On the whole however, Rumana’s bibliography is an excellent resource that opens up the enormous mass of books, chapters, and articles that are devoted to the many aspects of Rorty’s thought, ranging from politics to the language of the Antipodeans. A fair number of the citations are accompanied by concise annotations that are helpful not only for the beginner but also to the specialist.

Cornelis de Waal

Pragmatism, Postmodernism, and the Future of Philosophy by
John J. Stuhr

“What is the pragmatic meaning of pragmatism now?”

This is the question that guides Stuhr’s text. Stuhr worries that American philosophy is not going beyond the writings of the classical pragmatists, that there is nothing new coming out of the pragmatist tradition. In short, pragmatism has not gotten beyond the 20th century. His book is a manifesto of invigoration to a stale tradition.

If “modernism” is defined in terms of liberalism, Stuhr points out that liberalism failed to achieve its goals, and as a result we find ourselves in a “postmodern” period of American life. If American life is “postmodern,” pragmatism must also become “postmodern” if it is to have any relevance to today’s times. Although the goals of pragmatic inquiry must change to keep up with current times and its problems, the original genius of traditional pragmatism stays in play: its orientation towards the future, its normative dimension, and its melioristic faith in democracy as a way of life.

In light of recent tragedies in American history, the melioristic faith in democracy has been rattled. Prior to September 11, 2001, “democratic faith” was a complacent acknowledgement of American invulnerability, democratic faith in the age of terrorism has to be more active, and, as Stuhr argues strongly in this text, more critical. Part of this critical project is an awareness of the multiple dimensions that make up American life, and, as a result, American philosophy itself must become pluralistic.
This is where Deleuze, Adorno, and Foucault come into play. Stuhr wants to show that Deleuze is doing the same project as Emerson, James, and Dewey, and as a result, one can use Deleuze as a resource for understanding pragmatism as a philosophy of creation, and therefore as a philosophy of radical thought and criticism. He also wants to show that pragmatism, with its immanent, non-dialectical view of criticism, offers a serious alternative to critical theories like those of Adorno and Horkheimer. Although Foucault's genealogical criticism can serve as an aid to pragmatism, pragmatism helps genealogy by truly thinking out the practical ramifications of the ideas that unfold in such a genealogical process. Stuhr, with the help of these continental thinkers, yet also against these thinkers, formulates a pragmatism for the 21st century that incorporates yet supercedes critical philosophy: power/inquiry (playing, of course, on Foucault's notion of power/knowledge). Power/inquiry, derived from Dewey's logic of inquiry, is the understanding that "all inquiries are branches of criticism because their operations involve value judgments and exercises of power and temperament" (163).

Having shown how pragmatism in the new century will have to be a critical accounting of the multiple dimensions of American life, Stuhr concludes his text with a discussion of "the future of philosophy." Stuhr is not attempting to do clairvoyance here; the emphasis of the phrase is on the definite article. When pragmatism was budding, it was believed that pragmatism would be "the" future of philosophy. Stuhr disagrees, arguing that pragmatism is "a" future of philosophy among many. In other words, Stuhr wants "to reconstruct a more pluralistic pragmatism, a more pragmatic pluralism, and in so doing to change both pragmatism and pluralism" (170). For Stuhr, pragmatism, in the original spirit of pragmatism held by James at the beginning of his Pragmatism lectures, is the guardian of the multiple ways of doing philosophy (pluralism). The final chapter, in the spirit of the critical continental thinkers discussed in the book, is a critique of transcendence, which Stuhr calls "spirituality." He worries that such transcendent spirituality offers a kind of consolation that leads to complacency, which frustrates the critical aspects of pragmatism that he is advocating. Therefore, as he titles the final chapter, American philosophy is to offer "no
consolation,” and instead lead us to “life without spirituality” and “philosophy without transcendence.”

Written in a relaxed, sometimes comically blunt manner, Stuhr hopes to push American philosophy into new ground, breaking philosophy free from the traditional academic game played by philosophers (this is a side theme throughout the book). How successful he is in this endeavor is questionable to me. First of all, it is hard for me to believe a full professor of philosophy at a prominent university when he criticizes the philosophical profession that feeds him (a criticism that can also be used against Bruce Wilshire’s works against the professionalization of philosophy). After all, the book is part of the Routledge American Philosophy Series, of which Stuhr himself is the editor. The other books in the series are by famous philosophers, and the advisors are also “big names” in the philosophical game. Several of the chapters come from already-published articles and papers presented before several audiences, which is the perfect academic formula for writing a book in philosophy. Given his criticism against how philosophy is so self-contained in our society, the message seems hypocritical, knowing full well that the average American will not read this book.

As much as Stuhr likes the idea of philosophers working with people outside of the philosophical profession, he fails to acknowledge those American philosophers who do, like Richard Rorty, Cornel West, and Judith Green, all of whom have taken their philosophical work far beyond the confines of publishing companies. For example, West has been willing to sacrifice his academic life in order to be a real American intellectual, and upon realizing that average people listen to music more than read books, puts together a hip-hop album that highlights his philosophical positions. West’s album is more successful than Stuhr’s attempt to integrate Frank Zappa and various webpages into his chapter on Deleuze, where it is secretly a guise for a regular, traditionally-written paper on Deleuze.

Criticisms aside, Stuhr’s book is interesting and thought-provoking. Philosophy must get over its self-grandeur and become “a” future for American life. Stuhr, even if he fails to actually overcome professional philosophy himself, shows us the problems with the
philosophical enterprise and encourages us to try to think past the twentieth century.

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