

Special Issue Editorial: Poetic Pragmatism and Artful Management

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“I cannot help fearing that men may reach a point where they look on every new theory as a danger, every innovation as a toilsome trouble, every social advance as a first step toward revolution, and that they may absolutely refuse to move at all.”- Alexis de Tocqueville (1840)

“For in spite of itself any movement that thinks and acts in terms of an ‘ism becomes so involved in reaction against other ‘isms that it is unwittingly controlled by them. For it then forms its principles by reaction against them instead of by a comprehensive, constructive survey of actual needs, problems, and possibilities.” - John Dewey (1980)

Introduction

This special issue explores how our common interest in connections between management and pragmatism, in conjunction with British utilitarianism and American pragmatism, form the English and American backbone of mainstream management philosophy. We set out to demonstrate the ways in which the theory of pragmatism, much more than that of utilitarianism, underpins our quest for understanding entrepreneurial actions for the Arts (literary, visual and performing in their many manifestations) and are central to this field.

The significance of the Arts in informing our understanding has not traditionally been regarded as significant to those who study the field. This is evidenced by the comprehensive Oxford

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Handbook on Process Philosophy and Organization Studies (Helin et al. 2014 OUP), which features chapters introducing typical American pragmatists as John Dewey, William James and Charles Sanders Pierce. This special issue aims to address that gap and suggests that such a line of inquiry today is the main philosophical contribution of pragmatism to management.

The issue emerged out of a research program entitled '*Le pragmatism en question(s)*', initiated by Professor Romain Laufer at the French '*College International de Philosophie*', and is discussed under three sub-themes:

- I) The question of symbolism: can pragmatism ignore symbolic structures?
- II) Examining bureaucracy: what signifies pragmatism when the players are bureaucrats? And
- III) The question of innovation: how can one be pragmatic when one produces the unknown?

For the third sub-theme Romain Laufer wished to cross the Atlantic to the American home of pragmatism, for whom innovation is a fundamental precept (the unknown having been both seen as a barb identifying a rather bureaucratic and clumsy dictum coined by Donald Rumsfeld in 2002¹ and lampooned by many and yet by the time of the conference was gaining taxonomic interest in the sciences² as a fundamental truth).

Laufer introduced a cross-cultural conversation into what was, at the time, deemed to be a subject mainly of interest to European philosophers. A seminar was created at the Baldy Centre for Law and Social Policy, State University of Buffalo, New York, under the soubriquet of a '*journée d'étude*'. The 'conversation' was developed between the Centre, HEC Paris and the Ecole des Mines-ParisTech. The question which Laufer posed formed the basis of this special edition. The actual symposium drew from a cross-cultural understanding of pragmatism and innovation, and also from various academic disciplines. Contributions were invited from artists, philosophers, lawyers, arts managers and management theorists.

The contributors to this volume share a fundamental understanding that, for management to derive benefit from pragmatist perspectives, a business or enterprise ought to be considered a poetic or artfully creative project. Therefore, the implicit claim is that, if we consider different kinds of business administration to be forms of Aesthetic Management, a framework is set to investigate and elaborate upon what pragmatists tell us about human action and creativity. The avalanche in investigations based upon recent constructs such as "creative industries" and "experience economies" has indeed prepared the ground for such an artful perspective. Today no one would seriously question whether the arts might be a key criteria through which to inspire management to support creative acts.

This special issue explores how the philosophy of pragmatism helps us pinpoint how and why this notion is of importance. Henri Bergson states in his introduction to the French translation of William James book "Pragmatism" [1] on "Truth and Reality" that:

"Le vraie, selon William James ne copie pas quelque chose qui a été ou qui est ; il annonce ce qui va être, ou plutôt il prépare notre action sur ce qui va être. La philosophie a une tendance naturelle à vouloir que la vérité regarde en arrière; pour James elle regarde en avant" (James 1911 p. 10.)

¹ As we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns—the ones we don't know we don't know.— Donald Rumsfeld 2002

² <http://jxb.oxfordjournals.org/content/60/3/712.full>

Pragmatism, as a theory of action, attempts to challenge dogma and the establishment of universal principles. James dedicates his book (by the way in itself a brilliantly successful enterprise for branding and marketing this special kind of philosophy) to John Stuart Mill who turned away from utilitarian dogma when understanding an economic enterprise to be an adventure, whereby the entrepreneur gained practical experimental knowledge through concrete business experiences rather than by normative calculus. His methodology and incipient theory rested on concrete testing of how markets reacted to his actions. To Mill, as well as to James, action is about practical doing which, when decanted, ultimately forms sediment which can be described as ‘knowing’. Such a perspective implies, as shown by Statler and Salovaara, that there are no eternal truths, but only local islands of certainty that might, at any moment, be over-written by new experiences. This explains why Bergson distinguishes pragmatism from doctrinal philosophies thus;

“...tandis que pour les autres doctrines une vérité nouvelle est une découverte, pour le pragmatisme c’est une invention”

All authors in our issue highlight the need to engage with a philosophy that embraces plurality and is hybridized with experiences in the actions and undertakings of managing and enterprising. With this issue we hope to show that expunging or ignoring this philosophical precept reduces pragmatism to a barren functional way of thinking. However, pragmatism is a complex philosophy far from any “pragmatic credo”. We hope to show that, at its core, the philosophical precepts of pragmatism offer management something far beyond a “do-whatever-works-functionalism” or “rule-of-thumb-opportunism”. “To be pragmatic” usually refers to functional outcomes and methodological practice very close to orthodox Benthamite utilitarianism. To adhere to pragmatism, however, implies theoretical underpinnings predicated upon a philosophy of action. During the conference Singaporean Director, and co-founder of the Theatre, Training Practice Institute in Singapore, T. Sasitharan, explained how he embarked on creating a new acting school where art performances were organically developing traditions, making an audience view otherwise invisible actions as culturally meaningful. This argument draws one closer to the concerns of a real pragmatist philosopher, such as John Dewey, and ably demonstrates that without this philosophical underpinning, the other meaning of the term has real limitations. In their article presented in this volume, the same holds true for Bejean and Hatchuel when they explain how to rectify the disaster of pragmatic credo management by crafting ways of symbolical co-creation amongst an artist-gardener-entrepreneur and her audience market. They demonstrate to us the wide gap between pragmatic and pragmatist management and serve to explain a common mis-reading of the terminology.

As pragmatism (the second philosophical meaning) explores inter-action, perhaps in contrast to mechanical or individual action, pragmatists constantly reflect on how human action contains, at its core, modes of human communication. In the works of James and Pierce we find a deep concern with how language is part and parcel of meaningful doing that has also inspired the later developments in semiotics. This is where Bordron’s article develops and elaborates on semioticians connections to pragmatism. This leads us to enquire about the way in which managerial discourses surrounding “creative industries” demonstrate the overlap between art and enterprise. Bejean’s and Hatchuel’s concrete case of managing and marketing innovative gardening-design supports this reading.

In the same vein one might revisit John Dewey’s classic from 1934 on “Art as Experience” [2] as a pragmatist companion to management in an “experience economy”. One reading of this could be that Art, or the service/product in an experience economy, might be understood as more of a process, where the actual process of making art hybridizes with its reception. This is the ‘space’ in

which Bordron tells us that experiences are in constant flux. Essentially Bordron questions how the employment of pragmatism, as a lens, could help us to understand changes in the flux that generate what managers call innovation or changes in taste and receptiveness for novelty. Bergson presented pragmatism as a philosophy of inventive action that abandons the scholastic idea of discovering any conditions of causes of events. Similarly Bordron notes that pragmatism only works with “post-suppositions” avoiding “pre-suppositions”, which of course makes more orthodox analytical philosophers reject pragmatism as a-theoretical. Still one may think of some logic of action for, as Guillet de Monthoux suggests, a pragmatist managerial perspective can be saved from a rationalistic backlash by making clear the fundamental distinctions between decisions, as syllogisms, and actions as practical events. He suggests that, by connecting to the Elizabeth Anscombe’s pragmatist mode of Wittgensteinian philosophy, we come to realize the importance of the actors’ own language in creating meaning and momentum when performing actions. Simply put, intentions in pragmatism can never be taken to be isolated causes which generate action. Pragmatism never sees us a Humean ball on a billiard-table.

Bordron’s article also asks what sort of reception or interpretation pragmatism might consider. This is a managerial issue when we look at services/products whose meaning is connected to aesthetic judgment. Thus to custom-make a garden, as in Bejean and Hatchuel’s case study, leads us towards an almost paradigmatic case. For should not the market-success of this business be considered in several aesthetic dimensions?

A traditional model for aesthetic judgement is “the hermeneutic circle” by which meaning is given to a work of art. It would seem that the traditional model of hermeneutics works on the precondition that a work of art always contains a core from which its interpretation diffuses but, as we have seen, Bordron finds it inappropriate for a pragmatist’s understanding to have preconditions. Instead he hypothesizes about an inverted pragmatist circle of interpretation aiming at a core in the future, and not in the past.

In Kristensson Ugglas contribution we are presented with Paul Ricoeur’s version of hermeneutics as mediation which seems to better match what Bordron has in mind. For our issue it is of importance that Ricoeur’s hermeneutics, we learn from Kristensson Ugglas, also developed when the French philosopher was influenced by American philosophy including pragmatism. Kristensson Ugglas helps us conceive of a way to understand consumption/production as poetic mediation that leaves most preconditions behind in the vein of Elizabeth Anscombe when she examines what intentions might imply for actions once we detach ourselves from seeing them as pre-existing causes. Kristensson-Ugglas expands hermeneutics towards a pragmatist view of poetics containing, in the bud, a vision of how to see co-creative developments in tune with what happens in the ever expanding creative-experience sectors of economic activities.

In Bordron’s article we encounter a notion that also receives considerable treatment by Laufer. We are asked to consider that, if human action is an inextricable bodily and linguistic hybrid, then we must accept the action power of speech. This makes Bordron propose a rhetoric of change, with different modes of making things change and take place. Bourdon suggests that rhetoric make changes emerge from the inside i.e. not by the convincing of something but simply ‘convincing’, maybe somewhat similar to the idea of self-confidence as fundamental for action. Laufer embarks on proposing complex macro societal systems of legitimation that implicitly control which arguments will be accepted, and which will not, in different historic situations. Laufer’s systems of legitimacy are the paradigmatic spectacles with which we all are equipped and which condition how we succeed in making our case. Laufer’s proposition is that systems of legitimacy are, in turn, the backbone of institutions. If we insist on adhering to pragmatism as a way of doing, whilst accepting Laufer’s overall

mapping of western European systems of legitimation, we then will have to grant pragmatism less power to change, as there is an embedded lexicon which conditions the success of action. Therefore action is not potentially free but seriously conditioned, although this is not visible. It comes into play when traditional institutions and their legitimation systems break down. Once having explained his triadic system of legitimacy, Laufer also implies that we now are in a state of crisis, as we cannot operate within an internalized set system. Maybe this can help us explain why we are now so taken with pragmatism? But the challenge is to see whether such an explanation, imbued with its theory of history, could ever be accepted by pragmatism itself?

In their quest for a pragmatist philosophy of action, both Bordron and Laufer simultaneously suggest that we take a closer look at Plato's most contentious philosophy; sophism. Laufer notes the parallelism between sophism and marketing when it comes to criticism and rejection. Marxists and other idealists today despise marketing as dearly as Plato sophists in Athens! Bordron makes the connection between pragmatism and sophism to which Laufer adds his conviction that marketing is today's sophism and that exponents of both have become the pariahs of society. For to him, when business is about human action outside confined and closed sites of production, when factories and sites of production become outsourced in wide networks, managerial interest turns increasingly to how markets perform rather than taking a closer look at performance and control inside organizations. To Laufer, successful marketers, viewed from pragmatist perspectives, are similar to good sophists constantly doing things with words. They will meet the same sort of critique from those who prefer to postulate a world predicated upon certitude of eternal principles. They will, as pragmatists still are from analytical philosophers, be held as a-philosophical. Plato not only attacked sophist, Laufer reminds us how he utterly despised art as mere illusions, falsely mirroring real things. In creative economies not only marketers are sophists but, in addition, whatever is produced is increasingly approaching what we call art. Laufer notes that marketing and art are often confused and this brings us, (given what all the other articles in different ways indicate), even closer to a situation where management might considerably profit from taking pragmatism seriously. This dichotomy is at the core of his argument which flies in the face of traditionally received interpretations of organizational culture and society.

In summary the pre-conditions for this issue are that management today takes place outside the traditional industrial structures of modernity. Management takes place in markets and it has to work in a relatively uncontrolled setting. Moreover, management produces value of a dominantly aesthetic kind which is established by complex processes of judgment. In volatile economies, such as we find today, structured order is hard to command and models are soon rendered obsolete. Perhaps we are still caught up in a situation of postmodern crises and our times share similarities with the post-civil war American era when new sense-making templates had to replace old faith-based principles. That historic situation, according to the thesis of Louis Menand (2001), drove a demand for pragmatism and its experience based epistemology. The pragmatist focus on the quest for truth, in the same way as practical enterprising made explicit connections culminating in the self-made economic agent; the entrepreneur and the artist.

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Professor Ruth Bereson joined Griffith University in September 2015 as Dean (Academic) of the Arts, Education and Law Group, prior to which she was Dean of the Faculty for the Creative Industries at Lasalle College of the Arts, Singapore. She holds a PhD from the Department of Arts Policy and Management at City University London and has a diverse background in the fields of arts management, cultural policy, cultural diplomacy and cultural leadership. Her major research interest is the relationship between governmental policies and their effects on the arts internationally and over time. She was Founding Director of the Arts Management Program at SUNY Buffalo, and Associate Director, TC Columbia University Arts Administration Program. Professor Bereson has recently designed and delivered the Cultural Leaders' Lab, an international program for experienced Arts Managers and Practitioners, for the National Arts Council of Singapore. She has contributed to the field through a wide range of books, edited volumes and articles on arts management and cultural policy and frequently lectures internationally. In addition to her scholarly work, her professional experience extends to the profit and not-for-profit sectors across the arts where she has held such diverse positions as General Manager of a touring musical theatre company, Logistics Manager for an international arts festival, and co-ordinator of an international visual arts exhibition and artist exchange.

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