrial societies, he advocated federations of integrated, collective, directly-democratic, communities.

More recently, David Kadlec wrote, "Little has been written of the historical relationship between political anarchism and American pragmatism" (2000; p. 22). While his book explores this to some extent, it is mainly a discussion of how pragmatism and anarchism influenced modernism in art and culture.

A few other authors have written one or two papers on the anarchist/pragmatist relationship, such as Bartenberger (2014), DeHaan (1965), and Pereira (2009). Dabrowsky & Schmidt have written, " . . . Anarchism and pragmatism have an essentially symbiotic relationship; pragmatist principles bolster the anarchist case and vice versa" (2014; p. 1). (There are also a few people calling themselves "anarcho-pragmatists," who are pro-capitalist, false "libertarians." Since real anarchists oppose capitalism as well as the state, I will ignore such people.)

Ruth McKenna (2001) has written a book on utopian visions, contrasting anarchism, pragmatism, and feminism. She rejects anarchism in favor of what she regards as a pragmatist and feminist approach. Her presentation of Deweyan pragmatism and its usefulness for feminism is clearly written and explained. However, she does not know much about anarchism. For example, she claims that most anarchists want to replace "the capitalist market" with "the ideal of a truly free market." Supposedly they believe that "putting an end to the exploitation present in the current market system . . . will lead to cooperative and healthy competition . . . " (pp. 58—59), whatever that means. Apparently she is not aware that almost all anarchists are and have been socialists (including small-c communists) and completely reject any type of market system. (The individualist, pro-market but anti-capitalist, anarchist school, was always marginal and has almost completely died out.)

Perhaps not surprisingly, what she criticizes about Dewey's vision is precisely what he shares with the anarchists, namely his belief in smaller democratic communities. "Dewey's call for the formation of face-to-face communities could be problematic. . . .The worry is that without uncovering and addressing inequality and oppression, the return to face-to-face communities will result in more intolerance and more restriction" (pp. 123–124). But it is impossible for people to create a more decentralized and communal society without mass upheavals which also "uncover and address inequality and oppression." Neither anarchists nor Deweyan radical democrats would accept any other kind of decentralization! McKenna does not see this because she believes in change without mass upheavals, that is revolution (my next topic). Given her views about "markets," it is consistent that she does not discuss workplace democracy, neither when covering the anarchists nor the pragmatists.

Dewey and his co-thinkers wrote a great deal about education. He may be most well-known for his work in this area. Similarly, anarchists have done a lot of work and writing on education and schooling. The intersection of anarchism and Deweyan educational theory and practice is a fascinating topic. (Paul Goodman would be an important figure in any such discussion.) But I am not going into it here.

Part II: Pragmatism, Reformism, and Revolution

"Dewey was never tempted by the idea of a violent revolution. He advocated social reform by democratic means" (Bernstein 2010; p. 77). This is a typical statement, by a prominent pragmatist philosopher. Note that a revolution by millions against a minority that has oppressed and exploited them, is not regarded as "democratic."

John Dewey explained his nonrevolutionary views in a few places. In his 1935 Liberalism and Social Action, he asserted, "Liberalism must now become radical, meaning by 'radical' perception of the necessity of thorough-going changes in the set-up of institutions and corresponding activities to bring the changes to pass." (McDermott 1981; p. 647). Such changes, he stated, included "a socialized economy" (p. 662). But the "corresponding activities to bring the changes to pass" did not include working class revolution.

Dewey favored class struggles in the limited sense of workers' forming unions and striking, but rejected such struggles culminating in workers' revolution. In that sense he denounced "class struggle whose spirit and method are opposed to science" (p. 654). "The question is whether force or intelligence is to be the method upon which we consistently rely. . . " (pp. 656–7). Manicas responds,

"Dewey's absolutist either/or, either force or intelligence, is unwarranted. No serious revolutionary, not Marx, not Lenin, not even Bakunin, so tied his hands in the way that Dewey suggests . . . " (2008; p. 16).

What is the meaning of this abstract appeal to "intelligence"? Apparently it means to operate within the laws and institutions of the existing state. Dewey claims to be arguing that radicals should not commit themselves ahead of time, that they should examine each situation by itself and intelligently decide if and when force is needed or if public discussion and voting will be enough for those "thorough-going changes" he wanted. But actually he is strongly on the side of the legal, pacifistic, electoral, road to change, at least in the USA.

Dewey recognized that "our [political] institutions, democratic in form, tend to favor in substance a privileged plutocracy" (McDermott 2008; p. 661). However, he still argued that bourgeois politicians and institutions can be effected by changes in public opinion. "Legislatures and congresses do not exist in a vacuum—not even the judges on the bench . . . The assumption that it is possible for . . . law-making bodies to persist unchanged while society is undergoing great change is an exercise in verbal formal logic . . . .Even as they now exist, the forms of representative bodies are potentially capable of expressing the public will . . . " (pp. 660–661). He did not appreciate that there is a difference between some changes in public opinion, such as changing laws about alcohol or marijuana, and others, such as taking away the wealth of the entire "privileged plutocracy"! The legislators, congressmen, and judges may bow to some public pressures, but not to the call for the total expropriation of the class to which they owe allegiance. It is the class to which they mostly belong. (Talk about "verbal formal logic"!) They would sooner cancel elections, organize fascist gangs, and try to make a military coup.

Dewey admitted to "one exception . . . .When society through an authorized majority has entered upon the path of . . . great social change, and a minority refuses by force to permit the method of intelligent action to go into effect. Then force may be intelligently employed to subdue and disarm the recalcitrant minority" (p. 662). Even in this case, Dewey does not advocate preparing the workers and oppressed to be ready to resist and defeat "the recalcitrant minority." He does not advocate warning the people ahead of time that this might happen. The whole of his influence would be to direct the "authorized majority" into legal and electoral channels. This would disarm the working people in the face of what is not at all an "exception" but is the most likely probability.

Dewey went over this argument again, in 1938, responding to Leon Trotsky's essay, "Their Morals and Ours" (Trotsky 1966). (To an anarchist reader, Trotsky wrote some good things in the essay as well as some very bad things, but that is not my topic.) Trotsky claimed that the class struggle was the major law of

society, from which revolutionary conclusions may be deduced. Dewey responded, "One would expect, then, that with the idea of the liberation of mankind as the end-in-view, there would be an examination of all means that are likely to attain this end without any fixed preconceptions as to what they must be, and that every suggested means would be weighed and judged on the express ground of the consequences it is likely to produce" (Dewey 1966; p. 57). Since revolutionary socialists do not do this, he says, they are dogmatic and unpragmatic.

This argument ignores the studies which Marxists and anarchists have made, over generations, of the class nature of societies. It ignores the studies made of revolutions which have succeeded and those which have failed, from the time of Marx and Bakunin to today. It treats each situation as a brand-new problem which has to be analyzed from scratch. While it is correct to reject an inflexible determinism, it is foolish to adopt this sort of indeterminism. It seems to deny that anything can be learned from the past. Dewey wrote this, after all, after the experiences of the Russian revolution and of the rise to power of Italian and German fascism. From over a century of experience, the revolutionary socialists (Marxists and anarchists alike) have drawn the conclusion that the existing (capitalist) state cannot be used to transform capitalism into socialism but must be dismantled, destroyed, and replaced by alternate institutions. It is possible that the revolutionaries have drawn the wrong conclusions. But to deny that a lot of experience and experimentation has gone into theories of revolution and the state, is inaccurate and unjust.

Revolution is not defined by being "violent" or "bloody." "Revolution" means "to turn over" (revolve). It means one class overturning another class. Under capitalism, it means the working class and its allies of all the oppressed overturning the capitalist class and its state and other institutions, and replacing them with new institutions. This is intended to develop a classless, nonoppressive, freely cooperative, society.

Such an overturn might even be fairly nonviolent: IF the big majority of the population is united behind it and determined to carry it through–IF the ranks of the military (the daughters and sons of the working class) come over to the side of the majority–and IF the ruling class is demoralized (especially if revolutions have been successful in most other countries). All this is possible, but. . . .iffy. For example, the October Russian revolution which brought the Soviets to power had minimal bloodshed. It was only later, when foreign imperialists pumped up counterrevolutionary forces into fighting a civil war, that the revolution became bloody (and the worst traits of the Bolsheviks were encouraged). It is likely that the US ruling class will try to resist loosing its power and wealth, as violently as "necessary." The best way to limit their violence is to be prepared: to organize the workers and oppressed as solidly and strongly as possible.

Dewey and his followers often refer to the US political traditions of democracy, liberty, and equality. Dewey openly admired Thomas Jefferson. Yet he never discussed the US revolution, of which Jefferson was a leader. Apparently at least one revolution—"violent" and "bloody" as it was—was a good revolution, consistent with the dictates of "intelligence."

In brief, Dewey's naive faith in the probability of legally and peacefully taking away the capitalist class' wealth and power, does not seem to be based on creative intelligence but on a fixed prejudice.

Reformism or Revolution?

Martin Bartenberger (2014) argues that Dewey's concept of radical democracy is compatible with anarchism because anarchism, like pragmatism, rejects revolution, unlike the "dogmatic" Marxists. Bartenberger specifically cites the anarchist David Graeber as a model. Bartenberger quotes him as seeing conflicts as processes of "problem solving rather than as a struggle between fixed interests" (quoted on p. 8). Both Dewey and Graeber, he claims, reject the idea of solving basic conflicts by revolutionary force. Instead they supposedly advocate "democratic means to reach democratic ends" (p. 9), by which he means using nonviolent discussion and compromises.

On the other hand, Erin McKenna (2001) believes that Dewey's concept of democracy in incompatible with anarchism, because, she says, anarchism, unlike pragmatism, advocates "violent revolution"! "If the price is revolution, it may be too high" (p. 53). Peculiarly, she asserts, "Most anarchists see revolution as [requiring]. . . a total and complete change in people's beliefs, values, and habits. Furthermore, all vestiges of past institutions . . . must be destroyed" (p. 53). "Anarchist visions tend to endorse. . . [an] immediate and complete revolution" (p. 65). She cites no evidence that anarchists believe in such nonsense–except an excerpt from Kropotkin about how the French (bourgeois, not anarchist) revolution uprooted medieval and feudal institutions (which seems a good thing to me). And she quotes Fanon, an important political writer but not an anarchist. Then she makes obvious arguments about how some of the heritage of the past might be useful and, anyway, people cannot completely change all their traits overnight. So, McKenna has the opposite reaction to Bartenberger.

Neither of them realizes that anarchism has two main tendencies (price 2009). Historically, the main one has been revolutionary, from Bakunin onto Kropotkin, Goldman, Makhno, the anarcho-syndicalists and the anarcho-communists. But there has also been a reformist trend, believing in building producer and consumer cooperatives, communes, and other alternative institutions. These would

grow, peacefully and gradually, until they replace the state and the capitalist economy, with a minimum of direct combat. This trend began with P.J. Proudhon and includes Graeber and possibly the majority of current US anarchists. (I am generalizing; specific individuals may not fit precisely into either tendency.) I think this trend is unrealistic as a strategy because the capitalist class controls the marketplace even more than it does the state. It would find ways to stop the alternate institutions from spreading beyond the margins. Anyway, Bartenberger finds pragmatic liberalism to be consistent with reformist anarchism, while McKenna finds it to be in conflict with revolutionary anarchism.

Today, virtually all—or all—of the well-known pragmatic philosophers are liberals or reformist socialists (of those who mention the topic anyway). This includes Richard Bernstein (2010), Richard Rorty (Guignon & Hiley 2003), Robert Westbrook (2005), and Cornell West (1989; West has also been influenced by Marxism and the African-American prophetic tradition).

Among pragmatists who were also anarchists or anarchist-influenced, again almost all were reformist. This began with William James, who Deborah Coon (1986) described as believing in a "pacifist, communitarian anarchism." Paul Goodman described himself as an "anarchist-pacifist." While insisting that he was not a liberal, he advocated small changes and small steps to make a more liveable society (price 2010).

Peter Manicas, the professional philosopher, dealt with the issue of revolution while discussing the possible relationship between pragmatism and Marxism, which has influenced him as well as anarchism. He makes some good criticisms of Dewey's reformism: "it will not be easy to explain Dewey's continuing optimism that creative intelligence can be effective even where it so patently lacks institutions" (2008; p. 17). However, he thinks that Dewey was right to believe "that in the United States, at least, proletarian revolution was not on the historical agenda," then or now (p. 12).

Richard DeHaan, influenced by both Kropotkin and Marx as well as Dewey, rejected "the liberal-reformist philosophy espoused by Dewey himself" (1965; p. 283). Instead, he advocated "adopt[ing] a revolutionary attitude" (p. 284), but did not actually advocate revolution. Not only anarchists, but, as can be seen, almost all of the pragmatists who were influenced by Marx also adopted a nonrevolutionary, reformist perspective (Cork 1950).

The most significant exception among Dewey's followers was the early Sidney Hook. Hook was a prominent student and explicator of Deweyan pragmatism. Yet in the 1920s and '30s he was also the leading US Marxist scholar. He wrote two major books explaining Marx's Marxism, one being Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx (Hook 2002). It was a critique of Marx's overall views of politics and philosophy. At the time, Hook saw himself as a follower of Lenin, whom

he (incorrectly) interpreted as a radical democrat. This was based on Lenin's apparent support of soviets (elected councils) of workers and peasants, rooted in factory committees and village councils, replacing the bourgeois state. But Hook was also influenced by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Korsch, who really were inspired by the humanistic, democratic, and libertarian aspects of Marxism.

Hook's main goal was to expound a "revolutionary interpretation" of Marx. In the course of his book, he answered most of the arguments which had been and would be raised against revolution. Hook focuses on Marx's theory of the state. ". . . It is Marx's theory of the state which distinguishes the true Marxist from the false . . . .Since the acceptance of the class theory of the state is the sine qua non of Marxism, to be a Marxist means to be a revolutionist" (pp. 270, 273). He interprets Marx as saying that the state is an organ of a ruling class; therefore the existing state cannot be used to remove its own ruling class and to liberate its working class and oppressed.

Dewey and others have noted that Marx and Engels wrote, on several occasions, that it might be possible for the working class to take power by peaceful, electoral, means in Britain or the United States. Hook refers to this. He quotes Engels that, whenever Marx made such comments, "He certainly never forgot to add that he hardly expected the English ruling class to submit, without a 'proslavery rebellion,' to this peaceful and legal revolution" (quoted on p. 292). This is a reference to the US Civil War, which Marx had observed. Lincoln had gotten elected legally and peacefully. Rather than accept the results, the slaveowners rose up, took most of the nation's officer corps, and tried to overturn the government and break up the country in a bloody civil war. Hook commented, "As if it were not precisely the danger of a 'proslavery rebellion'—a counterrevolution—which demanded that the revolution everywhere assure its victory by a resort to force!" (p. 292). Hook believed that Marx's speculations of a peaceful revolution were unrealistic even at the time he made them, let alone a century later.

Westbrook (2005) criticizes the revolutionary Sidney Hook by citing an article Hook wrote on "workers' democracy" in 1934. In this article, Hook had claimed that the rule of the workers would include denying the former capitalists "political rights . . . freedom of speech, assembly, and agitation . . . ." (Hook quoted on p. 125). Westbrook rejects this political repression of a minority and raises questions about how democratic "workers' democracy" would really be. I agree that Hook was wrong to make political repression of the bourgeoise, after a revolution, into an apparent principle. It should be a matter of expediency, with as much freedom as possible for everyone and political repression only if necessary (if they organize sabotage and armed counterrevolution). Making repression a principle reflected Hook's Leninism.

However, Westbrook missed the real point. What the bourgeoisie will resent about workers' democracy is not really the possible loss of their votes—it is the loss of their capital, their industries, their incomes, their mansions, their estates, their fortunes and status. They will be furious about these being taken away from them (even under Dewey's program of socialization), much more than about their right to circulate petitions. As far as they are concerned, this expropriation is what makes the purest workers' democracy into a "dictatorship."

By the end of the 1930s, Hook began to turn to the right. He felt the pressures of the spread of Stalinist totalitarianism, of World War II followed by the Cold War, and of the post-war prosperity in the West. He devolved into an anti-communist cold-warrior, to the right of Dewey. (The same was true of others, such as Max Eastman. For a time he too was a student of John Dewey and a follower of Lenin. He also moved far to the right.)

Christopher Phelps has sought to revive interest in Sidney Hook's revolutionary period (Phelps 1997). He argues that Deweyan pragmatism is still consistent with a socialism which is revolutionary, democratic, and Marxist– a socialism-from-below. He rejects arguments that it was Hook's pragmatism which led him to move to the right. However, Phelps' Leninism (and Trotskyism) mar his efforts to make a radically-democratic case for a pragmatic Marxism. Granted that Lenin was not Stalin, he and Trotsky did establish a one-party police state which laid the basis for Stalinism. Phelps does not consider the alternate approach for a radically-democratic socialism-from-below–namely revolutionary anarchism.

In Conclusion

Possibly the major argument against a revolutionary perspective is the current nonrevolutionary—if not outright conservative—consciousness of most US people (whether we look at them as workers or as citizens). Very, very, few are presently considering revolution. Yet there have been revolutions! A revolutionary perspective is built on the possibility that most people's consciousness may change. Our society is already facing economic crises, dangers of war, and coming ecological, environmental, and energy catastrophes. If the capitalist ruling class and its politicians are unable to deal with these issues (as they seem to be), then more and more people may be looking around for answers. They may be willing to consider even the most radical ones. In the course of fighting for better lives, the working people and others can educate themselves and transform themselves. They may make themselves into self-governing members of a truly democratic society.

Richard Rorty himself has imagined his own pragmatist liberalism coming to pass after a national economic collapse, followed by a military coup and its

overturn. So Westbrook (2005; p. 169) explains. Westbrook doubts this could happen, which expresses his limited understanding of the nature of the times we live in. Given the economic, military, and ecological/ environmental threats facing the human species, an anarchist-socialist revolution would not only be a morally good thing, but may be a necessary thing, for human survival. The alternatives are "socialism or barbarism" (Luxemburg), "anarchism or annihilation" (Bookchin). This is a very practical issue (price 2013).

To return to my starting point: anarchists have believed in a wide variety of philosophies (those who have thought about philosophy). Pragmatists, followers of the philosophy I am recommending, such as Bernstein (2010), find it valuable to be in dialogue with philosophers of different traditions.

And pragmatists have believed in a wide variety of politics. Most were liberals or social democrats, but a few were conservatives. Some were Marxist socialists of various sorts and some were anarchist socialists. Most believed in legal, peaceful, reforms, but a few have been revolutionaries. William James (1981) felt that the philosophies people adopted were influenced by their psychological temperaments. In any case, the connection between a set of philosophical beliefs and a specific political program is complex and affected by many factors.

Influenced by Hegel, pragmatism has a holistic and dynamic viewpoint. It includes some of the most positive aspects of Marx's method, while rejecting its rigid determinism and teleology. It shares with anarchism a belief in radical, decentralized, democracy, including in the industries of a socialized economy. Like anarchism, it seeks to replace authoritarian rule by cooperative self-determination through discussion, intelligence, and collective problem-solving. Pragmatists have usually rejected the need for a social revolution, but there have been some who have seen its necessity.

It is possible to be a pragmatist in philosophy and a revolutionary anarchist, or so I believe. I think this combination provides the best tools for consistent revolutionary praxis. It is at least worth exploring.

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Anarchism and the Philosophy of Pragmatism
Philosophy and Revolutionary Anarchism
May 2014Part I: Pragmatism and Anarchism Unlike Marxism, anarchism does not have an official, orthodox, philosophy. For Marxism, this is “dialectical materialism.” (By now there are so many different interpretations of dialectical materialism–as t