

Two tales about pragmatism and European philosophy, with an introductory family tale.

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Abstract: The paper focuses on the relationships between pragmatism and continental philosophies in two historical moments: the first, in the turn of the 19th Century, was characterized by failed encounters; the second, in the 70's of the 20th Century, produced a fruitful, ongoing debate and encounter. Two issues are employed to deliver this contrast: a) the concept of nature and the relationship of science to philosophy and b) the idea of democratic experiences and the place political and social hope has in them.

A family tale

Allow me to start with a short family story, something I would normally avoid talking about, but that today I consider adequate, at least to continue some strands of the personal implications that appear in Westbrook's "Tale of two Dicks". Let me take you a bit further north and over fifty years ago. I used to spend my long summers in our family house in Vilardevós, an almost forgotten small hamlet up in the mountains of Ourense, in Galicia. My grandfather, of whose memory I only had imprecise and rhetorical family shreds, had rebuilt his own grandfather's house by the end of the 19th century and it was there where we all uncomfortably packed by the end of June. The fragments of his library were held in three huge dusty bookcases with unswept glass panel doors. In spite of their size, I learned those were only fragments of a mythically larger collection, because his apartment in Madrid, where the main library had been kept, had been plundered -- the family legend went-- during the Spanish Civil War a year after he died. The books and papers, I was soon to find, were his student materials, the manuscripts of his published and unpublished books and articles, and what looked like his random summer readings: politics, economy, sociology and Spanish and foreign literature, that ranged from our belated romanticism to the early works of the

Generation of 98, from French poetry and Catalan modernism to –what should have surprised me had I not known he was one of the minor founders of the new Galician resurgence by the turn of the century—a handful of Irish poetry books. I should have been around 14 or 15 years old when I started to excavate the contents of my grandfather’s library and when my interest in that mythical, but foggy character, grew. My adolescent winters yearned for those summers, full of outdoor activity in the fields with my friends and many hours of solitude in the dimly lit library with the sole company of spiders, discovering unknown cultural territories I could brag of back in school and outlining with a finer pen the traits of the peculiar, and sometimes uncongenial shadow of my grandfather.

In those early 60’s we took philosophy in our senior year at high school. With whatever slim knowledge of the history of philosophy the holy Jesuits might have taught me –I was soon going to discover at the University it was not that limited—I soon developed an interest in the scarce philosophy books kept in those three tall bookcases. Surprisingly, there were no classics, from Aristotle to Hegel, the authors I was acquainted with, and almost no contemporary philosophy, from phenomenology to existentialism, sources I afterwards guessed had been pillaged back in Madrid. Instead, I found an almost unopened Scheler’s *Ethik*, some Nietzsche, scribbled with notes full with obvious exclamation marks, and some early works by Unamuno, like *Paz en la Guerra* and several of his pamphlets and essays, all of them with kind and friendly inscriptions. There was also a nice sample of Jorro’s books, a now almost mythical press that introduced modern psychology and sociology, along with contemporary German and French philosophy to the moment of reawakening in Spanish culture that we would end calling our Silver Age, the years leading to and of our Second Republic that ephemerally arouse our culture out its slumber. My grandfather had published at Jorro his first book, *Histrionismo Español*, in 1906 and continued his collaboration with several other works on contemporary German philosophy. I knew, but I soon deepened the awareness of what this meant, that he had been a High School philosophy professor in different cities in Spain: in Soria, Ourense, Toledo (I am especially glad to recall this fact here today) and Madrid till his death –I am tempted to call it timely—in 1935. Had he lived through the war he would have ended in exile due to his radical leftist republicanism that had a long family

tradition and to a somehow pro-Marxist orientation in his later years... and I would not be talking to you today.

Allow me to drag this story to the point in which it comes relevant, I hope, for our Conference. I remember one almost torrid afternoon in August when my family were drowsing off in their siesta and I had gone down into the Library in one of my frequent archaeological excursions. Behind a stack of my grandfather's manuscripts, I discovered a small, cardboard box full of letters. I browsed through them and found many names I yet did not know of, like Wundt, with whom my grandfather ended writing his dissertation on the melody of Mediterranean languages, or Eucken, another of his teachers in Leipzig, or Negrín, his roommate in Louvain and who was to become the last Prime Minister of the Spanish Republic and who, of course, had never been mentioned in our Spanish history classes. But there were others I was already acquainted with, like Emilia Pardo Bazán or Unamuno. Unamuno's set of eleven letters filled me with excitement, and I remember dashing up the staircase yelling out my discovery. My family reacted with a tolerance that verged, nevertheless, into an understandable annoyance due to my untimely insistence. (At least, it all ended with happier outcomes, as my mother soon decided to dust off the bookcases and, later, my uncle set himself to put some order in the collection —something my youth had not cared about much; I knew my ways around-- and start a small catalogue of its content).

In order to bring this story to the point I was pursuing, let me translate for you a very small fragment of the first letter of Unamuno's correspondence, dated December 6th, 1898. It is a beautiful lesson in mentorship full of advices to a former student that had already started to fly on its own. Unamuno, then a Professor in Greek at Salamanca, tried to light up the depressive moments of a young philosophy graduate that could not find a clear path ahead, but that seemed to be defining his theoretical interests. He writes:

You have an excellent treatise of psychology in English, by the North American W. James, *The Principles of Psychology*. You also have *The Feeling of Effort*. In logic you have the excellent *The Principles of Logic*, by Bain¹.

No other books nor philosophers are mentioned in this long letter that soon moves on to other advices regarding what we could call the strategy of survival in the suffocating cultural climate of Spanish monarchical restoration, some of which, by the way, look surprisingly suited for current times. Without them knowing this inner history, I have frequently used those advices when talking to my students: travel abroad, study facts, do not take public recognition as the criterion for your self-confidence. But to return to the point, I find it fascinating, and at the same time melancholically depressing, that as early as 1898, early, that is, in the Spanish cultural time zone, Unamuno would advise a young philosopher –who probably would have studied only scholastic and neo-scholastic doctrines in Salamanca and the nevertheless liberating vagaries of Krausism in Madrid—to read two of James’ books and to go back to Alexander Bain, a colleague of Stuart Mill, but also an acknowledged predecessor of Pierce and James.

I learnt only a year ago that Eloy –that was my grandfather’s name--, perhaps due to his reading of James and Bain or by further indications from Unamuno –who in other letters advices that by all ways he should avoid France in his studies abroad (“French influence, he says, strikes me as the most pernicious to our thought”)- had applied in 1901 for a scholarship to the Junta of Ampliación de Estudios in order to study with James in the United States. Yet it had never been the Junta’s policy to send students across the ocean, or perhaps it was more inclined to Germany and France than to would then seem a bizarre choice (just remember Santayana), and my grandfather traveled first to Louvain and later to Leipzig in order to finish his post-graduate studies. He could develop his interests in psychology with Wundt, but pragmatism only appears in his later work by way of some scattered references to James.

¹ M. de Unamuno, *Epistolario inédito, I*, (ed. L. Robles), 1991, Madrid, Espasa Calpe, p. 58.

A tale of failed encounters with perhaps a happy ending

If I have delayed myself dealing with this small fragment of personal history it is because I find it symbolic of some questions concerning pragmatism and Europe I would like to consider with you today. I guess that if we are meeting in Toledo it is because some of us feel there are still things to settle both regarding our own Spanish and European traditions vis-à-vis pragmatism, like their blind spots and their difficulties in dealing with what it is foreign to them, and because we are already in a new cosmopolitan world in which philosophical nationalisms are or should be increasingly irrelevant. Bernstein and Rorty are, yet again, marvelous examples of such cosmopolitanism that both tried to render the universal content of the American experience and do so with the deepest dialogue I know of with continental philosophy. The contrast between the two Dicks that Westbrook has just presented will appear at certain points in my argument but seen, maybe, in this different light I would like to bring into the discussion. My aim is, precisely, to ask about the unaccomplished relationship of Continental thought to American pragmatism in the early years of the 19th century that my grandfather's adventure could exemplify, and to see its effects that may linger until today. I think, as I will mention in a moment, that things have really changed in terms of the dialogue itself, but I am not sure, though, that in some respects – basically the relation between science and philosophy—we are now in better situation than one hundred years ago.

I am no historian, though. My suggestions should rather be taken as a series of questions I would like to forward for the discussion. Although we have wonderful and insightful histories of American Pragmatism –Bernstein and Westbrook being amongst the most relevant—, all of which are illuminating exercises in self-explanation in which European influences are analyzed, and in spite of the fact that different Europeans have also written extensively and perceptively on several pragmatist authors, I am not aware, though, of any systematic analysis of the failed encounter between continental philosophy and pragmatism in the first decades of the 20th century. Of course, there are books in

those years, like Baumgarten's ², that looks to me a partisan discussion of Emerson, James and Dewey, as there are many Usamerican treatments of European philosophy at the time (Santayana must be recalled in this regard), but, if I am not mistaken, they should be taken rather as the materials upon which a narrative is still to be built. Nor is there a systematic reconstruction of what and how things started to change in the 60's and 70's with the ongoing dialogue of Usamerican philosophy and the second generation –not the first, it should be noted—of Critical Theory. Critical Theory has been almost the sole contemporary Continental school that has participated with interest in this discussion (phenomenology and post-phenomenology being scandalously absent from it) that, starting with K-O. Apel, continues to our days with Habermas or Honneth on the European side, and with Bernstein, Rorty or Putnam on the other side of the ocean. This I take to be less worrying, because at least we have their personal testimonies and their illuminating analysis on the topic and it is still a living history of the present. I have hopes in this mutual learning process, which would certainly heal the wound, but will not efface the scar of an absence for which the anecdote of my grandfather may be a suitable emblem. This is the reason I am speaking here today.

Leaving aside historical contingencies, why was there a European dismissal of pragmatism with some peculiar exceptions like Unamuno in Spain, a hint of acknowledgment in Bergson and Hébert in France³, perhaps the early Baumgarten and Gehlen in Germany ⁴, or a host of center Europeans that took interest in this, then new philosophical program? The question might be perplexing, and even vexing, because when Bernstein and Rorty started –generously, I would say-- to underscore similarities with the Continental traditions in the 60's and 70's --surely Critical Theory, but also Heidegger, Hermeneutics and even Deconstruction—they

² E. Baumgarten, *Die geistigen Grundlagen des amerikanischen Gemeinwesens*, vol. II, 1938.

³ *The Reception of Pragmatism in France & the Rise of Roman Catholic Modernism, 1890-1914*, David G. Schultenover (Ed.), The Catholic University Press of America, 2009.

⁴ Klaus Oehler “Notes on the Reception of American Pragmatism in Germany, 1899-1952”, *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Winter, 1981), pp. 25-35

did so in a landscape of a certain European high brow self-sufficiency that made those traditions blind to their American counterpart. Obviously, there were theoretical and political circumstances that can give partial explanations to this previous dismissal, but they seem to need some sort of systematic treatment to be meaningful. I soon will be going into some of them. But first, I would like to map two different types of problems I deem could help us in thinking the question itself, perhaps rephrasing it, and in finding some sort of an answer. These problems might be taken as contestable lighthouses that could fix our attention in dealing with the issue of why, and how, did a relation fail and how it was reconstructed.

The first parallels Westbrook's first topic, the way Bernstein and Rorty rendered distinct, if not opposed, versions of pragmatism regarding its epistemology or, to put in more amiable terms for Rorty, how are we to understand the theoretical import of pragmatism as philosophy. My way of approaching the issue is to ask how pragmatism's conception of science in its relationship to philosophy contrasted with Continental philosophy's own rendering of that same question in the past. It is precisely in this respect, as I suggested a moment ago, that we are all now facing the same problem, namely, that an inherited mistrust towards science on the part of philosophy puts us all, new continental philosophies and new pragmatisms, in a somehow unstable position. Of course, maybe this is too coarse a statement and we would all surely rush to point out differences of approach within pragmatism and continental philosophies that nuance it. But that, precisely, is the question: whilst in the first wave of dialogue –or, rather, absence of such—the issue of science was a clear frontier, in the second wave it does not seem to be significant. And this, I will argue, is worrying, because we may have lost the cutting edge that pragmatism brought into the philosophical conversation by underscoring the central importance of science. I will call this first issue “two tales about nature”,

The second issue I would like to deal with also parallels Westbrook's second topic, democratic politics. I would also like to give it a somewhat different twist; while I can see a clear continuity in the pragmatist tradition of the idea of democracy, from Mead and Dewey to Bernstein, Putnam and Rorty, in spite of their different renderings of its theory and its practice, the European treatment has had,

as we know, a more unstable history. I will not, of course, be dealing with the wide array of issues that are entangled here, but perhaps the topic of democratic hope, a question that has been addressed by Bernstein and Rorty and that has provided the title to a book by Westbrook, can be significant enough of, again, a tensioned predicament of successful and unsuccessful encounters between the ships that are sailing off from the two shores of the Atlantic. The very fact that democracy can be tied, conceptually linked, with the virtue of hope on your side of the Atlantic and that hope itself does not sound exactly right on this side is, in itself, meaningful. I will title my treatment of this second issue “two tales about hope”.

Two tales about Nature

In Philip Wiener’s classic and illuminating book *Evolution and the Founders of Pragmatism*, he summarizes in five tenets what he takes to be the common features of the lesson the early pragmatists’ extracted from the different versions of the theory of evolution, but especially from Darwin. Let me quote him directly from his last chapter that carries the title “The philosophical legacy of the founders of Pragmatism”:

American pragmatism has fostered, first, an *empirical* respect for the complexity of existence requiring a plurality of concepts to do justice to the diverse problems of mankind in its evolutionary struggles [later he names this idea as “pluralistic empiricism”]. Secondly, it has abandoned the eternal as an absolute frame of reference for thought, and emphasized the ineluctable pervasiveness of *temporal* change in the natures of things [he calls this “temporalism”]. Thirdly, it has regarded the natures of things, as known and appraised by men, to be *relative* to the categories and standards of the minds that that have evolved modes of knowing and evaluating objects [he will name this idea “relativism”]. Fourthly, it has insisted on the *contingency* and precariousness of the mind’s interaction with the physical and social environment, so that even in the most successful result of hard gained experimental knowledge, what we attain is *fallible* [he will call this “probabilism and fallibilism”]. Finally, American pragmatism upholds the *democratic freedom of the individual* inquirer and appraiser as an

indispensable condition for progress in the future evolution of science and society [he names this “secular democratic individualism”].⁵

Maybe two types of connected issues lie in this brilliant summary: the question of method, or of enquiry, and the underlying question of Nature. Let me start with this second idea. The general conception of Nature that Darwinism brought along to the pragmatists’ conception of reality retains, in mutated form, the Romantic (British and German) intuition of the mutating flux of reality that, because it had a holistic structure had to be apprehended in holistic terms, for example in terms of a global and unifying narrative. Philosophically, it was a Hegelian heritage. Dewey, Bernstein underscored, retained the anti-atomistic, organic coordination of nature in his notion of experience and very soon in his career modeled his analysis of the process of enquiry along these lines⁶. But the crucial difference between European Romantic holism and Darwinism are those seemingly small nuances that come along with the three ideas of pluralistic empiricism, relativism, and probabilism and fallibilism –to use Wiener’s catchwords. Darwin had a notion of nature that, though it appeared as a global, holistic process could only be understood through a scientific method of enquiry that avoided thinking from a preconceived notion of its essence. In contrast with idealist understanding, the relationship between what we could take nature to be and our way of apprehending it had to be inverted: it is our pluralistic, fallibilistic, process of inquiry which could make meaningful the idea of the holistic flux of Nature itself, all teleology being abandoned in this significant epistemological inversion. So, because we can only think of nature by a piecemeal research process, science –the prototypical method of enquiry—and all sorts of enquiries are conscious of what Wiener termed “relativism”. The crucial point of this inversion from nature-to-knowledge to science-to-reality is, obviously, empiricism. To give a name to this shift I think we could call it the process of turning idealism to naturalism.

All these concepts and catchwords have been subject to intense discussions in the pragmatist tradition and we could map the different strands of Pragmatism

⁵ Philip P. Wiener, *Evolution and the Founders of Pragmatism*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1949, p. 191.

⁶ R. Bernstein, *John Dewey*, New York, Washington Square Press, 1967, pp. 17 f.

according to the diverse conceptions of what those very words mean. It is not my task, though, to go into that now. I would like to point that whilst American pragmatism could –not with its own internal conflicts—make the move to naturalism and fallibilism, Continental philosophies found themselves less inclined to make that move. It has been said that European philosophy did not need to turn to pragmatism because it had, in its own tradition, philosophers, like Nietzsche, that had opened up what pragmatism had allowed in the United States. This is still a contested issue, but certainly we can understand Nietzsche in naturalistic terms that work against what idealism and *Wissenschaft* (the Hegelian version of perfect or accomplished knowledge) meant in the 19th century. I am not sure, though, that this interpretation of Nietzsche is what ended being his canonical heritage in the Continental tradition, nor that he himself overcame the romantic idea of a holistic, on-recurring process of Nature that defined even the forms and structures of human mind. Be it as it may, Phenomenology and Existentialism –think both of Husserl’s *The crisis of European sciences* and of Heidegger’s *Nietzsche*—retained a general mistrust towards empirical sciences, to the very notion of accomplished inquiry as modeled by fallibilism and naturalism. It may not be surprising, then, that when continental philosophy paid attention to pragmatism it conceived it as an empiricism –in the mould of British modern empiricism-- that was limited, or mistaken, from its point of view. The defense of *Wissenschaft* vis-à-vis science produced in Europe its own schizophrenias, and I would say, lingered on to the 20th century in what I consider pathological forms that still were present, for example, in the first Frankfurt School. But even today, I would say, suspicions against naturalism are still around. These suspicions against science, for example, have been present as a reaction of what was understood as the positivistic self-understanding of science. But what all these maneuvers, I would suggest, seem to lose is the larger picture that pragmatism had offered. In the current crisis of knowledge –p.e., in its form of the critique of the disregard for the humanities—some sort of return to that larger picture would be needed. But I should add: needed both on the American side of the ocean, and Putnam has been clear about that, and here.

Of course, things are much more complicated. The epistemological shift that pragmatism had pushed for in its beginnings had a direct reference to the idea of

scientific inquiry as tied by its own conceptual and methodological constraints. Precisely because it was not a totalizing *Wissenschaft* it could be normal, fallible, critical and criticized enquiry. Precisely because it was not total nor eternal, because it was not definitive, it was human, historical and social. This is the issue the linguistic turn and the hermeneutical turn put on the table since de 30's and that, in diverse though parallel forms, defined both American and Continental philosophies in the 20th century. Here the more recent contrast between Bernstein and Rorty comes clearly to mind. As is well known, and Westbrook's paper has perfectly reminded us today, while Bernstein proceeded to establish a new dialogue with hermeneutics and critical theory in his book *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* in the early 80's, and for so doing, had recovered the notion of praxis he had already reframed in the 70's in *Praxis and Action*, Rorty took a different path to denounce all sorts of fundamentalism that even abdicated the idea that science could be thought of as a paradigmatic form of enquiry—at least, it was not the sort of enquiry we needed in the sphere of human culture in which other activities, such as literature, were more illuminating. While Bernstein underscored, as the times did, the idea that Weiner called "relativism"—of course, avoiding the post-modernist implications that this label carries along in order to save the way in which praxis touches reality and changes it—and he understood it as a hermeneutical approach to realities and meanings, Rorty declared our contemporary predicament as an ethnocentrism that could, at most, aspire to an edifying role. To use other terms that come from a different philosophical jargon, whilst Bernstein's acknowledgement of the historically and methodologically framed forms of plural enquiry understood itself as performative, Rorty's way of doing it was a modified sort of emotivism.

Let me finish this first tale of two natures nailing down what I see as the problem we all share and that I briefly mentioned before. Current suspicions, both European—as Habermas'—and American, against naturalism are, certainly, justified when one sees many reductionist research programs in philosophy of mind or in bioethics, just to give two examples. But it seems to me that pragmatism offered—even in its more physicalist descriptions, as Quine's—an alternative picture of what naturalism and nature might mean. If a positivistic and reductionist notion of naturalism is taken as the paramount meaning of what

science amounts to, we will be forced to an uncomfortable position that, again, will cut off philosophy, and more generally culture, from the main tools of our transformation of our social realities. We desperately need a new philosophical understanding of science along pragmatist lines, following the paths, for example, that Putnam has reopened. But this project should remember what Bernstein clearly stated in his book on Dewey:

Throughout his life Dewey proclaimed that the main crisis of our times resulted from the divorce of science and values. Dewey championed the application of scientific method to the entire range of human and social problems. [...] He believed that the main task of philosophy in our time is to help bring about this union of science, ethics and social philosophy.⁷

We also know, of course, that a pluralistic conception of human reason and action avoids and should avoid all sorts of epistemic imperialisms, be they scientific, legalistic –something, we Europeans are very prone to--, artistic or whatever. If we are not thinking, thus, of a reduction to reductionisms, it seems it all amounts to a question of balance or, better, of achieving a clear understanding of how what is different is also articulated. This idea of articulation is crucial and perhaps one of the better lessons pragmatism should insist upon. To put it in a Deweyan context, let me bring in a last quote from Bernstein’s book:

[The important distinction between what is and what ought to be done] warns us against identifying what is or what has been with our norms of what ought to be. This distinction can be and has been used in misleading ways. It is sometimes used to “justify” the claim that any scientific information about man is totally irrelevant to “justifying” what ought to be. This dichotomy fails to appreciate the intimate *rational* connection between our knowledge of human nature and our decisions about what ought to be.⁸

That such a task could be achieved without giving up naturalism was pragmatism’s insight, what continental philosophy resisted in the past and still resists in the

⁷ R, Bernstein, *John Dewey*, cit. p. 116. Cfr. Mead’s position in Westbrook, *Democratic Hope*, Ithaca, Cornell Univ. Press, 2005, p. 14

⁸ Ob. cit., p. 127

present and of which, I think, contemporary American pragmatism should not abdicate. The linguistic and hermeneutical turns that were already present, though not always explicit, in the pragmatist tradition, amount –to put it now in Rorty’s words—to an antifoundationalist conception of human reason. Or, to put it in Bernstein’s, to a refusal to become subject to the “Cartesian anxiety”. But they do not imply to substitute a particular methodological approach, suited for the humanities and partially for the social sciences, for other methodologies that conform the natural sciences themselves. Perhaps we are striving for a sort of hermeneutical naturalism.

Two tales about hope

But the lagging remnants of a Romantic conception of Nature and of an idealist conception of Science are not the only factors that made the Continental reception of pragmatism problematic and even impossible by the end of the 19th century and the early decades of the 20th century. In all the interpretations of the early pragmatists –Bernstein’s, Menand’s, Westbrook’s, Murphy’s, to mention some—we can patently see how their conception of their intellectual task was tied up with a conception of experience that, on its turn, advocated an active involvement with a democratic building of the public space. Europe, in the same era, had different problems and, also, very different political and historical experiences. I started my talk today with my grandfather’s story that was historically framed in a moment of delayed disasters and endings, 1898, a moment, though, that perhaps was not as fateful as it was then depicted, because it opened a historical process of reconstruction. Unstable as it was, that process aspired to a democratic dream that soon the bloodiest of our wars would bury in an unknown grave in a forgotten roadside. In a larger perspective, and earlier, World War I had destroyed the old European self-confidence in the bourgeois regimes built along the nation-states of the 19th Century and the unstable democratic republics that followed were soon to become prey to what was to end being the worst of nightmares. I do not want to detain myself in the minutiae of European history, but to signal that whilst the American political experience was one of successful reconstruction after the Civil War and had democracy and equality as its main goals and driving dreams that empowered national self-confidence, the European

experience was, on the contrary, the fight over the possibility of democracy and equality, a fight that ended, by mid-century, with an almost total devastation and the wounds of radical evil. Even the Allied victory did not bring, I would suggest, national self-confidence (or did so with non minor self-deceptions), but that somewhat different feeling of relief that comes when we wake up from a nightmare. European experience is more like striving and failing, re-starting and falling back, something that disrupts any continuous progressive dream and turns resistance, hope against hope and against despair, rather than self-confident hope itself in its main ethical attitude.

Not only our two different types of historical experiences would seem an obstacle in the European understanding of pragmatism; also many philosophical attitudes, which had far reaching roots in European culture, towards Usamerican philosophy nurtured also this European dislike. Just remember Heidegger's talk about Americanism in *Holzwege* or the émigré Frankfurt School mistrust—in sharp contrast with Arendt—of the United States' intellectual and cultural life and vitality. I do not think these were minor, forgettable, highbrow attitudes, although I would accept they were not generalizable. They reveal a deeper trait. There is something embarrassingly patronizing in the way these segments of European philosophy—only segments, but at its center—reduced the pragmatist conception of inquiry into a sociological trait, something to be explained away in terms of whatever despicable conception of rationality one could find insufficient: instrumental reason, or the substitution of quantitative for qualitative thinking. If a social, deformed characterization was used as a reason for disdain of pragmatism's critical impulse, the theoretical approach from where this was done took itself as immune to its own historical and social circumstances, something performatively contradictory with what Heidegger's existentialism and critical theory had otherwise argued as one of their main guiding insights. Strangely, their own narratives were, in the end, meta-historical. Again, a philosophical interpretation of the tasks of philosophy resisted the de-transcendentalizing move that pragmatism had exemplified.

A third trait could be added to this tale of two different hopes, the hope of resistance and the hope of construction. It will help me move on to more

contemporary times and bring an end to my presentation. Maybe there is a conceptual connection between the type of historical experience and the type of understanding of the role of philosophy that underlie the central currents of European philosophy I have been referring to. Heidegger's philosophy after the *Kehre* and the first Frankfurt School's diagnoses not only allowed for no hope – perhaps not even resistant hope—but conveyed a clear sense of melancholic finale. They substituted memory and impossibility for action and possibility. Something changed, though, in the 60's, the moment when a new constellation –to use Bernstein's words—seemed to give a new chance for the encounter of pragmatism and European philosophy. This new constellation has been given different names, but I would accept Bernstein's own description of a type of hermeneutical praxis that forwards a new dialogical understanding. Let me quote him from the concluding section of *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*:

Like Gadamer, Habermas, Rorty and Arendt, I want to stress the danger of the type of “totalizing” critique that seduces us into thinking that the forces at work in contemporary society are so powerful and devious that there is no possibility of achieving a communal life based on undistorted communication, dialogue, communal judgment, and rational persuasion. What we desperately need today is to learn to think and act more like the fox than the hedgehog –to seize upon those experiences and struggles in which there are still glimmerings of solidarity and the promise of dialogical communities in which there can be genuine mutual participation and where reciprocal wooing and persuasion can prevail⁹.

The attitude of the hopeful fox –in contrast with the obsessed hedgehog Westbrook recalled regarding Rorty—is a particularized attention to the possibilities of emancipatory action in specific historical situations. In Bernstein's case, this is the case of the Civil Right's movement in the 60's. Reflecting on that experience, Bernstein suggests that we need an utopian impulse, without which

⁹ R. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, Philadelphia, Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, p. 228

we are always in danger of accepting blatant injustices [...] Utopian hopes always seem to exceed concrete historical achievements. And when this happens, there is a temptation to retreat into despair and cynicism. There is a tension, a paradox at the heart of utopianism. On the one hand, the lack of the so-called “realism” of the utopian impulse –the historical disparity between one’s hopes and the actual achievements of communal *praxis* can all too easily lead to disillusionment and a sense of hopelessness. Yet without the utopian impulse the melioration of concrete injustices might never be achieved. We need both utopian impulse and a robust skepticism about what it can achieve.¹⁰

Bernstein is thinking from the perspective of the active, participative citizen that finds her motivational resources in the idea of the possibility of her action achieving the positive result of overcoming injustice. This militant, ethical and agential pragmatism, this democratic hope, contrasts somewhat with Rorty’s version of social hope. Not that hope can be forgotten. “[H]ope for social justice is [...] the only basis for a worthwhile human life”¹¹, he writes, but in his way of rendering what hope amounts to, he is closer, I would be tempted to say, to the European version of resistance than to the American ideal of construction. Or, at least, in the delicate balance of the utopian impulse and robust skepticism, Rorty would underline the second whilst Bernstein’s particularized attention –a certainly epistemological trait of pragmatism—would remind us the importance of the first. Bernstein sees hope as a necessary dimension of political agency in the present -- as if answering the question: how are we to act now so that our hopes are not to be frustrated? He frames his hope in political terms that attend to particular social and political battles –one immediately recalls the Obama campaign—in which not only motivational resources but also conceptual tools are required. On the contrary, Rorty’s version comes in the way of a prospective narrative that does not have immediate implications for action; they only suggest an enticing picture of what would be desirable in spite of foreseeable dark times ahead. As Westbrook stated: “[A] left without social theory is disarmed [...] Rorty’s social hope cannot

¹⁰ R. Bernstein, “Democratic Hope”, Manuscript, pp. 5f.

¹¹ R. Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, Penguin Books, 1999, p. 204.

make do without greater conceptual resources that the American left now has at its disposal in public debate”¹².

There is something in this discussion about hope that European ears cannot quite understand. Perhaps because, as I suggested, our own experience is more related with what we do not want *again* –Adorno’s new categorical imperative of Auschwitz not been repeated—than to an image of what we would want *now*. Maybe these are only small nuances and accents. But they reveal, I would suggest, differential attitudes, political and theoretical. Let me end with a last suggestion. Bernstein’s, Rorty’s, Westbrook’s democratic and social hopes –in spite of their differences—stem out of a political confidence in a wide political project that understands itself with a historical dimension. There is no such confidence in the European Union, which sees its tasks, rather, as a practical necessity in which confidence and hope are not defining traits.

I will end with a metaphor to understand this dialectic between utopia and skepticism. Melancholy comes in two flavors: the first is the excitement of the new and the energetic power of mind and action –the *furor* of Ficino, behind which lies Plato’s erotic power of the soul—; the second is the paralyzing moment of realizing what cannot be achieved, as what cannot *already* be achieved. Certainly, we cannot understand the reason of this second moment, which frames the present from the perspective of the past, without the first, that sees the present as a moment that springs up into the future. Or maybe it is also the other way around. Perhaps resistant hope and militant hope are, as melancholy, two faces of the same coin or the two shores of the same ocean.

¹² D. Westbrook, *Democratic Hope*, ob.cit., p. 171 f.