

INTRODUCTION: PRAGMATISTS IN VENICE

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The Central European Pragmatist Forum (CEPF) organized its ninth international conference in Venice, Italy, on June 5-10th, 2016. The conference (organized by Roberta Dreon and John Ryder) took place in the University of Ca'Foscari, and "Cultural Politics" was its broad and interesting title.

We had a very diverse range of lectures, and I have collected here some of the best papers. Due to their very strong differences, I highlight here first of all Joseph Margolis' lecture on "Persons as Natural Artifacts." To the second set of papers belong those, which emphasize cultural politics in connection with society, politics, and democracy (Tom Rockmore, Jane Skinner, Kenneth Stickers, Scott Pratt, Leszek Koczanowicz, Matteo Santarelli, Alexander Kremer). The third set of papers is connected to cultural politics in a more indirect way (Dorota Koczanowicz, Martin Sventner). At the end of the issue, the respected reader can find two interesting reviews.

Joseph Margolis' lecture, "Persons as Natural Artifacts" was not delivered within the frames of the conference, but it has belonged to his Venetian Lectures. We are grateful that we can publish this paper that is a shorter version of a text, which is forthcoming in a more extended form in Joseph Margolis' book **Three Paradoxes of Personhood**, edited by Roberta Dreon. The book belongs to the series *Lecture veneziane* (Venetian Lectures) directed by Luigi Perissinotto, published by Jouvence, Italy.

I think that one of Margolis' paragraphs summarizes well his main idea that none of the rationalist philosophical theories could correctly describe the continuity between the human primates and human beings: „Broadly speaking, any acceptable reconciliation of the opposed pairings I've begun with—mind and body, thought and world, law and history, and the rest—within the bounds of nature, without foundational or

normative privilege of any kind, construing all such dualities coherently and consistently, preserving the continuum of animal and human powers, counts, in most of the idioms of the new millennium's philosophies, certainly in my own intrusive ideology, as thoroughly pragmatist in sweep, or at least as compatible or companionable with same. My thought is that this presumption may very well define the most promising, most arresting philosophical ventures of our age. In any event, I confess I start from this corner of the world and find myself entirely open to provisional, selective, and functional recruitments (in terms of pragmatist affinities) among initially alien or opposed figures and doctrinal proposals that would have seemed impossible to countenance a short while ago: for instance, regarding Descartes, Leibniz, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Frege, Peirce, Russell, Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Carnap, Quine, Strawson, Davidson, Sellars, and Wittgenstein at the very least. By and large, these are the salient figures I find I must conjure with especially—that is, genealogically, *not* in any way to prejudge the merit or importance of any of their contributions. But then, to suggest that there may be pragmatist affinities between such figures and the classic pragmatists will no longer seem odd."

The thorough analysis of Marx's pragmatism by Tom Rockmore shows us that superficially looking at his philosophy it may seem that he was a pragmatist (practice-oriented and empiricism-based philosopher with meliorist strives, etc.). However, Rockmore justifies that: „This account of Marx's relation to pragmatism identifies forms of pragmatism associated most prominently with Peirce and Dewey, Marx's normative conception of theory, the outlines of Marx's theory, including the conditions of its realization in practice. In Marxian theory, a minimal view of changing the world is to bring about a transformation of capitalism, or a system of private ownership of the means of production, into communism, in which private property will by definition no longer exist, and above all men and women will be able to develop into fully individual human beings. Marx clearly intends his theory of the

transformation of the modern social world to succeed not only in theory but also in practice. It is in the latter respect, for reasons given above, that it seems that the Marxian theory is not traditional but rather genuinely pragmatic. Yet though it succeeds in theory, it has so far and will presumably in the future continue to fail in practice.”

Jane Skinner’s article sketches a „historical trajectory over the century since the publication of Dewey’s *Democracy and Education* in 1916” to illustrate that „political economy” was replaced by an „Economics,” which is understood as „a natural or ‘hard’ science, based on mathematical models.” Skinner argues that this replacement has „serious negative consequences for democracy and, by implications, for international peace.”

Kenneth Stickers argues that “the rise of capitalism brought not merely new economic institutions, such as private property and free markets, but also a reconception of morality in accord with the demands of those institutions. Moreover, this new morality, as Scheler argued, was based on the very sort of *ressentiment* of which Friederich Nietzsche had accused Christianity. The paper identifies two places where the "transvaluation of values" entailed in such *ressentiment* is evident: in the bourgeois notion of "private property" and especially in the perversion of life and utility values.”

Scott Pratt considers „the parallels between the liberal philosophy of Richard Henry Pratt (1840-1924), founder of the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania whose views laid the foundation for the post-Civil War genocide of American Indian peoples, and the philosophy of Rorty’s liberal ironist project. By looking closely at the implications of a philosophical project like Rorty’s as it was applied in the large-scale experiment of late 19th century Indian policy, we can see that, rather than serving as a resource for ending cruelty, liberal irony can serve as an instrument for its perpetuation.”

Leszek Koczanowicz examines “the concept of “phantom public” which originated in Walter Lippmann’s political thought and was polemically discussed by John

Dewey.” In Koczanowicz’s opinion “Latour uses extensively this concept for his own purpose and recently one has noticed a shift in his thought from Dewey’s notion of public to Lippmann’s concept of limited democracy.” He interprets this shift in front of “the background of French political philosophy as well as Latour’s growing interest in non-human factors of the democratic system.”

Matteo Santarelli has focused on the expansion of the Calabrese mafia, the ‘Ndrangheta in Northern Italy. He represents an anti-culturalist approach to this phenomenon since culturalist approaches explain the expansion of organized crime outside its original boundaries by understanding mafia only as a simple by-product of a certain cultural milieu. However, the culturalist hypothesis appears as one-sided and incomplete, and Santarelli sketches an alternative, Deweyan explanation.

Alexander Kremer is persuaded that philosophy as theoretical self-reflection of the human being always has an ideological content. Philosophers have to relate to this ideological dimension of philosophy, and they choose mostly from one of the three main positions. They become Ivory Tower Philosophers, Political Activist Philosophers or Cultural Politics Philosophers, and I claim that we have already chosen before our conscious decision.

Last but not least, the respected reader can discover two excellent reviews from John Ryder and Brunella Antomarini, and I hope that not only professional academics but everybody will find important reflections on pragmatism in the present issue.