

Introduction

Albert Schinz, author of *Anti-Pragmatism: An Examination into the Respective Rights of Intellectual Aristocracy and Social Democracy*, had complained that his book had been met with “an argument from silence.” A.W. Moore, a reviewer of the original French edition, was evidently annoyed with this complaint. He noted in his review of the English language version:

As for my own voluminous contribution to “the argument from silence,” frankly I must confess that so foreign is the author’s whole standpoint and world *to*, what seems to me to be the universe in which we are now living that I unable to take it very seriously or to deal with it systematically. (1)

Schinz’s “whole standpoint” to the “universe in which we are now living” is precisely what makes Schinz’s book of considerable interest. He was, to be sure, anti pragmatism, but more than some issues in technical philosophy were at stake. It will take some effort in historical reconstruction to see this. This is the burden of the present introduction.

Actually, Moore did take Schinz’s book seriously, even if he was profoundly distressed by his “whole standpoint,” including not only Schinz’s understanding of philosophy but, as well, his understanding of American society and its relation to philosophy. Moore’s review ran to four and half pages and quite systematically dealt with the critical themes in Schinz’s book—pointing out, as well, Schinz’s penchant for misquotation. Nor, more generally, was the response to his book altogether an “argument from silence.” First, according to Schinz himself, reviewers in the more popular papers and magazines, *The New York Times*, *The Nation*, *Evening Post*, *Boston Transcript*, *The Bookman* and *Current Literature*, had “made it a point to give a very fair account of what he said regarding America, and of his views regarding democracy and aristocracy of the intellect” (2). Not everyone, regrettably perhaps, was as turned off as was Professor Moore by Schinz’s “whole standpoint.” And within one year of its original publication, there were not less than twelve reviews in more professional journals, including reviews by John Dewey and F.C.S. Schiller, whom both had come in for long criticisms. All twelve reviewers offer more or less “neutral” descriptions of the book’s claims and there is considerable agreement about what Schinz has tried to do, albeit along with some perplexity as to the coherence of his project. Several are neutral in their evaluation of this effort, including the anonymous reviewers writing in *The American Journal of Psychology*, and *Monist*. Two of the reviewers, B.H. Bode, writing in *Philosophical Review*, and Alfred Bertaud, writing from France in *The International Journal of Ethics* are moderately sympathetic, yet critical.

The reviews by Schiller and Dewey are of especial interest. F.C.S. Schiller, a fellow at Oxford and treasurer of the Mind Association, had called his own philosophy “humanism,” but it has always and rightly been associated with James’s pragmatism, even if American writers have tended to minimize his importance in the early development of pragmatism. As with Moore, Schiller wrote two reviews, one for the original French edition and one for the translation with the new appendices which were responses to

criticisms. Schiller began his careful six page review of the former by noting, generously, that: "M. Schinz's book is a document of great interest as a genuine piece of psychological revelation, a spontaneous reaction of a philosophic soul upon a new idea, to new and too big to be embraced by it, but not to alien to stir it to its depths."(3)

Schiller went to note that "such souls, moreover, are just now quite common and M. Schinz has doubtless blurted out the secret thought of not a few philosophers." I suspect that Schiller was correct in this judgment, including, as we note subsequently, Schinz's beliefs not only as regards philosophy, but as regards American society.

Schinz correctly noted that one had to conclude from Dewey's review that there was "nothing good whatever of " his *Anti-Pragmatism*. Dewey could be a very tough reviewer, to be sure, but in this case, he even felt the need to defend the amount of space given his review. He concluded:

If the reader wonders why so much space has been devoted to a book of which the foregoing is a synopsis as exact limits of space permit, I may remind him that the book appears in Alcan's "Library of Contemporary Philosophy"; and coming from a teacher in a representative American college (Bryn Mawr), can hardly fail in France at least of a certain prestige and authority, as presumably diagnostic of American life and thought. (4)

James, who surely was at the center of Schinz's attack (and this is the appropriate term, I think), choose not to respond. Of this genuine "argument from silence," however, Schinz says: "Personally, I much prefer the attitude of Professor James who declined to discuss publicly *Anti-Pragmatism*." As I suggest momentarily, this likely was not merely kindness on James's part. Schinz was correct to see that James, the dominating pragmatist at this time, more generally preferred "the argument from silence." Thus, in *The Meaning of Truth*, originally published shortly after *Pragmatism*, Schinz notes that James went out of his way to say that he "did not pretend to consider a host of critics, Messrs. Taylor, Lovejoy, Gardiner, Bakewell, Creighton, Hibben, Parod, Salter, Carus, LaLande, Metre, McTaggart, G.E. Moore and others, especially not Professor Schinz, who has published under the title *Anti-pragmatisme* an amusing sociological romance" (p. 257).

James characterization, if unflattering, was perhaps on the money. A puzzling feature of the book, noticed by several reviewers, was the last chapter, "Is William James a Pragmatist"? Many today might well say that this would seem much like asking if the Pope was Catholic. And while I doubt that Schinz's reasons for asking the question are on the mark, he was, perhaps, also right on the money in asking it.

What then of this volume and its place in the history of pragmatism? There are two distinct if related problems that make Schinz's book a pertinent document. First, as just suggested, there is the still vexing question of what pragmatism is. Second, there is the much debated issue of its relation to American culture. Schinz has never been considered as providing some additional leverage on these issues. For me, it is precisely

his energetically professed reactionary views which make his book of interest. But to see this, we need to make the effort to be historical--to see his work against the background of James and his America.

Schinz was not a "technical philosopher." Neither was William James. Schinz was a professor of modern languages, but as one reviewer noted, he was known as "a man of thorough philosophic training, wide knowledge and an active mind." Much the same could be said of James--except that, of course, he was a founder of modern psychology and a remarkably creative and exciting writer. And more needs to be said about what I mean here by "technical philosopher."

Briefly, a technical philosopher is very much interested in addressing the arguments of other philosophers. This is not true only of twentieth century "analytic" philosophy: it was true of most of those figures who dominate what we think of as the tradition of philosophy in the West. You cannot read a page of Kant without seeing the arguments of Hume before him, nor a page of Hegel without the arguments of Kant. The "problematic" (to appropriate Bachelard's useful term) which sets the framework of "the problem" is the critical issue. To say that someone is a technical philosopher thus does not imply that they are merely engaged in philosophical argument, since many of the great ones in the tradition also had what might be called a vision-- a view of the universe. But one can have a view of the universe and well articulate it without being a technical philosopher, or if you will, without being either much concerned or, for that matter, much adept at philosophical argument. This is obvious as regards those who do not easily fit into the philosophical tradition as that is understood in the West, e.g., the "philosophers" of the East, of China and of India. It is less obvious, but still true, of William James and Albert Schinz.

If we take seriously--as "philosophers" generally do not--the first pages of James's *Pragmatism*, we can see what is at stake and why, indeed, Schinz was the militant critic that he was. James approvingly quotes Lord Chesterton, who, of course, does not appear in the canon as a "philosopher": "There are some people--and I am one of them-- who think that the most practical and important thing about a man is still his view of the universe" (5). Moreover, for James, "the philosophy which is so important in each of us is not a technical matter; it is our more or less dumb sense of what life honestly and deeply means" (p. 17f.). James notes: "I have heard friends and colleagues try to popularize philosophy in this very hall, but they soon grew dry, and then technical, and the results were only partially encouraging." So, he concludes, his enterprise--to offer us a philosophy, different what is available *and* one we can live by, is "a bold one."

If "pragmatism" is an alternative, what was it an alternative to? As is well-known, James saw but two choices, which he assembled under two "temperaments," "tough-minded" versus "tender-minded." Yet, "temperament" misleads: his concern was historical not psychological. The struggle for meaning had taken on an urgency as the century turned. Much of this had to do with science, recently industrialized and becoming a convincing part of everyday life. As he says, his first "positively important point" was that "never were as many men of decided empiricist proclivity in existence as there are

now" (p. 23). But for these, one could have "either...that Rocky Mountain tough of a Haeckel with his materialist monism, his ether-god and his jest at your God as a 'gaseous vertebrate'; or it is Spencer treating the world's history as a distribution of matter and motion solely..."(p. 24). It is not merely "the spiritual" that was being ushered out. "Romantic spontaneity and courage"--indeed, human agency itself, must also go: "Let him record truth, inhuman though it be, and submit to it!" (*ibid.*). Yet, the other side, rationalist monisms, offer nothing to recommend them. The reasons are important. James begins with a long quotation--also generally not noticed in philosophical accounts of pragmatism-- from the pamphlet pertinently entitled "Human Submission" by the anarchist, Morrison I. Swift. James picks out by one of the many stories which are "specimens of our civilized regime"--"suicides, deaths from starvation the like"(p. 31). After relating this tragic story, James continues with the Morrison text:

The records of many more such cases lie before me [Mr Swift goes on]; an encyclopedia might easily be filled with their kind. These few I cite as an interpretation of the Universe. 'We are aware of the presence of God in his world,' says a writer in a recent English review. [The very presence of ill in the temporal order, is the condition of the perfection of the eternal order writes Professor Royce (The World and the Individual, II, p. 395).] 'The Absolute is the richer for every discord and for all the diversity which it embraces, says F.H. Bradley (Appearance Reality, p. 204). He means that these slain men make the universe richer, and that is philosophy.... The philosophers are dealing with shades, while those who live and feel know truth. And the mind of mankind--not the mind of philosophers and the proprietary class--but the great mass of the silently thinking and feeling men, is coming to this view. They are judging the universe as they have hitherto permitted the hierophants of religion and learning to judge *them*...(p. 32).

Rationalist philosophies *escape from* life; they "interpret" the world by rationalizing it. "It is at this point," says James, "that my own solution begins to appear" (p. 33).

Pragmatism offers a philosophy *for* life, an articulation of "our more or less dumb sense of what life honestly and deeply means." Moreover, it was a series of popular lectures, and James's immediate audience was in the room. Most were not "technical philosophers." When the lectures became a book, his first readers were the philosophers—but of course, his "arguments" did not convince them. One may guess that James had not expected that they would; so, perhaps, against the onslaught of criticisms, the "argument from silence" was the best that he could do. Indeed, while Schinz drew Dewey and Schiller into James's wake, Dewey, writing as someone who shared James's deepest concerns, was anything but enthusiastic regarding the philosophical details of James's pragmatism. For example, his criticism of what at least James seemed to think was "the place of the personal factor in the constitution of knowledge systems and of reality" was criticized from all sides. Thus, for Dewey, the pragmatism that James "has ventured upon will take a very different form according as the point of view of what he calls the "Chicago School" or that of humanism is taken as a basis for interpreting the nature of the personal," whether in a nutshell, it is be unanalysed

and becomes in effect, "a pluralistic, voluntaristic idealism," or, alternatively, "analysed and defined biologically on its genetic side and, ethically on its prospective and functioning side."(6) Dewey was, I think, right in this. But, to repeat using Dewey's (later) language, these are the problems of philosophers, not the problems of men.

Pragmatism has been identified as a theory of meaning (Peirce), a method (Peirce and Dewey), and a theory of truth (Peirce, James, Schiller, and Dewey) All of these (and perhaps some derivatives, e.g., a philosophy of science) are problems of technical philosophy, construed as a "discipline" which has generated its own particular modes of discourse, analysis, and argument. As such, its "conversations" did not require significant bearing on the problems of everyday life. In *Pragmatism*, however, James offered a synoptic philosophy of the universe. To be sure, this view, as James recognized, required some considerable revision of traditional philosophical positions in epistemology—pragmatic truth, ontology—pragmatic pluralism, and ethics--an ethics of "interest" and need. Schinz, no technical philosopher himself, was not the best person to shed illumination on James's ill-formulated efforts in this regard.

But Schinz's did meet James on his own ground. Indeed, although the reader will need to judge this for herself, Schinz is very nearly a caricature of the rationalist monist which James tried so hard to disarm in his *Pragmatism*. Schinz surely saw that James's views were those of a real enemy, including critically, the idea, so insisted on by James, that every person needs a philosophy and that the ones then available were bankrupt. This accounts in part for the subtitle of Schinz's book: "An examination into the respective rights of intellectual aristocracy and social democracy. On the one hand, who can believe that philosophy is for everyone? Schinz (perhaps legitimately annoyed by James's claim in *Pragmatism* that his lectures "drew—they brought good audiences" (7)), introduced his criticism by noting that

Pragmatism...would scarcely have been possible in earlier times. It has become so since erudite scholars and original thinkers have deemed it fit to cater to a public incapable of taking a genuine interest in their researches and their speculations... We feel flattered by the plaudits of the crowd, and to procure these we are satisfied to get down to the level of those whom as *thinkers* we should disdain. Popular science, popular art, popular theology—only one thing was lacking—popular philosophy. And now they give us that.(8)

Pragmatism, as it turns out, is anti-philosophy. Indeed, even if it is true that everyone needs a philosophy, it had better be one safely in the hands of "the intellectual aristocracy."

Again, while the reader can judge for herself, Schinz's arguments both against pragmatism and for "philosophy" were even weaker than James's. This should not surprise nor annoy us. One might even say that his rhetorical strategy was quite brilliant, although challenged, by Schiller and others, as having "a curious theoretical inconsistency." Thus, if it was Schinz's view that "scientific truth ought to be kept out of the reach of the general public" Schinz's violated his own principles by writing in a non-

technical style which seemed at least to address a wide, non-professional audience. He gave several responses to this: “In the first place the book is still philosophical enough so as not to become popular with the masses” (p. xi). Moreover, what for him was the willful obscurity of pragmatist writings had to be addressed “in plain language.”

A good part of his argument involved simply quoting from some of James's most famously energetic but baffling utterances and then standing back and saying: “See, I told you so”! Another strategy, pointed out by Bode (who applauded Schinz’s assault on James’s “loose language”) was his assumption that key terms, “intellect,” “intellectual,” “reason,” “practical,” were not themselves contestable. He thus ignored precisely what is at issue between the pragmatists and others. By doing this, with a vengeance, Schinz is able to foist contradiction upon contradiction on the pragmatists. Nor, again, as readers can themselves judge, was he beyond misquotation and perhaps willful misconstrual.

What then of the pertinence of Schinz’s effort as regards our understanding of the relation of pragmatism to American culture?

For James, *Anti-Pragmatism* is “an amusing sociological romance.” James’s description is not impertinent. On the one hand it is hardly clear that Schinz’s understanding of pragmatism can be sustained. Nor, indeed, is his view of the United States without serious problems, problems which, as we noted, much concerned Dewey. Still, there is something to be learned from Schinz’s account as regards our question—especially if we keep in mind the larger issue which concerns Schinz: the question of the relation of philosophy to society.

Roughly, for Schinz, pragmatism is a philosophy of expediency—a view voiced by numerous critics. Yet, he is on sounder ground in seeing that “pragmatism would invert the traditional relationship established between philosophy and life.” He continued: “In place of regulating our practical conceptions of the world by our theoretical conceptions, it would have us regulate our theoretical conceptions by our practical conceptions” (p. 23). In this regard, the reader will notice an especially trenchant attack on James’s defense of religious belief—at least as Schinz understands this defense.

This is even more dramatic a difference since for Schinz, “philosophy,” properly understood, bakes no bread! For him, the “truths” of philosophy have no bearing on life: “What silly prejudice is this that truth has anything whatever to do with practical life” (p. 209)—a remark which, unsurprisingly, profoundly annoyed Dewey. On the contrary, “from the social point of view, the false is preferable to the true.” (p. 207). On this, strange it may seem, both Plato and Marx would agree—if for different reasons! Schinz has nothing so imaginative as Plato’s “myths” nor of Marx’s critique of ideology in mind. Rather, he judges that scientific “determinism” is dangerous (p. 118) because it de-energizes, and ordinary people need religion, both to shore up courage and to restrain immorality (p. 130)—a theme by then well established in French sociology. James might well have agreed. This leads Schinz to his remarkable conclusion: “pragmatism will triumph, but because it is false, not because it is true” (p. 207)!

But why did America give birth to pragmatism? For Schinz, America “is a land without traditions,” and it is “in a constant state of creation.” Moreover, “America has immense natural resources to develop and cultivate,” but this can be realized “only on condition of exerting a formidable energy.” Dewey was, as noted, upset by Schinz’s picture of America, but we may judge, it was not as regards these ideas, by now perhaps both familiar and, perhaps disastrously, characteristic. (9) But indeed, under such conditions, “ideas and principles purely speculative will be nothing.” Accordingly, “a man who should be inaccessible to considerations of practical life in his method of thinking would be regarded not only as a useless person, but as a dangerous and even noxious person (*ibid.*) “Its thinkers, if it is so fortunate as to be granted any, will not be able to escape the influence of this atmosphere” (p. 114). To be sure, “practical life” for Schinz—as for many other critics of pragmatism, is taken uncritically. Thus, America’s elite are *all* “pragmatists.” The editor-in-chief of *the Wall Street Journal*, quoted by Schinz, sounds much like William James:

The supreme need of the hour is not elastic currency or sounder banking, or better protection against panics, or bigger names, or more equitable tariffs, but a revival of faith, a return to morality which recognizes a base in religion and the establishment of a workable and working theory of life that view man as something more than a mere lump of matter (p. 141).

The text is supremely American--and strikingly resonant of recent talk about America. But while it smacks of James, especially, the last line, we need to remind ourselves that it was James whose damning of the “bitch goddess success” implied a thoroughgoing critique of the Protestant Ethic.

Finally, Schinz sees something about America which reactionaries have always noticed: America’s ostensible commitment to equality, to be sure, a commitment more ideological than real: “It would not be very hard to show that the difficulties in which the great pragmatic nation is floundering to-day all come from the persistent, wilful (*sic*), and blind ignorance of the inequalities of men...”(p. 234). Schinz is almost certainly a racist, but he sees very well that the emancipation of slaves, America’s most “frank” and “radical” (*sic*) proclamation of equality, left an unsolved problem: “...since then the question is which to choose of two solutions of the enormous difficulty created by this regrettable act (*sic*): whether to get rid of the blacks or reduce them again to slavery (without giving the name ‘slave’ to the thing)” (p. 233). By 1907, reconstruction was an abysmal failure and state tolerated lynching was the ultimate weapon of apartheid. The “formidable energy” of rapid post-Civil War industrialization which brought millions of immigrants, a feature of America’s constant “creation,” is also pertinent. Again, in terms which now reappear among ideologues of “white” America, according to Schinz, there is a failure to acknowledge “how soon that which is called ‘American’ in the population of the United States threatens to be submerged.” (10) Indeed, “to all this must be added that the quality of the immigrants instead of growing better seems rather to deteriorate” (p. 215). By 1907, WASP America had become vigorously self-conscious.

James, Schiller and Dewey, certainly to their credit, were also democrats—at least of the spirit. According to Schinz, “for the sake of an ideal...that of elevating all men to the dignity of thinking beings,” America’s thinkers “have had to confine themselves to a philosophy accessible to the crowd” (p. 223f.). One thinks here of Aristotle’s definition of “democracy” as “ochlocracy.” For Schinz, then, America’s mythological conception of itself “which has reached its climax in that absurdity, social democracy” called forth an equally absurd philosophy for the crowd, the “philosophy” called “pragmatism.”

As the reader will see, *Anti-Pragmatism* is certainly reflective of its time and place. (11) The reader will have to judge whether, given that it is also a confusing mix of impatience, insight-- and idiocy, it can help us to understand pragmatism—and America?

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Endnotes

(1). A.W. Moore, review of Albert Schinz, *Anti-Pragmatism: Author’s Translation from the French with Appendices* (Boston: Small, Maynard, and Company, 1909), *Journal of Philosophy*, v.7, n. 26 (December 22, 1910).

(2) Albert Schinz, *Anti-Pragmatism: An Examination into the Respective Rights of intellectual Aristocracy and Social Democracy* (Boston: Small, Maynard and Company, 1909), p. ix.

(3) Review of *Anti-Pragmatism, Examen des droits respectifs de l’aristocracie intellectuelle de la democratie sociale* (Paris: Alcan, 1909), *Mind*, v. 18, n. 3 (July 1909).

(4) John Dewey, review of *Anti-pragmatisme*, *The Middle Works*, 1899-1924, V. 4 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1977), p. 249.

(5) William James, *Pragmatism* and four essays from *The Meaning of Truth* (New York: Meridian Books, 1955), p. 17.

(6) John Dewey, "What Pragmatism Means by Practical," *Middle Works*, Vol. 4, p. 113. This is a review--essay of James' *Pragmatism*. The charge that James countenanced "subjectivity" recurs again and again. See e.g., Schinz, p. 85, and notes on that page. And later, after saying that pragmatists “repeat the same things all the time,” he asks: “Would it not better to meet the criticism addressed to them from all quarters, which is summarized in these words: Pragmatism is Subjectivism?” (p. 258).

(7) James, *Pragmatism*, p. 18.

(8) Schinz, *Anti-Pragmatism*, p. xv.

(9) Not only is the US the most environmentally insensitive economy in the developed world, but Americans are the most overworked people in the developed world. See. e.g.,

Mark Dowie, *Loosing Ground: American Environmentalism at the Close of the Twentieth Century*. (Boston: The MIT Press, 1995); Juliett Schor, *The Overworked American* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

(10) See for example, Orlando Patterson, "Race by the Numbers," *New York Times*, May 8, 2001.

(11) A very recent valuable overview of America at the turn of the century is Noel Jacob Kent, *America in 1900* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2000). Kent is especially good in highlighting the distinctive character of America, especially as regards the myths which promote its energy, and the problems, especially as regards race and ethnicity, which remain the legacy of our nearly unique past.