

# AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY

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FROM WOUNDED KNEE TO THE PRESENT

*Erin McKenna and Scott L. Pratt*

B L O O M S B U R Y  
LONDON • NEW DELHI • NEW YORK • SYDNEY



**Bloomsbury Academic**

An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

50 Bedford Square  
London  
WC1B 3DP  
UK

1385 Broadway  
New York  
NY 10018  
USA

**www.bloomsbury.com**

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First published 2014

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**British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-44119-437-4

PB: 978-1-44117-518-2

ePDF: 978-1-44118-375-0

ePub: 978-1-44117-893-0

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Typeset by Newgen Knowledge Works (P) Ltd., Chennai, India

Printed and bound in India



*In memory of*  
*Roger Sayers Pratt*  
*(May 23, 1962–February 25, 2009)*  
*and*  
*W. Waugh Smith*  
*(June 13, 1917–August 27, 2010)*



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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Given that this book is the result of many years of study, writing and conversation, we cannot hope to thank everyone who has influenced and contributed to our thinking. So we start with thanks to the community of American philosophers, and special thanks to those who are members of the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy. In particular, we would like to thank those who have provided specific guidance and support: Charlene Haddock Seigfried, John J. McDermott, Marilyn Fischer, Doug Anderson, Leonard Harris, John Lysaker, Mark Johnson, Jerry Rosiek, Douglas Lewis, Lee McBride, John Kaag and Kim Garchar. We would also like to thank all those who came to the works-in-progress session at the 2012 Summer Institute in American Philosophy. We hope you, and all our new readers, will find this both a useful teaching tool and a resource for understanding the American philosophical tradition.

We would like to thank those who reviewed the proposal for this project and those who reviewed the manuscript. Their comments and suggestions were very helpful. Even though we were not able to follow through on all the suggestions, we appreciate the thoughtful reading and comments. In addition we would like to thank the editors at Bloomsbury who brought the project to us and stuck with us as the project grew in size and extended over time.

Finally, we would like to thank Aaron Pratt Shepherd and Mary Breiter. Aaron provided invaluable editing and reference work, along with good humor. Mary provided space, food (including blueberry pancakes), thoughtful insights, and a calm presence while we argued over the work. Portions of Chapter 3 were taken from Pratt, Scott L., "Agency and Sovereignty in American Indian Philosophy," delivered at the 2012 Central European Pragmatist Forum and will appear in the conference proceedings. Several paragraphs of Chapter 5 previously appeared in Pratt, Scott L., "Native American Thought and the Origins of Pragmatism" *Ayaangwaamizin: The International Journal of Indigenous Philosophy* 1 (1) 1997, 55–80. Portions of Chapter 32 were published in McKenna, Erin and Scott L. Pratt, "The Present Place and Purpose of American Philosophy," *COGNITIO: Revista de Filosofia*, 15 (1), 2015.

# PROLOGUE

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On New Years Day, 1891, Dr Charles Eastman, a Dartmouth trained physician and Dakota Indian, led a group of one hundred civilians from the Pine Ridge Reservation to a snow covered field on the bank of Wounded Knee Creek. Three days before, elements of the Seventh US Calvary—the same unit that had been virtually eliminated by a coalition of American Indian warriors at the Little Bighorn River in Montana 14 years earlier—killed more than 300 Miniconjou and Hunkpapa Lakota men, women and children after surrounding and disarming them. “Fully three miles from the scene of the massacre,” Eastman wrote in his autobiography, “we found a body of a woman completely covered with a blanket of snow, and from this point on we found them scattered along as they had been relentlessly hunted down and slaughtered while fleeing for their lives” (1916, p. 111).

The massacre that cold December morning marked a response framed by fear and a certainty that in the end the land would be rid of those who would challenge the supremacy of a European America. Writing in the *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer* newspaper five days after the massacre, L. Frank Baum, later author of *The Wizard of Oz*, summarized:

The *Pioneer* has before declared that our only safety depends upon the total extermination of the Indians. Having wronged them for centuries, we had better, in order to protect our civilization, follow it up by one more wrong and wipe these untamed and untamable creatures from the face of the earth. In this lies future safety for our settlers and the soldiers who are under incompetent commands. Otherwise, we may expect future years to be as full of trouble with the redskins as those have been in the past.

At stake in this confrontation was the struggle for American pluralism and what it means to live in the context of difference.

In the larger context, the massacre on the banks of Wounded Knee Creek might seem to be a small matter. The United States was only 25 years away from the Civil War, in which more than 620,000 Americans were killed by combat or disease. By 1876, Reconstruction had ended in the Southern states, and in 1890 Mississippi had established the first poll taxes and literacy rules that served to block African Americans from voting. In 1887, the US congress passed the General Allotment Act (the “Dawes Act”) that redistributed American Indian lands to individual tribal members. The US government claimed the leftover land and sold or gave most of it to white settlers, as well as to railroad, lumber, and mining companies. By 1890, industrialization was well underway; in an effort to stop the growth of monopolies, Congress passed the Sherman Anti-Trust laws that year. In November, after the collapse of banks in England, panic hit the New York Stock Exchange, beginning a period of decline that would culminate in the panic of 1893. In the census of 1890, nearly 15 percent of the US population was identified as “foreign born” (the highest percentage in any census, although the 2010 reported 12.9 percent, the highest level since 1910) and about 12 percent of the population

was identified as black. The census also reported that US territory included about 248,000 American Indians, a decrease of 38 percent in just 40 years. The 1890 census also declared as part of its report that the United States no longer had a “frontier.”

In the midst of all this, white America began to follow news of a new “religious” movement among Western American Indians. In the spring of 1890, a Oglala Lakota named Kicking Bear addressed a Lakota council. In his address, Kicking Bear described a journey to the Great Spirit who entrusted him with a message for all Native American peoples that, with sufficient faith and the practice of a ceremony called the Ghost Dance, white people would be covered over with earth, indigenous plants and animals would be restored to the land, and Native peoples would again “eat and drink, hunt, and rejoice” (Kicking Bear, 1890).

Despite initial deflationary reports of the Dance, white Americans quickly changed their assessment and came to the conclusion that the Ghost Dance was in fact a threat. On November 23, the *New York Times* published a long report under the headline “It Looks Like War.” The article led with a statement from Little Wound, a Lakota from the Pine Ridge reservation, explaining that the people would not cease their dancing at the request of the Indian Agent, Daniel F. Royer. Little Wound wrote:

I understand that the soldiers have come on the reservation. What have they come for? We have done nothing. Our dance is a religious dance, and we are going to dance until spring. If we find then that the Christ does not appear, we will stop dancing, but, in the meantime, troops or no troops, we shall start our dance on this creek in the morning.

The reporter concluded: “This letter is an open defiance to the troops [now stationed at Pine Ridge]. The ghost dancers have been warned to stop their revolting orgies and this is their answer.” Agent Royer was then quoted: “The [Lakota] mean war. They have been ordered to stop their dancing. They have refused to do so. It now remains for the soldiers to enforce their orders” (*New York Times*, 1890).

Within several months, the Ghost Dance had gone from a curiosity and a “craze,” as some called it, to fanaticism, and finally to a certain cause of war despite Native appeals to the contrary and pleas for peace. In order to preempt the expected Indian attacks, the US military mobilized troops throughout the West, sending 600 to 700 troops to the Pine Ridge Agency in October, 1890. The troops were commanded by General Nelson Miles (1839–1925), who had led the troops who had captured Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce in 1877. Miles would later lead the troops who put down the Pullman Strike in 1894, lead the invasion of Puerto Rico in 1898, and run for president of the United States in 1904. On December 28, 1890, Chief Big Foot’s band of Lakota encountered Major Whiteside and elements of the Seventh Cavalry and agreed to be escorted peacefully to an established camp along Wounded Knee Creek on the way to Pine Ridge. There, the Lakota spent the night surrounded by US troops, who celebrated the “capture” of Big Foot and his people. The next morning, now under the command of Major Forsyth, the Seventh Cavalry separated the Lakota into two groups of 106 men and approximately 250 women and children and then demanded that the Lakota surrender their weapons. When nearly all of the weapons were surrendered, someone—probably a deaf mute Lakota man—fired his weapon as some soldiers tried to take it away.

The soldiers quickly retreated to the perimeter of the Indian camp and then the Seventh Cavalry, arrayed in a square around the camp, opened fire. Within an hour, as most of the

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Lakota lay dead or dying, a blizzard moved in. Survivors that could be found by the army were loaded into wagons and taken to the Pine Ridge agency along with 39 wounded soldiers. When the blizzard ended, 146 Lakota men, women, and children were unceremoniously buried in a mass grave. It is likely that many more were killed and their bodies removed by relatives during the blizzard before the burial party arrived from Pine Ridge. Still others were wounded as they fled the carnage and later died of their wounds. Some estimate that more than 300 of the 356 members of Big Foot's group were killed at the creek. Twenty-five soldiers were also killed, most as a result of friendly fire from across the square.

Newspapers declared that a great battle had been fought and the "Sioux Rebellion" had been quelled. To confirm the valor of the Seventh Cavalry in its action against the Lakota, 18 Congressional Medals of Honor were granted to soldiers involved in the massacre, more than in any other single US military action before or since. While the commanding general and others claimed that the Ghost Dance was part of a plot to attack white settlements, no evidence was found then or since to verify the claim. The "preemptive" strike effectively ended most of the efforts of the Plains Indians to live life free of reservations and the US Indian Service. Although the military forces remained ready to fight for some months after, over the next few years the military turned its interests elsewhere—first to suppressing labor actions and then to the Spanish American War.

While the Ghost Dance offered hope to Native peoples, it posed deep questions for whites. How were they to understand the claims of renewal by prophets like Kicking Bear? What did the prophecy portend for relations along the borders in the West? Was it possible to coexist with people who held such beliefs? Most whites, it appears, concluded that the Ghost Dance was a threat that must be ended. While some favored a policy of aggressive assimilation where Native beliefs and cultures were set aside in favor of Christianity, property ownership, and farming, others claimed that such a policy was too slow and ineffective. The "awful" action at Wounded Knee was a necessary, even humanitarian, response because it brought a quick end to a "craze" that was good for neither whites nor Indians. *The Word Carrier* concluded in January 1891, "Taking [the slaughter of a whole tribe of Indians] in its bearings on the whole condition of things among the rebellious [Teton] Sioux it was a blessing. It was needful that these people should feel in some sharp terrible way the just consequences of their actions, and be held in wholesome fear from further folly" (DeMallie, 1982, p. 397).

These assessments of the situation, however, did not stand on their own. Beneath the proclamations of those who favored assimilation and those who favored war, there operated a certain way of thinking—an epistemology and an ontology—through which the prophets and their message acquired meaning to non-Native people. In retrospect, the Ghost Dance and the action at Wounded Knee can be seen not only as an historical event, but also as a signal moment in the development of a set of philosophical commitments that gave meaning and direction to those in the dominant society who took up arms against the Lakota. Such commitments—still active in American society—mark a logic in which incompatible ways of thinking can only be resolved through assimilation or exclusion. In resisting the alternatives, the Ghost Dancers left the dominant society few alternatives other than the destruction of Native people.

After Wounded Knee, however, thinkers, Native and non-Native, came forward to offer an alternative set of philosophical commitments that could lead to a broader conception of pluralism and a wider range of responses. Against the demands for progress, wealth, unification, and certainty, diverse thinkers offered critical challenges. The classical pragmatists, Charles S.

Peirce, William James, and John Dewey tried to show the limits of established philosophies by reconceiving the practice of inquiry, the idea of self, and the nature of democracy. American Indian thinkers including Charles Eastman, Arthur Parker, Gertrude Bonin, and Luther Standing Bear challenged extermination and assimilation by proposing ideas of community and place that drew on North American indigenous traditions. W. E. B. Du Bois and Jane Addams challenged industrial capitalism and aimed to reconceive communities around an idea that Addams called “lateral progress.” Josiah Royce, Alain LeRoy Locke, and Horace Kallen offered a notion of community around a logic of borders that could inform experience in the context of lived diversity. This tradition of resistance has rarely found a place in discussions of American philosophy either as it is practiced today or as it was developed over the past century and a half. Reasons for this neglect are probably connected with the interests of these thinkers who, in their most critical work, aimed to make the complacent uncomfortable and the dogmatic doubtful.

On September 11, 2001, Islamic fundamentalists hijacked four commercial airliners and successfully used three of them in an attack on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, DC. Innocent lives were taken and in the wake of the attack—as in the wake of Wounded Knee—Americans asked how they could go forward in a world still framed by apparently incommensurable differences. From one angle, the others who seemed to threaten the American vision were “religious fanatics”—not the particular men who carried out the attacks, but peoples who find themselves living in a world not wholly compatible with Western science and global capitalism. Understood in these terms, the United States took upon itself the task of bringing utopia through war. It is estimated that more than 149,000 civilians died as a result of the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. In Afghanistan over 3,400 members of the military (United States and coalition) died, while at least 15,000 Afghani civilians have died since 2006 (according to the United Nations). In Iraq, 4,804 US and coalition troops died, while [iraqbodycount.org](http://iraqbodycount.org) estimated that at least 137,000 Iraqi civilians were killed. In both cases, these invasions (motivated by the events of 9/11) resulted in a catastrophic loss of innocent lives that was many times greater than the initial attack.

In the wake of September 11th, everyone faced choices about how to respond. Were the attacks acts of terrorism or acts of war? Were they attacks on US freedoms or attacks on US power? There were, and still continue to be, disagreements about both how to see the attacks and how to respond to them. At the time, however, a particular understanding became dominant and overshadowed the alternatives. The mentality that governed much of the immediate response—the invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent invasion of Iraq—was one that relied on simplistic dichotomies to assert absolute moral certainty. In a speech just five days after the attacks, President Bush proclaimed: “My administration has a job to do and we’re going to do it. We will rid the world of the evil-doers” (Perez-Rivas, 2001). And a few days later in an address before Congress, Bush (2001) made clear the absolute choices to be made: “Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.”

In his book *The Abuse of Evil*, American philosopher Richard J. Bernstein argued that the dominance of this kind of mentality is a threat to democracy. In its place he suggested an approach that “questions the appeal to absolutes in politics, that argues that we must not confuse subjective moral *certitude* with objective moral *certainty*, and that is skeptical of an uncritical rigid dichotomy between the forces of evil and the forces of good” (2005, p. vii).

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He called this pragmatic fallibilism: that is, an attitude that allows for the possibility of being wrong. Bernstein found this mentality in the tradition of American philosophy and turned to Peirce, James, and Dewey—thinkers who offered philosophical resistance through a call for pluralism and fallibilism. An important part of this view is the belief that ideas develop in a particular environment and context and are necessarily provisional.

When the pragmatists critically attacked absolutes, when they sought to expose the quest for certainty, when they argued for an open universe in which chance and contingency are irreducible, they were not concerned exclusively with abstract metaphysical and epistemological issues. They were addressing ethics, politics, and practical questions that ordinary people confront in their ordinary lives. (2005, p. 23)

The alternative strand of American philosophy—the tradition of resistance—is one that helps to challenge the desire to respond to difference with fear, demonization and distancing. As two sorts of philosophical commitments framed the circumstances of 1890, 2001 marked another signal moment in which versions of these two philosophical perspectives were shown again in sharp contrast. In the wake of Wounded Knee, a struggle was waged over the character of life in America; in the wake of 9/11 a similar struggle is underway. This book is an effort to clarify one of these two strands in a way that both illuminates the history of philosophy in America, and also illustrates the character of that philosophy and its potential to make a contribution in the twenty-first century.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

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The title of the history you are reading is “American Philosophy,” though we have not yet said what that means. If you are like most students of the formal discipline of philosophy, you will ask first about the moniker “American.” You might say, “I thought that philosophy was something that is not fixed to a geography or owned by a people.” Those close to the idea that there is a distinctive American philosophy will respond that what is American is a particular kind or way of doing philosophy “indigenous” to the American intellectual scene and called “pragmatism.” In the story you are reading, however, that term and its associated stable of thinkers are only part of the field.

In the context of this history, American philosophy is first a geographic term abbreviating a history and part of a hemisphere. When Europeans determined that their future lay in a continent “discovered” and consequently “owned” by them, they became strangers in an already peopled world. The story here focuses on one version of that invasion of the northern part of the western hemisphere and its later consequences after the Europeans had settled in this place for more than 250 years. A larger “hemispheric” history of philosophy is yet to be told. When it is, it will likewise connect the thought of Native American peoples and European thought in a history of struggle more than 400 years long.

Some have argued that to adopt the name “American” for any philosophy is a mistake because it associates the endeavor with industrial capitalism, militarism, the creation of grinding poverty and extreme wealth, exploitation based upon gender and race, and global domination. Better, they say, to treat philosophy as having no borders at all. We say that such an approach mirrors the very single-minded domination it decries. Instead, we must see the work of philosophy—and philosophy in America in particular—as inexorably bound to a history of domination and the struggle for liberation. Those who would set aside the American name, in effect, fail to take responsibility for these histories.

John Lysaker, in his paper “*Essaying America*,” challenged the use of “American” we propose here, declaring, in the end, his independence from the term. His reasons—the association of the term “America” with the United States and its imperial and capitalist history—aims to take up philosophy outside such history in order to resist it. “American,” he says, “names a certain kind of situatedness, but not one with which philosophy should identify.” As a result, he concludes,

My venture thus both eschews and retains the word American in the realm of philosophical conduct, which is to say, I hereby declare my independence from “America” in the name of a philosophy that would be, or rather, that would enable, as best it can, something more. . . . (2012, p. 548)

Lysaker goes on to explain that this form of resistance involves recognizing the implications of America for indigenous peoples, the ancestors of African slaves, for mestizo peoples of South

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and Central America, for the environment, and for the global economy, ultimately seeking a mode of reflection that is forward looking—a vision of life that does not require the oppression of so many to support the advantages of a few. That Lysaker engages in debate about the meaning of America in order to resist its history is itself a response to American circumstances. The situation calls for a philosophical practice that is bound to those circumstances and returns to them with a declaration of independence. As he observes, “for the time being ‘America’ remains a condition for the possibility of that declaration and the independence to which it aspires” (2012, p. 548). There are few things more characteristic of the philosophy of resistance traced in this book than the effort to declare independence from a dominant culture that has brought both pain and loss. Such a declaration and its grounds in American circumstances mark this “independent” philosophical investigation as a part of the tradition of resistance we describe in this book.

In *Genealogical Pragmatism: Philosophy, Experience, and Community*, John J. Stuhr offered an alternative characterization of the American philosophical tradition by presenting three senses of American philosophy: national, philosophical and cultural. The “national” category is not interesting because its only meaning is to identify those philosophers who happen to live and work in the United States. The “philosophical” sense of “American philosophy” is more interesting as it suggests that one can engage in a philosophy that has “common attitudes, purposes, procedures, problems, terminology, and beliefs” (1997, p. 23). He addressed what this might be by examining the work of John Lachs, who stresses the primacy of action and will; John J. McDermott, who stresses the primacy of experience; and John E. Smith, who discusses how purpose and interest “help shape the importance and direction of reflection” (1997, p. 24). That purpose and interest can shape reflection is in part why the third sense of American philosophy—the cultural sense—is also important. The “cultural” sense means that an American philosopher is marked “by a particular relation to a distinctly American culture, or, more accurately, to plural American cultures” (1997, p. 25). He rejected the idea that philosophers can be transcultural or nongenealogical and pointed to Dewey, James, Santayana and others to support his claim. Stuhr concluded that “Here, and more generally in all philosophy that is philosophically and culturally American in character, philosophy regularly and critically addresses the pressing problems of its time and place” (1997, p. 38).

Stuhr’s conception of American philosophy recalls Dewey’s in his essay “Philosophy and Civilization.” For Dewey, “the life of all thought is to effect a junction at some point of the new and the old” in the context of “some conflict with newly emerging directions of activities.” In this case, “philosophy is not just a passive reflex” of a culture, “it is itself change; the patterns formed in this junction of the new and old are prophecies rather than records,” “they proclaim . . . that such and such should be the significant value” (LW 3, p. 7). Philosophy, in short, “marks a change of culture;” for better or worse, it is bound to a land, seeking to find its better side.

This quest for a “better side” might lead you to believe that the story you are about to read is a sort of pseudo-narrative, bringing together the authors’ favorite philosophers who happen to have lived in America and have the “right” ontology, politics and multicultural agenda. How can this be a “history” at all? Because it is an approach based upon the central problems of the American philosophical tradition. Du Bois once declared that the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line—the problem of the coexistence of differences that figure in our experience as members of communities. From the perspective of the post-9/11 world, the formative problem continues to be the coexistence of difference. The thinkers

that are part of the American tradition take up that problem in a variety of ways, from the racist philosophy of T. Thomas Fortune to the analytic philosophy of May Brodbeck to the pragmatism of Richard J. Bernstein. Rather than offering a narrow account of an internal philosophical debate, we will examine the American philosophical tradition of debate as it is bound up with the lived circumstances of the more than 120 years that stretch from Wounded Knee to the aftermath of 9/11 and to the present day.

Despite the discipline's present narrow vision of who is part of the American tradition, even those philosophers who have been canonized held views that would challenge the canon as it was formed. This is, in part, because the so-called classical pragmatists began their own philosophical reflections by affirming the centrality of experience. For Peirce, James and Dewey, philosophy worth the name began in response to experienced problems—situations marked by confusion, doubt, indeterminacy—and then returned to these problems, aiming to transform and reconstruct them in ways that allowed the inquirer to go forward, to encounter still more experience. Philosophy, then, should be understood as an activity that arises from experience. Since experience is framed by language, culture and history, philosophy is not a transcendental practice engaged with the really real and truly true. Instead, as Dewey wrote in his essay “Philosophy and Civilization,” the practice is “. . . approached with the antecedent idea that philosophy, like politics, literature, and the plastic arts, is itself a phenomenon of human culture.” As a work within culture, within experience, he continues,

Philosophy thus sustains the closest connection with the history of culture, with the succession of changes in civilization. It is fed by the streams of tradition, traced at critical moments to their sources in order that the current may receive a new direction. . . . But philosophy is not just a passive reflex of civilization that persists through changes. . . . [P]hilosophy marks a change of culture. In forming patterns to be conformed to in future thought and action, it is additive and transforming in its role in the history of civilization. (Boydston, 1981–90, 17 vols, vol. 3, p. 7, hereafter “LW 3, p. 7”)

Philosophy then, at least from the perspective of one of America's canonical figures, can be understood as a mode of inquiry into widely held beliefs and methods of solving problems that begins when established beliefs and methods fail.

Our historical method also begins in Dewey's philosophy of history. In *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* he writes:

The slightest reflection shows that the conceptual material employed in writing history is that of the period in which a history is written. There is no material available for leading principles and hypotheses save that of the historic present. As culture changes, the conceptions that are dominant in a culture change. Of necessity, new standpoints for viewing, appraising and ordering data arise. History is then rewritten. Material that had formerly been passed by, offers itself as data because the new conceptions propose new problems for solution, requiring new factual material for statement and test. (LW 12, pp. 232–3)

History, on this account, is the product of a particular place and time. And it is a practice that is grounded in a commitment to a particular kind of world. “There are no absolute originations

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or initiations or absolute finalities and terminations in nature,” Dewey concludes. “The ‘from which’ and ‘to which’ that determine the subject-matter of any particular narration-description are strictly relative to the objective intent set to inquiry by the problematic quality of a given situation” (LW 12, p. 221). In this way, histories are not “objective” descriptions of some given reality, but ongoing and dynamic interactions in the present that reconstruct the past and in so doing provide a context for the future. As Dewey puts it,

There is accordingly, a double process. On the one hand, changes going on in the present, giving a new turn to social problems, throw the significance of what happened in the past into a new perspective. They set new issues from the standpoint of which to rewrite the story of the past. On the other hand, as judgment of the significance of past events is changed, we gain new instruments for estimating the force of present conditions as potentialities of the future. (LW 12, p. 238)

Our approach to the present of American philosophy is through a history of the tradition framed by the philosophical tradition itself and the commitment to a dynamic, pluralistic world of experience in which knowledge is a product of ongoing investigation, always limited in resources and scope, subject to failure, and liable to be overturned as the problems of the world change. The question of which philosophers are “real” American philosophers (or even which are “real” philosophers) is not some question answered by consulting the transcendent categories of “American” or “philosophy;” such questions are answered in light of the concerns at hand. From this perspective, the story told here is not the final story of American philosophy, but, to the extent the problems of difference are experienced here and now, it is a story that ought to be heard and engaged.

Our work follows in important respects other efforts to rethink the American philosophical tradition. John J. McDermott, in his 1965 essay, “The American Angle of Vision,” helped to set the stage for our history when he wrote, “No longer do we hold to radical breaks in historical continuity or hold to the absolute novelty of positions taken by individual thinkers” (2007, p. 43). Instead, history takes its lead from the experience at hand. The “American angle of vision” and its expression as American philosophy

is not so much a question as to whether the American tradition is radically different from other cultures but whether, in its emphases, concerns, and blindspots, as generated by its historical situation, such a tradition doesn’t offer options of a profound kind for the immediate human future. (2007, p. 63)

Cornel West, while making a case for Ralph Waldo Emerson as “the appropriate starting point for the pragmatist tradition,” also made a case for expanding those who counted as pragmatists—adding W. E. B. Du Bois, C. Wright Mills, and Lionel Trilling to the story—and their impact on the trajectory of American philosophy. West’s *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (1989) stands as a key moment in transforming American philosophy from the story of a few early twentieth-century thinkers to a broad movement deeply connected to the experience of those living in North America. Charlene Haddock Seigfried’s 1996 *Pragmatism and Feminism: Reweaving the Social Fabric* further contributed to the process of understanding American philosophy by reintroducing the role of

women thinkers. In the process of arguing for a place for pragmatist feminists in contemporary philosophy, she made her case in part by showing the central place of feminist thinkers in the development and basic commitments of pragmatism. And Scott L. Pratt's 2001 *Native Pragmatism* argued that many of the same philosophical commitments that marked classical pragmatism also were part of Native American thought, and that interaction between Native and European Americans can also be seen as part of the origin of the distinctive tradition of American philosophy.

Louis Menand, in his popular history of classical pragmatism, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (2001) presents the story of American thought focused on the work of Peirce, James, Dewey and Oliver Wendell Holmes, Civil War veteran, lawyer, philosopher, and eventually an associate justice of the US supreme court. For Menand, the Civil War was the defining event that gave rise to what he argued is the common idea shared by all four thinkers. Ideas, Menand wrote, "are not 'out there' waiting to be discovered, but are tools—like forks and knives and microchips—that people devise to cope with the world in which they find themselves" (2001, p. xi). Such ideas are not the product of individuals but are the work of "groups of individuals . . . [and] are entirely dependent, like germs, on their human carriers and the environment." As circumstances change, ideas will necessarily change and to hold on to ideas of the past as though they are the last word can only lead to disaster. "The belief that ideas should never become ideologies—either justifying the status quo, or dictating some transcendent imperative for renouncing it—was the essence of what they taught" (2001, p. xii). From these basic commitments, Menand concludes, pragmatism laid the ground for a conception of society that "permitted a greater . . . margin for difference" and so "create more social room for error [in order to] give good outcomes a better chance to emerge" (2001, p. 440). The resulting theory of democracy, he argued, is the enduring legacy where "Democratic participation isn't the means to an end . . . ; it is the end. The purpose of the experiment is to keep the experiment going" (2001, p. 442). Menand's history is narrowly focused, but opens the way to consider a still broader conception of American philosophy that—like the pragmatists—aimed to resist the establishment of a single dominant culture in the United States.

Recently, in another text aimed at a wide audience, Carlin Romano challenged the long-standing view that America is an unphilosophical land in *America: The Philosophical* (2012). "I think that in no other country in the civilized world," Alexis de Tocqueville wrote in 1835, "is less attention paid to philosophy than in the United States. The Americans have no philosophical school of their own" (quoted in Romano, 2012, p. 5). Contemporary versions of Tocqueville's dismissal include academic studies that conclude that Americans as a group are anti-intellectual, as well as popular books such as *Idiot America: How Stupidity Became a Virtue in the Land of the Free*, by Charles Pierce. In response, Romano makes the provocative claim that "America in the early twenty-first century towers as the most philosophical culture in the history of the world, an unprecedented marketplace of truth and argument" (2012, p. 6). He tries to make his case by recognizing the work of philosophy as a widely distributed practice, shared by members of the dominant society as well as outsiders, women, members of diverse racial and ethnic groups, gays and lesbians, and the poor. Such philosophy is not bound to treatises or academic journals, but emerges in blogs and websites dedicated to conversation about present problems, in coffee houses and churches, on television and talk radio, and in films. Common to Romano's discussion and the histories by McDermott, West, Seigfried,

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Pratt and Menand is the recognition that philosophy is continuous with lived experience, and that philosophy in America, thanks to the distinctive experience of its peoples, is produced as a distinctive philosophical tradition.

American philosophy, then, took a variety of forms as it emerged in the encounter with the people and lands of North America. One strand sought to tame the Americas and institute a particular vision of human life drawn from the European enlightenment and bound to a conception of a single humanity governed by fixed and certain principles. The other strand grew in resistance to the invasion and sought pluralism with the recognition that fixed principles and certainty are not available options—and that seeking them leads to disaster. The first strand included the Jacksonian democrat described by James Fenimore Cooper, the social Darwinism of William Graham Sumner, the authoritarian democracy of Walter Lippmann, and the antidemocratic visions of Sidney Hook.

Our interest here is in the philosophical effort that stands on the other side of assimilation and exclusion: the transformative thinking that rejects settled truth, fixed goals, and endless progress. Instead, thought is situated, fallible and committed to the idea that liberation is a placed and shared experience. This view bears a commitment to a metaphysics of change, and the idea that individuals and communities have the ability to act with a purpose. It has its own fallible conception of knowledge (epistemology) and consequently has a particular approach to ethics and politics. This book leaves it to others to describe in detail the dominant and dominating strand of American thought; our interest here—and our belief in the power of philosophy in the twenty-first century—is in the resistant strand of philosophy in America. Despite its general invisibility in philosophy as a discipline, this strand of American philosophy nevertheless offers examples of the way philosophy can challenge domination, and of a living philosophy whose practice is still available and perhaps never more important.

What then is a philosophy of resistance? First, it is one that challenges dogma and settled belief from a perspective that recognizes the pluralism of experience and the value of growth and change. It is resistance in an expected way because it takes on systems of domination as a necessary step in a process of liberation. At the same time, American philosophies of resistance do not rest with criticism but actively work to establish alternative ways of thinking and living. It is a philosophy of the sort offered by Kicking Bear, for example, that begins outside the philosophical commitments of the dominant culture. As such, the philosophies of resistance are commonly (but not universally) marked by apparently contradictory commitments to both pluralism and continuity.

Like Kicking Bear, such philosophers recognize difference, but do not assume that difference is merely appearance, or reducible to sameness, or explainable using universal truths. They reject the ideas that experience is divisible into realms of knowledge and being, public and private, that action can be separated from language or theory, and that facts and values are distinct. To manage the tension between the two commitments, most of these thinkers also adopt a robust conception of boundaries that are sites of contradiction, possibility and a relational ontology. The resulting philosophies are centrally concerned with questions of agency and sovereignty, power and purpose, the continuity of knowledge and action, and a cluster of ideas related to place, culture, and embodiment. Kahnawake Mohawk philosopher, Taiaiake Alfred, summarizes the central commitments of an indigenous version of an American philosophy of resistance:

Indigenous conceptions, and the politics that flow from them, maintain in a real way the distinction between various political communities and contain an imperative of

respect that precludes the need for homogenization. Most indigenous people respect others to the degree that they demonstrate respect. . . . And that is the key difference: both philosophical systems can achieve peace; but for peace the European demands assimilation to a belief or a country, while the indigenous demands nothing except respect. (2002, p. 472)

This story of American philosophy, framed by its interest in philosophies of resistance, is, like any history, perspectival and therefore incomplete. Further, the work of the thinkers who are discussed here is not presented completely, nor are the parts we introduce fully discussed. This book is introductory and should be paired with further reading of the primary texts and considered in light of secondary literature (most of which we do not discuss here). Our purpose is to provide an outline of American philosophy and illustrate how the discussion of philosophy interacts with events in the wider world. We hope that this will enable those reading and teaching the text to tailor their courses and reading by selecting some particular figures to explore in more depth, or by choosing one or two themes to follow throughout the history. In order to foster broader reading, we provide suggestions for primary texts to read in more detail at the end of each chapter.

Consistent with the work of McDermott, West and Seigfried, we have embedded our discussions of the philosophical work within some historical context: then again, many significant historical moments are left out. We have rather selected some signal events to help readers gain an understanding of the social and political context in which the various philosophers we discuss were writing. We encourage readers to expand this history as they consider the work of particular figures or themes.

This book is one that seeks the active engagement of the reader. It makes room for a plurality of approaches to philosophy, a range of philosophical interests, and the study of multiple figures. We hope it is useful to those encountering these thinkers for the first time. We also hope that by presenting philosophical thought alongside historical events, those long familiar with these figures in American philosophy will find new ways to think about their work. Furthermore, we have been able to draw some interesting connections between various thinkers that may cause the reader to rethink the history of the tradition as well as the import of particular ideas. Our overall goal has been to enable readers to critically engage with the philosophical ideas and concepts presented here, but also to see how these philosophical ideas and concepts have been put to work in the world. Our hope is that students of philosophy, and students of American thought and history, will continue to build upon this story.

## CHAPTER 32

### THE SPIRIT OF AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY IN THE NEW CENTURY

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As we have seen throughout this story, the tradition of American philosophy has always been an active and publically engaged tradition. As expected of a tradition committed to pluralism, there have also always been disagreements about the best way for philosophy to play out its role. The tradition we have traced here is one that is generally committed to expanding and opening discourse in order to sustain possibilities for individuals, capable of thoughtful participation, to shape their individual and social lives. As the previous chapters have shown, this spirit of American philosophy is alive and well and engaged with the problems people face.

Such engagement, however, cannot be sustained without the constant attention and efforts of those working in this tradition. As we noted in the Prologue, Bernstein worried that in the wake of 9/11 the United States was in danger of slipping into a kind of antipluralism that could endanger the discourse needed to sustain an open democracy. Having finished his book *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation* just days before the attack on 9/11, Bernstein considered revising it. He then realized that what concerned him about the response to 9/11 was not the concept of evil, but the use (or abuse in this case) of the concept. Reflecting on *Radical Evil* in the introduction to his later book, *The Abuse of Evil* (2005), Bernstein explains that “*Interrogating evil is an ongoing, open-ended process . . . because we cannot anticipate what new forms of evil or vicissitudes of evil will appear*” (2005, p. vii). Generally, talk of evil has spurred critical argument and debate among religious and philosophical thinkers. The abuse of evil is when people talk about evil in order to shut down discourse and block critical thought about complex issues.

For Bernstein the responses to 9/11 represented a “clash of mentalities.” One mentality “is drawn to absolutes, alleged moral certainties, and simplistic dichotomies.” The other, which he called “pragmatic fallibilism,” “argues that we must not confuse subjective moral certitude with objective moral certainty” and is “skeptical of an uncritical rigid dichotomy between the forces of evil and the forces of good” (2005, p. viii). Responses that stifle thinking are dangerous given the uncertain nature of the world. But some see complex and subtle thinking as indecisive and therefore dangerous in the face of concrete problems. Bernstein argued that pragmatic fallibilism is open to correction but not indecisive. Critical fallibilism and engaged pluralism require the courage to test ideas in public and to listen to others rather than hide behind simplistic and rigid responses.

Although one might worry that this approach falls into relativism, Bernstein argued that it does not. There are limits to tolerance; recalling the work of Alain Locke and Kallen (among others), he says, “[w]e cannot tolerate those who are actively intolerant—those who seek to undermine the very possibility of discourse, dialogue, and rational persuasion. But how are we to decide when these limits have been reached?” (2005, p. 60). The curtailing of civil liberties

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often appears to be an attractive immediate response, but such action is dangerous. More openness, not less, is the better response—whether to the “cold war” or the “war on terror.” The same goes for listening to dissent: Bernstein asserts that labeling dissenters “unpatriotic” hurts discourse.

Further, when one is so certain about being right, there is no need for questioning or further analysis. Whether it is McCarthy, Nixon or George W. Bush, as David Susskind observed, there is “a disdain for contemplation or deliberation, an embrace of decisiveness, a retreat from empiricism, a sometimes bullying impatience with doubters and even friendly questioners” (quoted in Bernstein, 2005, p. 84). How decisions are reached, and how they are held (tentatively or absolutely) is as important as the decisions themselves. Bernstein notes that after 9/11 there were responsible defenders of military intervention, but they did not appeal to absolutes, certainty or a crusade against evil. They did not use the fear of an enemy to manipulate people and curtail liberties; such actions corrupt politics. There is no grand solution, Bernstein concludes: just the call for all to oppose the abuse of evil.

So what is to be done? Ordinary citizens must stand up to and oppose the political abuse of evil, challenge the misuse of absolutes, expose false and misleading claims to moral certainty, and argue that we cannot deal with the complexity of the issues we confront by appealing to—or imposing—simplistic dichotomies. (2005, p. 121)

He goes on to say that “There is a role for public intellectuals, educators, journalists, and artists to help guide the way—just as Holmes, James, Peirce, and Dewey did at a different time under radically different historical circumstances” (2005, p. 121). Bernstein concludes that democracy is fragile and requires critical fallibilism and engaged pluralism at all levels of society.

The election of 2012 illustrated the “clash of mentalities” in a way that earlier elections, even the election of Obama in 2008, did not. In the wake of the Citizens United Supreme Court decision, corporate interests and Tea Party conservatives asserted a vision of government and the American community in which fixed principles determine policy and individual success or failure is accomplished on one’s own. In this vision, compromise is viewed as a failure of commitment. The resulting vision affirms the dominant structures of race and gender and can enable the denial of support to people in need. Specific policies, in general, aim at once to free individuals from government support and market regulation, while insisting on a significant government role in determining the values held and decisions made by individuals, particularly women. Policies advocated by this mentality include elimination of abortion rights, prohibition of gay marriage, increasingly restrictive immigration laws, devaluation of non-Western religions, and the view of poverty as personal failing.

In contrast, the other mentality offered a vision of government framed by pragmatic fallibilism and pluralism. President Obama, as the most visible advocate of this vision, argued for government guided by principles that are open to discussion, debate, experimentation, revision and gradual reform. In policy discussions, this vision led to efforts to address widely shared problems that affect immigrants, women, the poor and other disadvantaged populations. Such “help” for particular groups was seen as a direct contradiction of the absolute mentality’s individualistic commitments. When the election finally occurred, it was at the end of a four-year presidency that was determined in part by the conflict between visions that included the overt commitment to see that Obama would be denied a second

term. Despite such challenges, Obama demonstrated the place of pragmatism in his policy work. While Mitt Romney, the Republican nominee for president, was credited by many for being a pragmatist for his willingness to shift his position based on his audience, such a practice instead represented a lack of connection between principles and rhetoric. Obama's willingness to modify his positions emerged rather as the result of a process of reflection and consultation consistent with his general principles.

It is important to note that Obama is fallible as well in his approach to governance. He was slow to respond to some issues—related to immigration, gay marriage and the poor—and remarkably quick to concede on certain economic issues—agreeing to Bush-era tax cuts and proposing only modest regulation of the Wall Street financial markets. Furthermore, the controversy over ongoing counterterrorist programs involving the CIA and military revealed that the Obama administration did not fully embody the openness to inquiry and debate necessary for pragmatic fallibilism.

But his apparent failure to achieve the ideal is part of the reason Obama can be seen as within this tradition of pragmatic fallibilism and engaged pluralism. Such an approach does not guarantee or even suggest that those committed to pragmatic fallibilism and engaged pluralism will always get things right. It only allows for the possibility of open discussion and self correction. Further, his approach to governing is rooted in the very tradition we have been discussing. According to James T. Kloppenberg's *Reading Obama: Dreams, Hope, and the American Tradition* (2012), Obama was introduced to the work of James, Dewey, Du Bois and Alain Locke as an undergraduate student. Through these thinkers he learned about the need to build community in order to make justice real. His work as a community organizer in Chicago followed on the work of Addams and Hull House and was where he learned the importance of listening—listening to those in need and to those with opposing viewpoints. In law school at Harvard, he was in the midst of an active community of philosophical and legal scholars. Kloppenberg suggests that the emerging fields of legal pragmatism, feminist jurisprudence, and critical race theory (among others) did much to shape Obama's approach.

Obama encountered pragmatism first- and second-hand as he continued his education. As president of the *Harvard Law Review* (the first black president) he issued editions with regular citations of figures like Hilary Putnam and Richard Bernstein. He took a class with Roberto Unger, a Brazilian pragmatist often cited by West, author of *The Self Awakened: Pragmatism Unbound* (2007). According to Kloppenberg, Unger reports that Obama "understands the pragmatists' critique of dogmatism and the democratic potential of pragmatist philosophy" (2012, p. 68). Obama grasped that democracy requires disagreements, but also requires that these disagreements be approached in a flexible, antifoundationalist, perspectival manner. Change and contingency are real; the individual and the social are intertwined. Michael Eldridge extended this understanding of Obama's approach. "Obama is what I call a value or ideal pragmatist," Eldridge wrote. "He has his ideals but he is very flexible about how he achieves them. It is not that he is just an opportunist or that he will settle easily for what the circumstances give him. He has stable, enduring values that he is seeking to realize" (2011, pp. 118–19).

As Kloppenberg notes, other philosophers such as Charles Taylor Rawls, Nozick, Sandel, Nussbaum, and Susan Moller Okin are a part of the story of Obama's intellectual heritage. Obama also found resources in feminist theory rooted in the continental tradition, the

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theology of Reinhold Niebuhr, and the legal theory of Cass Sunstein. But all of these contributors are built into a framework based in the pragmatist method.

Kloppenberg argues that Obama is closest to Bernstein's philosophy. For Kloppenberg, the central points of this view are a commitment to fallibilism, a realization that individual experience has a sociocultural character, a focus on individual participation in inquiry and discussion, an acceptance of the role of contingency and change, and a commitment to pluralism (2012, p. 133). This gets played out in a willingness to listen to a variety of views, an attempt to put one's self in other's shoes, an insistence on facing the best and worst-case scenarios, and being open to negotiation (2012, p. 148). In Obama's words, we need to see "our democracy not as a house to be built, but as a conversation to be had" (quoted in Kloppenberg, 2012, p. 161).

Critics see this emphasis on deliberation, investigation and revision of outmoded claims as a weakness and a lack of commitment. But this is a misunderstanding; it is rather a different kind of commitment. Kloppenberg writes that Obama "evinces a particular kind of conviction, the conviction of a democrat committed to forging agreement rather than deepening disagreements." "Whereas many radicals as well as many conservatives believe that they possess the truth and that their opponents are evil as well as misguided," Kloppenberg concludes, "Obama accepts different political perspectives as a normal and healthy sign of a vibrant culture" (2012, p. 222). Following Bernstein, Kloppenberg asserts that the mindset that amplifies conflict and creates fear disables democracy. "Only when we affirm the process of continuous and open-ended experimentation do we affirm the principle of democracy" (2012, p. 265).

The success of the pluralist American vision in the election means that there is a renewed place for philosophical engagement in the issues of shared life among Americans and among Americans and the world. But that does not mean that all is well. West, and others, have been critical of Obama for his support of Wall Street and disregard of the poor. West continues to write and to participate in protests: he was even arrested at an Occupy Wall Street protest in 2011. But as we have seen, for West protest and disagreement are part of what democracy calls for, not fear or retreat.

Central to the election rhetoric in 2012, and all the politics since 9/11, has been the use and abuse of fear and division. The presumption is that the antidote to fear is certainty and claims by one vision or another that are speculative or experimental are necessarily less certain and so are to be rejected. Like the fear that led to the militarization of South Dakota and the massacre that followed at Wounded Knee, fear of the sort that emerged from 9/11 became a fear of others and a willingness to set some principles aside to avoid imagined future harm. The alternative presented by the tradition examined here is to approach such conflicts, or perceived conflicts, with inquiry and openness and an ongoing commitment to Deweyan democratic experimentation, Roycean commitment to community, Peircean fallibilism, Jamesian pluralism, Lockean reciprocity, and Addams's idea of "lateral progress."

Even with these alternatives, fear is not unfounded. We live in a precarious world that is made more precarious by human technology, greed and inattentiveness. It is not a mistake to be afraid, but it is important to decide how to respond to the fear. The American tradition we have charted has advocated a response of openness and tolerance that leads to the possibility of amelioration and hope—but there are no guarantees. Moving forward, this tradition is still alive and well and we hope that we have explained the present character of the tradition.

We now need to think about how the tradition moves forward and how you, the reader, can become engaged as an academic philosopher or by living out a philosophical way of life developed in the rich American tradition of resistance. We believe that there are at least eight broad thematic conceptions that continue the work of the tradition and deserve more attention. What follows is not an exhaustive list but rather a list of those that come readily to mind in the wake of this study. These themes are expressed as commitment to conceptions of power and resistance, boundary and place, pluralism and agency, and fallibilism and hope.

## Power and resistance

Mary Follett identified the central problem of social relations—power—and declared that “our task is . . . to learn . . . how to develop power” (1924, p. xii). For Follett, “genuine power is not coercive control, but coactive control. Coercive power [‘power over’] is the curse of the universe; coactive power [‘power with’], the enrichment and advancement of every human soul” (p. xiii). Decades earlier in his 1860 *The Conduct of Life*, Emerson wrote “Life is the search after power,” a stark claim anticipating Nietzsche (whose work began with his reading of Emerson). But Emerson continued “and this is an element with which the world is so saturated—there is no chink or crevice in which it is not lodged—that no honest seeking goes unanswered” (1860, p. 47). Power, in this case, is that which fills the gaps, lies between things such that the search for power is also the search for connections.

Although often set outside philosophical conversation, the question of power nevertheless fills the chinks and crevices of the tradition. Power in its ordinary sense typically implies a kind of active force that can be harnessed to accomplish tasks. Mumford, in the second volume of *Myth of the Machine*, sees in this idea and its successive definitions the framework for a structure of power that defined American life. Tracing the meaning of power in the *New English Dictionary*, Mumford noted that the first definition, dating from 1297, “possession or command over others” was succeeded by a new definition, the “legal ability, capacity, or authority to act,” in 1486. In 1727, “power” took on a “technological role as ‘any form of energy or force available for application to work’” (p. 240). Finally, as “horsepower, waterpower, windpower, woodpower, coalpower, electricpower, oilpower, and . . . nuclear power,” diverse systems became what he called “the Pentagon of Power,” a “megamachine”: “a machine in the orthodox technical sense, as a ‘combination of resistant bodies’ so organized as to perform standardized motions and repetitive work” (p. 240). “Power” in this sense—“power over” as Follett called it—marked the forced unification of systems where its resistant parts were essential to its success.

C. Wright Mills writing in 1958 described another dimension of power as focused on “whatever decisions men make about the arrangements under which they live.” The “basic problem of power,” for Mills, asked “who is involved in making [these decisions] (or not making them)” (1958, p. 29). Decision-making systems by mid-century eliminated the assumption that people must be “governed by their own consent” because “[a]mong the means of power that now prevail is the power to manage and manipulate . . . consent” so that “much power today is successfully employed without the sanction of the reason or the conscience of the obedient” (p. 29). Power, again as power over, marked the harnessing of agency in service of unifying economic, political and military systems in what Mills called “the permanent war

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economy,” a system that “rests upon great secrecy of plan and intent” (1956, pp. 293–4). The purposes of individuals and groups are put in service of the purposes of the system. “It is just,” he said, “that people are of necessity confused and must, like trusting children, place all” decisions—economic, political and military—“in the hands of experts.” After all, he concluded “everyone knows that somebody has got to run the show” (p. 294).

Martin Luther King, Jr. challenged what he took to be the dominant conception of power in his 1963 presidential address to the SCLC. “[S]ome of our philosophers,” he declared, “[have gotten] off base” by viewing power and love as “opposites—polar opposites—so that love is identified with a resignation of power, and power with a denial of love” (1986, p. 247). For King, as for Follett, power is genuine only when it is accompanied by a sense of connection and the need to work things out together. “What is needed,” King continued, “is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic” (p. 247). In contrast to power in the analyses of Mumford and Mills, “Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love” (p. 247).

A few years later, Cone recalled Follett’s claim that power with is finally a matter of self-determination, the self-determination of communities that reinforced differences while seeking common purposes in the face of experienced problems. “Black power” he said in *Black Theology and Black Power*, “means black freedom, black self-determination, wherein black people no longer view themselves as without human dignity but as men, human beings with the ability to carve out their own destiny” (1969, p. 6). The idea is not unlike the conception of power central to the indigenous American traditions we have considered. Power is a motive force that both distinguishes agents from each other even as it motivates the distinctive relations that make someone—human or not—the person or agent they are. Power is not an imposition but a condition for the possibility of purposes that can prove to promote both a sense of self and a sense of connection across the boundaries that divide.

The conception of power as it developed in the American tradition we consider here is fundamentally a matter of resistance to dominant systems that overdetermine the lives of its parts. The “megamachine” of Mumford is manifested again and again in America and the globalizing economy as it strives to order its parts, narrow its diverse habits and ideals, and reinforce its hierarchies even as it offers, on one hand, freedom to those who are willing to conform, and oppression to those who become essential “resistant parts.” In either case, action is determined from the outside through domination, submission or compromise. Real resistance, as Follett suggested, is found in self-determination, in cultivating histories, habits and ideals that begin outside the “Pentagon of Power” and flourish in their connections with others.

Power and resistance in the American tradition mark the drive for pluralism instead of assimilation, and unity instead of separation. When Du Bois declared that the goal of racial groups in the United States was to embrace the “unifying ideal of race,” he (like Cone after him) proposed a kind of power that both separated and united America along the edges of its parts. Such power—power with—would not seek a final unity but a process of uniting with others here and there where the boundaries encountered would be the source of new life and experience. Rather than a resistance essential to the megamachine, American philosophies of resistance, by attending to the situation at hand, became obstacles to the system, wrenches in the works rather than the friction that guaranteed an efficient system. Power and resistance

give rise to boundaries and place, mark the importance of pluralism and agency, and makes fallibilism and hope possible.

### Boundary and place

It is not a surprise that some people from South and Central America refer to themselves as Americans, especially in light of their shared colonial past. Given globalization, or at least north/south economic, labor and cultural interactions, it is becoming apparent that peoples throughout the Western hemisphere face related problems of economic depression, racism, sexism and environmental destruction. It is also apparent that the shared history of the hemisphere is one framed by the dual tragedies of genocide and slavery, both of which are a part of the legacy of the European invasions of the past 500 years. Indigenous people north and south were displaced, died of disease, and were killed by Europeans through slavery, rape and war. In 1491, about 145 million people lived in the western hemisphere. By 1691, the population of indigenous Americans had declined by 90–95 percent. Slavery began almost immediately following the arrival of Europeans, first by enslaving Native Americans in South and Central America. It continued with the arrival of African-born slaves in Cuba in 1501 and in Virginia in 1619. Lands obtained from America's first peoples and slave labor from African peoples provided the economic foundation for the "new" European world. In philosophy a greater awareness of this shared history of place will demand greater attention to the shared problems and the shared conceptual frameworks that seek decolonization and the construction of new ways of life in the Americas.

Recalling the conception of boundaries offered by Anzaldúa, as well as earlier philosophers including Peirce, James, Dewey, Calkins, Kallen and Locke, boundaries at once define individuals and groups and at the same time are porous and provide the possibility of new ideas, resources and ways of life. Boundaries are not abstract and they are not simply the meeting of one thing with another. A boundary creates a new space "a vague and undetermined place" in a state of constant transition. The boundaries in and between North and South America mark distinct cultures, histories, lands and ecosystems. At the same time, they mark "border *lands*," concrete places where people live and work, love and die. Across these borderlands, through the efforts of the people of the place, Alain Locke observed, "cultural exchange passes in reciprocal streams from the conquerors to the conquered and from the conquered to the dominant groups" (1946, p. 10). The special character of boundaries affords such exchanges. As Peirce pointed out, boundaries are logically indeterminate spaces. They mark the meeting of two sides, but cannot be reduced to either or both. They are, as Anzaldúa says, "neither one nor the other but a strange doubling" (1999, p. 41).

The resistance tradition of American philosophy placed the issue of boundaries at the center of questions of identity and community. These spaces served as a means for understanding the pluralism of experience and the possibility of border-crossing as a tool for cultural advancement and cultural stability. Boundaries and borders should not only be understood as they commonly are in discussions of immigration as obstacles and walls, but as ever-changing places that constitute who we are as individuals and members of communities, nations and the world. These borderlands are a means of understanding difference and sameness and the

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possibilities of the future. The future of American philosophy must involve the affirmation of this complex understanding of borders and boundaries.

Theories of place that recognize boundaries and that address the problems of plurality through a notion of community mirror in key ways King's vision of the "world house" and Royce's idea of "Beloved Community." The fluidity of boundaries and borders demonstrate the importance and complexity of community, but do not undermine the importance of place. Once framed by a historically rooted conception of place, notions of boundaries and borders take on new meaning and become resources for addressing problems in new ways. Place is more than a location on a map, it is where and when experience happens. As a result, places are formative of one's sense of self and one's sense of community. Places include the land on which one depends, the built environment, and systems of education, politics and economy. In our world today this can include virtual locations and identities. Places also include people and other forms of life and the languages they speak and understand.

As the bounded contexts of experience, places also lead to an alternative conception of knowledge consistent with the epistemic theories of the classical pragmatists and their successors. Universal claims, whether of philosophy or biology or practical matters, are themselves of a place and their reach is always less than universal. Such claims can, again, never be certain for all time, but are nevertheless useful, relevant, leading principles that guide the inhabitants of a place. As the guiding ideas change, the place changes as well, altering values and borders, even as the guiding ideas themselves remain limited in their reach. As addressed in the indigenous philosophical tradition by Standing Bear and Deloria, places (and their framing boundaries) are first principles of philosophical reflection requiring both recognition and respect. Ontologically, places are necessarily bounded (even virtual places, though they may be more fluid) and so the ideas and ways of life that emerge from them are necessarily limited as well. Even though much of the American tradition leaves the notion of place in the background, its presence is nevertheless implied in the fallibilist conception of knowledge and the resistance to universal claims.

When American philosophical thought affirms the idea that experience is always placed somewhere and somewhen, it can consider again ideas received from the dominant tradition and reconceive them. As Du Bois proposed in *Dusk of Dawn*, for example, capitalism and its universal economic motivations, when seen from the place of black communities in the mid-twentieth century, can be reconstructed around the need for economically self-sufficient communities connected by larger reciprocal exchanges with other small communities. Rather than requiring uniform economies, such a view calls for diverse economies that are balanced in their work and needs with other places. Recent examples of other place-based revisions to capitalist economies include the "buy local" movement (especially in food production and distribution), barter economies (the online marketplace "Craigslist," for instance), and "free" economies that rely on the refuse of modern urban life. On a global scale, systems of "fair trade" production provide alternative modes of exchange that begin with a respect for economic differences rather than the sameness of global capitalism. Microlending systems established throughout the Americas and other parts of the world provide money to businesses too small for support from global banks. The resulting small loans can transform local communities and, through repayment, can pass such support to other places. Practices that at once reaffirm differences and support interaction function as boundaries that foster places as sites of resistance and growth.

## Pluralism and agency

The affirmation of place also implies new methods of thinking and new understandings of pluralism and agency. Just as Addams, Dewey, Follett, Carson, Galbraith and Chomsky sought cooperation with scholars outside philosophy in order to address the problems of their times and places, new philosophical efforts emerging from the tradition are likely to be interdisciplinary efforts interested in addressing the lived problems of present communities. For example, while some combine philosophy with animal studies and anthropology, others use a pragmatist-informed method to bring together neuroscience and cognitive science to understand long-standing philosophical problems.

Philosophy must resist isolation both in the theories it discusses and the actions to which it leads. Just as this pluralism of disciplines will be important to the future of philosophy, pluralism of both theories and experiences will be important as well. For example, gender and sexuality have exploded into a vast array of ways to understand the character of human life. One can encounter heterosexual monogamous and polyamorous sexuality, bisexuality, and homosexual monogamous and polyamorous sexuality all in the space of a single community. Multiple genders are increasingly accepted in various communities. The scientific community has come to acknowledge a variety of transgendered individuals and technology makes it possible for people physically to change their sex.

Pluralism of experience makes it clear that there are also different conceptions of agency (of *who* acts). Different notions of gender, for example, imply different ways of acting, different interests, and different consequences. Cultural differences provide alternative means for understanding who agents are and where they come from. Conceptions of agency in Christianity and Islam often hold that selves—agents—are a divine gift. Contemporary naturalists often hold that agents are a biological product of evolution. Some confine recognized agents to a certain range of beings, human beings, or beings of a particular race or gender. At the center of concern in all of these understandings of agency is the recognition that theories of who agents are intersect with the experience of agency to define individuals. The received account from Western philosophy recognizes human beings alone as agents, individual and autonomous. At the same time, indigenous philosophy recognizes human beings and other nonhuman beings as agents. Within the American tradition philosophers including Peirce, Royce, Addams and Deloria (among others) recognize both individuals and communities as agents.

The centrality of agency has long been part of the American tradition of resistance. Agency is what was transformed in the mainstream in the wake of the Civil War and redefined—or reasserted practically—as part of the work of philosophers as well as activists. Philosophers such as Peirce, Gilman, Addams, Cooper, Follett, Kallen and Locke sought to assert a new conception of who acts as a means of transforming their community. The reemergence of indigenous sovereignty reasserted the agency of communities and their places and reframed the idea of recognition in the present world.

The notion of agency that emerges as part of the resistance to colonialism and empire is one that recasts the character of experience as the interaction of many different agents. The result, as Deloria concluded, is a “moral universe” in which other relations—epistemic, ethical, social, aesthetic—are relations between agents or persons. Agency—the ability to act with a purpose—demands the recognition of porous boundaries so that agents are neither cut off from others nor indistinguishable from them. Agents require a locus of action, a

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place, and they are necessarily diverse. At the same time, to act, agents are temporal beings able at once to be partly determined by their past and able to act in terms of a future that is indeterminate.

This emergent conception of agency is at risk on at least two fronts. Ontologically, agency is under the long-standing threat of being reduced to the action of discrete beings, isolated except for their materiality. This takes the form of modern individualism, which risks reducing values and what matters to materiality (i.e. ontological reductionism). The second threat is that, politically, agency excludes communities and the other-than-human. The risk here is that in the setting of policies, the only things that can be taken into account are human centered, and often individually centered. Human desires and interests become all that count. On this view, indigenous tribes and communities have no agency. Nor do other species, individual animals or ecosystems.

For some in the American tradition, such agency is widely shared and applies as much to human society as to everything else, animate and inanimate. For others, agency is narrowed to human society alone, and for still others it is limited to individual human beings. The lesson of the tradition of resistance is that the narrowing of agency to humans has been bound up with the rise of industry, the desire for control, and the fear of what is to come. Widening the conception of who counts as an agent has been instrumental in the resistance and essential to the reconstruction of life in America. Freedom, as even recent analytic philosophy has claimed, is tied to the autonomy of agents. The meaning of autonomy and the nature of agents, however, is greater than such theories have imagined. The future of American philosophy—as an extension of the resources and commitments of the past century of resistance—seems directed toward the affirmation of diverse agencies as a resource for resistance, but also as a ground from which new opportunities can arise. Attention to agents—individual and collective—refocuses consideration on boundaries and places and raises the question of the possibilities of failure and of hope. The failure of agents—their limitations and errors—seems at first to undercut a philosophical method aimed at amelioration. Yet, as we have seen, the American tradition has a long-standing recognition of the importance of integrating fallibilism with hope in moments of conflict and struggle.

## Fallibilism and hope

In addition to grappling with how to understand and respond to various other forms of agency, humans also need to continue to grapple with their fallibilism. Being finite and limited, no known creature has access to all ways of knowing. As a consequence, all limited creatures are subject to “blindness” and error. Ontology cannot be ignored—the ground of difference exceeds our ability to explain and compare from a single perspective the things that count. For example, animal studies that do not seek only to understand how the other animal being is and is not like a human being open up the possibility of discovering new things about the world we share. The study of birds reveals new understanding of the earth’s magnetic field; new discoveries about how dolphins process their sonar signals provide new approaches for humans to consider. Pluralism thus becomes even more important as an antidote to our potential individual and group inability to see. It is by encountering other perspectives that new things can be seen and known.

While a pluralistic approach helps address what James called “a certain blindness,” as limited creatures, humans remain inexorably subject to error. This is why Peirce insisted that inquiry, when properly done, is self-correcting. Unlike inquiry grounded in tenacity, authority, or imagined a priori principles, inquiry as the “method of science” recognizes the necessity of making and testing hypotheses and adopting practices that are “error sensitive.” Inquiry, in whatever form, always begins with a fund of ideas and practices already established and so must be ready to question not only possible solutions but also the received ideas that set the problem in the first place. This is why a method of inquiry developed within the pluralist American tradition should be a self-correcting method based on experimentation and revision of ideas and actions.

The study of American philosophy requires this same method of inquiry. While some philosophers write without any apparent understanding of the history of the tradition, others write in a celebratory tone and seek to persuade others that American philosophers have important insights. In order to have a more critical engagement, it is necessary to find, name and address limitations in the work and thought of these attempts to recover and use the tradition. On one hand, failure to engage the broad history of the tradition is misleading and undermines the tradition and its potential as a transformative resource in the face of present problems. On the other hand, it is not surprising that some scholars focus on historical recovery alone. As a largely ignored and unfairly criticized philosophical approach, it is important to “set the record straight.” However, there is also work to be done in confronting the “blindness” and limitations of these thinkers. We are all complicit in various prejudices and social habits that are only revealed when a community of inquirers challenges us to think beyond such limitations. Some contemporary thinkers are engaged in just this kind of work, but, as always, more needs to be done.

The work of the earlier thinkers in the tradition, strengthened by such critique, make valuable resources as philosophers try to address contemporary problems. In addition to needing the assistance of other disciplines, as mentioned above, it is important to approach contemporary problems with an attitude of humility rather than an attitude of mastery that expects problems can be solved once and for all. Philosophers need to be *partners* with other academics, practitioners and activists and need to be open to having their positions “corrected” by the experience and knowledge of the practitioners and activists with whom they engage. For example, Addams learned much from her engagement with workers, labor activists, and politicians. Contemporary philosophers need to open themselves to such experiences in order to address contemporary problems such as poverty, pollution and power.

This is where hope for the present and future lies. It is important to remember that in this tradition, hope is not understood in terms of unfounded dreams. Rather, hope must be grounded in the realities of the present situation and critical consideration of the possibilities for the future. This requires that we face up to the limitations, blindspots and prejudices in the cumulative history of the United States and the American philosophical tradition. It means we must acknowledge the ways in which the present and future possibilities are grounded in place and built upon an oppressive and genocidal past, and not just the more progressive story of increasing inclusivity and equality. Bernstein, McDermott and West are some examples of thinkers who embody this kind of challenging hope. It is hope with a tragic sensibility.

As Bernstein noted, “The essential fallibility of all inquiry is no cause for despair, but rather an incentive for openness and for testing as rigorously and critically as we can all hypotheses

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and theories.” Since meaning is social, he said, “[we] must not only countenance, but seek out intersubjective criticisms of all hypotheses.” The ideal to be sought was “the establishment of a free, open, self-critical community of inquirers” (1971, p. 199). West echoes both the caution and the hope when he points to the risks and possibilities of the American tradition of philosophy. “At its worst, it became a mere ideological cloak for corporate liberalism and managerial social engineering which served the long-term interests of American capital.” But at its best, West said, “it survived as a form of cultural critique and social reform” that sought to bring about a more pluralistic democratic process (1993, p. 103). As West concluded, hope is justifiable only if there is critical attention paid to the divisions, inequities and violence of the past and the present.

This story has tried to trace some examples of the divisions, inequities and violence to which attention must be paid. These include genocide, imperialism, class exploitation, gender inequality, environmental devastation and war. We have tried to present the story of American philosophy as a struggle to address these issues. It is itself a conflicted story with moments of humor, courage, cowardice and tragedy. For hope to remain a real possibility, it is important to take up the story in as complete a way as possible and use all of the philosophical resources made available by the ongoing conversations of American philosophy to work to ameliorate the present situation. It is important to avoid the temptation to think one has the final or complete answer as this often results in closing down inquiry and limiting community in the hope of “fixing” a problem or providing a “final solution.” This is the absolutistic mentality Bernstein (and others) worried about. Rather, an approach that seeks amelioration grounded in thoughtful inquiry and pluralistic discourse is presently the best hope.

McDermott amplifies this message when he points to the resources of a pluralistic, experiential and experimental approach to amelioration. His essays on Emerson and Royce argued that imagination helps us deal with risk and instability; it can help us construct possibility. Further, pluralistic communities can help us stay open to various and mediated interpretations that aim at amelioration. McDermott calls people to thoughtful action and says that if we believe in “our capacity to effect human healing of unnecessary suffering and in our responsibility to do so, then we shall, in time create a human community worthy of the rich human tradition of hope, aspiration, and wisdom” (2007, p. 155).

So, this is a story that is still in the telling. That means we do not provide an ending here, but an opening to the future. We hope this account can help ground such an opening, and guide the future of American philosophy by the lights and shadows of its past, even as the tradition is embodied by a new generation of philosophers, scholars and social activists engaged in addressing the pressing problems of the present and future. We hope that the story presented here provides an opportunity for those students who read it to not only consider their own roles in creating lives of meaning and purpose for themselves, but also the social and political conditions that make such lives of meaning and purpose a possibility for all.