

**Alexander Kremer and John Ryder, eds.**  
*Self and Society: Central European Pragmatist Forum,*  
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Until recently, philosophical pragmatism was more often called American pragmatism. Pragmatism has been labeled—for better or worse—the prototypically American philosophy of concrete results, science and democracy. But this philosophy is now being given more serious consideration around the world, and nowhere more so than in central Europe. This collection of papers from the 2006 meeting of the Central European Pragmatist Forum, held in Szeged, Hungary on themes of self and society in pragmatic thought, represents the growing cross-fertilization between American, Russian, Czech, Slovak, Hungarian and German thinkers (among others).

The essays are divided into four sections: Self and History, Self and Society, Self and Politics, and Self and Neopragmatism. As one would expect from conference proceedings, while these categories are generally accurate, the essays within do not form a unified argument. Rather, they form constellations of ideas, with a couple of outliers that fit the conference theme indirectly at best. Therefore, we should proceed in order.

1. Self and History. Ramón Rodríguez Aguilera's 'Sense of Self, Sense of Reality: A Peircean Approach in a Globalizing World' pleads for the reader to appreciate Charles Peirce's importance for social theory. Though the language is often overwrought, Aguilera argues that Peirce's progressive model of a world working toward communal ends through communication is needed under growing globalization. James Campbell defends William James from the charge of excessive individualism in his 'William James' Social Understanding of the Self'. Rather, James' 'me' is composed of many selves: the material, the social and the spiritual. The self attends to each and chooses between them, passing judgment on itself by means of internalized standards.

In his 'Dewey and Steinbeck on the Individual and Community' Richard Hart compares the philosopher John Dewey to the writer John Steinbeck. Hart contends that both are 'ecological' thinkers, rejecting any separation of the self and their context. This has moral implications as, in Dewey's phrase, 'morality is social'. Donald Morse's 'Dewey and the Lost individual' concludes the section. He continues Dewey's critique of the 'ragged individual' who, whether it is a matter of politics, religion, work or leisure, lacks the stable objects of loyalty required for flourishing. Motivating him is a criticism of American economic and military power abroad and the way that the rootless public has been manipulated by calls to patriotism.

2. Self and Society. Michael Eldridge's 'The Social Character of Obligation in Dewey's Pragmatic Ethics' responds to Hugh LaFollette's summary of pragmatic ethics. In his helpful correction, Eldridge notes that Dewey's ethics is not reducible to social concern. Rather, morality is irreducibly social in the sense that the social is ever present. It makes no sense that an ethic would demand we be social, since there is no other option. The true imperative is to be reflectively intelligent. Like Eldridge, Larry Hickman ('Publics and Products: Reassembling the Social') discusses pragmatism by engaging a contemporary thinker. He contends that Bruno Latour's 'sociology of the social' is deepened when set against the backdrop of Dewey's social theory of inquiry (and theory of social inquiry). In one of the volume's standout essays, 'Social Cooperation a Civic Virtue', Juan Carlos Mougán Rivero uses Dewey's and George Herbert Mead's theories of the self and democracy to show how social cooperation is an essential—not simply a prudent—element of human flourishing. Cooperativeness is a democratic virtue of its own, but also entails further virtues of inclusiveness, discursiveness and self-criticism.

The last two essays in this section do not follow the arc of the previous three. Kathleen Wallace's 'Personal Identity of an Intersectional Self' builds from Justus Buchler's metaphysic of personal identity. She provides a temporal, relational and intersectional model of the self, one that hopes to escape outworn problems of personal identity that arise when we give too much credence to the idea that to have an identity is to be self-identical over time. (Nonetheless, one worries that Wallace has given it too much credence herself.) Lastly, Lyubov Bugaeva's 'Education and Social Change: Gorky, Dewey and Fabian Socialism' is an interesting historical piece on Maxim Gorky's search for a philosophy of revolutionary consciousness. However, interesting as it is, Gorky's quest intersected with philosophical pragmatism only at the edges.

3. Self and Politics. Thomas Hilde's 'Toward a Pragmatic Reconstruction of International Institutions: Traveling Selves and Epistemic Cosmopolitanism' begins with a serious concern for pragmatic political philosophy: the difficulty of creating global governance with a concern for individual and social growth. Global institutions emphasize compliance to the detriment of genuine problem-solving. The essay ends with abstract calls for cosmopolitan selves akin to tourists who have overcome their parochialism. Armen Marsoobian's 'Genocide's Aftermath: Reflections on Self and Responsibility' is an interesting piece on the Armenian Genocide and collective responsibility, exploring the implications of genocide as social death. However, the discussion's relation to pragmatism is indirect and brief. John Ryder's 'American Philosophy and Foreign Policy' argues that pragmatism is necessarily cosmopolitan and not a philosophy of national interest. However, despite sharing an evangelical impulse with neoconservatism, pragmatism is not imperialistic. It advocates self-realization through reflection upon one's community and inter-communal discourse. It cannot be imposed.

Emil Višňovský's fine 'Social Control, Self-Control and Norms: A Pragmatic Approach' draws from the sociological school of symbolic interactionism—itsself created

by Dewey and Mead—to expand upon pragmatists’ accounts of social norms. By this account, while norms guide behavior they are not rigid, but provide the conditions of creativity and critique. Concluding the section, Gert-Rüdiger Wegmarhaus’ ‘The Political Self in Modern Democracy: Individual Liberty and Personal Rights *Versus* Republican Virtue and Communitarian Responsiveness’ provides a survey of the debate between liberals and communitarians or republicans, a debate that extends back centuries but that has framed much of political theory over the last few decades. It is a clear and responsible history running from Machiavelli to Rawls, albeit one that is familiar and that makes no reference to pragmatism.

4. Self and Neopragmatism. This final section is the most coherent in theme, as all the essays begin from the thought of late controversial pragmatist Richard Rorty and each, perhaps unwittingly, builds on the one before. Dorota Koczanowicz’ ‘Community, Individuality and Experience’ adjudicates the debate between Rorty and Richard Shusterman addressing the aesthetic of existence and its relation to narrative accounts of identity. The former emphasizes newness, authenticity and language in his account of how the self takes itself as an object of care, while the latter emphasizes the somatic, communal and institutional. Alexander Kremer’s ‘Richard Rorty’s Interpretation of Selfhood’ provides a mild defense of Rorty’s contingent and historical selves in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*. It is a responsible survey of Rorty’s position, but little more. However, Miklós Nyíró’s ‘On the “Logic” of Rorty’s Imaginative Liberalism: Utopia, Solidarity, and the Private-Public Distinction’ and Radim Šíp’s ‘A Koala’s Face, A Pig’s Slaughter, and Rorty’s Conception of Self and Society’ explore the interwoven themes of imagination, self and the liberal state. Nyíró cogently recounts the difficulties of extending Rortian we-feelings to others on a global scale and the consequences for his project of universal-yet-ethnocentric liberalism. Šíp, in a more free-ranging piece that perhaps tries too much in a short conference paper, is at his best when he criticizes Rorty for externalizing limiting meaning to propositional language and overlooking the realm of pre-thetic feeling. This fourth section concludes with an interview with Rorty. It is a broad discussion on religion, capitalism and the world order, but the core themes are Rorty’s hopelessness and lack of understanding.

Overall, this is an interesting but unsatisfying volume, for reasons of both content and editing. Despite bringing together many fine scholars, the conference format provides only hints and promises rather than sustained arguments. And too often the papers are more solid than insightful. The reader is left wishing that the authors had had time to explore the themes or to extend themselves. Further, given the topic, one would expect to see more of Peirce, James and Mead, though the last appears more than the other two. Dewey, a vital thinker, dominates. Editorial errors are less forgivable. Likely because English is not the first language of many people involved, the book is in dire need of proofreading. To give two examples, misspellings are common and one article is missing half of its endnotes. This does not lessen the value of the ideas, but it is distracting and indicates a lack of care. The editors should also have cut those essays that did not speak

primarily to pragmatism and its implications, and rearranged the rest to provide greater unity of theme. In short, anyone interested in American pragmatism and in furthering a global conversation about its future is indebted to John Ryder and Alexander Kremer for their conference series, but the book that does justice to that growing discourse has not yet been written.

**Phillip Deen**

Wellesley College