Therapy and Conflict. Between Pragmatism and Psychoanalysis
Introduction to the Symposium

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1   The history of the relationship between pragmatism and psychoanalysis is both complex and fragmentary. On the pragmatist side, the engagement with Sigmund Freud's thought – and with the psychoanalytic tradition more generally – tends to be cursory, nonlinear, and at times slightly adversarial. For instance, William James notoriously rejects the unconscious as a concept and develops a different theory of the subconscious. Similarly, Charles S. Peirce frequently refers to the unconscious dimension of the mind, although he does so without referring to psychoanalysis. By contrast, both George Herbert Mead and John Dewey discuss the commonalities and differences between their own perspectives and the psychoanalytic one, but they fall short of doing so in detail. On the psychoanalytic side, the encounters are even more infrequent, with the exception of the pragmatist imprint in Harry Stack Sullivan's work and the extensive references to William James in Carl Gustav Jung's work. In some cases, pragmatists have been (wrongfully) accused by psychoanalysts of defending a naive – or at least overly optimistic – picture of the human condition.

2   Recent contributions have attempted to rekindle such a dialogue. Without dismissing historical divides and theoretical divergences, these contributions focused on the many methodological and theoretical points of contact between pragmatism and psychoanalysis. As a testament to this renewed interest in the relationship between these traditions, topics such as the critique of the primacy of consciousness; the central role of the relationship with others in the formation of the self; and the centrality of the pre-reflective dimension in human conduct have all been discussed in recent years (Colapietro 1995; Colapietro 2000; Santarelli 2013; Brigati 2015; Maddalena 2017; Côté 2016; Lamarche 2017; Henning 2022). This special issue aims to further encourage this recently re-discovered dialogue by exploring novel ways in which pragmatism and psychoanalysis may work together, with an eye towards contemporary challenges in healthcare, education, and politics.

3   The notions of therapy and conflict represent the essential thread that guided our work as guest editors of this symposium. We aimed to select a range of contributions focused on therapeutic approaches to philosophical, moral, and political issues. We also privileged contributions that discussed conflict – in all its dimensions – as a key component of human action and psychology. Such a focus on conflict implies a peculiar perspective on pragmatism and its major theoretical tenets. While the key role of conflict is widely acknowledged both in Freud's thought and in post-Freudian psychoanalysis, pragmatist philosophy and social theory have often been considered inadequate when it comes to dealing with the conflictual dimension of human experience. As the contributions to this special issue show, this criticism is at the very least partial, if not inaccurate.

4   In what follows, we offer a brief overview of the contributions included in the issue. Section I deals more closely with issues related to the history and interpretation of the pragmatist and psychoanalytic traditions (Colapietro, Côté, Dadaian). Section II tackles theoretical aspects connected with the social, political, and emotional dimensions of the human condition, such as faith and suspicion (Henning), power and communication (Braun), and negative emotions (Gregoratto). Section III includes two contributions that engage with recent developments in the social sciences, touching upon education (Frank) and the comparison between neuro-pragmatism and neuro-psychoanalysis (Solymosi).

Section I: History and Hermeneutics

5   Vincent Colapietro's contribution pursues a twofold goal: 1) to highlight the agonistic dimension of Dewey's pragmatism; 2) to assess Dewey's contribution to American psychiatry. The two tasks are connected through an original comparison between Dewey's philosophy and social psychology on the one hand, and Alfred Meyer's psychobiology on the other hand. Notably, such a comparison is not solely based on theoretical affinities between the two figures, but also takes into account their historical encounters. As Colapietro shows, both Dewey and Meyer are key figures in the American reception of psychoanalysis. While retaining some important aspects of the Freudian revolution – e.g., the key role played by conflict in our lives, or the importance of the pre-reflective dimension of experience – Dewey's and Meyer's social naturalism contributes to an understanding of mental health that cannot be explicitly found in classic psychoanalysis. Specifically, among the original contributions of Meyer's psychobiology we find the idea of mental health as flourishing and vibrancy, the conception of mental illness as the disruption of fluency of functioning, and the understanding of therapy as the recovery of spontaneity. All these aspects have been clearly influenced by Dewey's thought. In reconstructing the threads of the dialogue between these two authors, Colapietro provides convincing arguments for redressing the recurring (mis)understanding of Dewey as a naively optimistic author, one who is unaware of the dark side of the human psyche. At the same time, the paper contributes to the reinstatement of Alfred Meyer as a key figure in the intellectual history of the 20th-century United States. Both pragmatism and psychobiology depict the human condition as a complex array of ever-present conflicts, combined with the enduring need for integration and survival – a topic that Colapietro addresses in the final part of the article.

6   Jean-Francois Côté reconstructs the problems and prospects involved in the relationship between George Herbert Mead and psychoanalysis. The necessary starting point of this endeavour is a recognition of Mead's explicit criticism of Freud. Although often superficial and at times misleading, such critique on Mead's part highlights crucial differences regarding the role of sexuality, the understanding of the drive dimension of human experience, and the distance between an approach focused on progress – such as pragmatism – and one that emphasizes regress – such as psychoanalysis. Alongside these clear and eloquent differences, there are also partial proximities – e.g., the importance of internalization processes in the dynamics of social control and the genesis of the self, or the role of the unconscious in ontogenetic processes. However, things become more problematic – and therefore more interesting – when we move from the explicit differences and similarities to the aspects of the two approaches that require further articulation from both sides. In this spirit, in the second part of the paper Côté investigates the different ways in which Mead, Freud and Lacan conceive the role of the symbolic dimension in the genesis of the self. Although far apart with respect to the possibility of authentic intersubjective recognition between self and others, Mead and Lacan seem to agree on the centrality of the symbolic dimension and of unconscious communication. The topic of emotions is yet another field where cross-breading, dialogue, and mutual influence between Mead and psychoanalysis are more important than their explicit differences and similarities. Generally speaking, the mutual transformation of the two approaches is explicitly envisioned as desirable by Côté, who concludes by welcoming the possibility of "a social psychology that dialectically joins regression and progression in terms of a better understanding of social life," and "another kind of symbolic interactionism beyond the Blumerian and Straussian orientations" (Côté § 27-28).

7   Anna Dadaian's contribution aims to draw a parallel between the work of William James and that of Carl Gustav Jung to show how Jung's psychology (especially, the *Psychological Types*, 1923) drew direct inspiration from the work of William James – e.g., *Principles of Psychology* (1890), *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), *Pragmatism* (1907) – , more so than from Freud's work. Recalling Taylor's (1980) and Shamdasani's (1999) studies, as well as Flournoy's (1917) account of James' philosophy, Dadaian argues that Jung's debt to James runs along four main lines: 1) the idea that scientific theories do not provide "absolute truths" but are merely tools for manipulating experience; 2) the concept of the "personal equation," whereby scientific objectivity, far from being a quantitative factor, requires the recognition of one's personal biases and preconceptions to be achieved; 3) the defense of epistemological pluralism, that is, the need to allow for the coexistence of multiple perspectives, since the existence of a single explanatory principle is an "intolerable tyranny" (Jung 1923; James 1909). Finally, Dadaian turns to address one last important issue: while it is true that Jung constructs his typology based on James, he nevertheless does not accept the latter's dualisms (rational-empirical; tough-minded-tender-minded), which he aspires to overcome. Religion (especially Eastern religion) and its creatively reconciling symbol is credited by Jung with resolving these conflicts of the ego-divided, thereby ensuring a higher order of objectivity. The interest of Dadaian's essay is found, in her own words, in the fact that "Jung's work thus provides a case study for the history of pragmatism – namely, an example of an early use of pragmatism as a philosophy of science and psychology" (Dadaian § 33).

Section II: Theory

8 Bethany Henning's essay offers a comparison between Freud's psychoanalysis (*The Interpretation of Dreams*, 1900/1954) and Dewey's cultural naturalism (*Art as Experience*, 1934/1989). These two approaches appear opposite and irreconcilable at first glance. Indeed, although the two authors share the biological and physiological description of the psyche, recognize the importance of the role of culture in the relationship between the individual and the environment, agree on the need to dismantle the tendency to see the mind as a subject, and discourage the hasty equivalence of mind and consciousness, the points of distance between them are numerous. Consider, for example, the fact that Dewey sharply criticizes the Freudian reduction of psychological interest to sexual appetite, thereby nurturing one of the most celebrated charges against psychoanalysis, that of being "a salacious enterprise that projects its own lurid fantasies onto its analysands" (Henning § 3). To further connote the distance between the Freudian and Deweyan approaches, Henning resorts to the difference established by Paul Ricoeur between "hermeneutics of suspicion" and "hermeneutics of faith," as two distinct and mutually exclusive methodological poles. The author's hypothesis is that it is possible, however, to build a bridge between these two approaches, which lies in a middle ground between Dewey's aesthetics and the psychoanalytic approach to dreams. Indeed, Henning argues, to the same extent that in the dream "I institute no distance between myself and the experience I am undergoing," in the aesthetic experience described by Dewey we find the same "raptness of attention and the pervasive emotional tone" (§ 7), which the American philosopher takes as optimal and necessary for learning and growth. Progressively unraveling the opposition between Dewey and Freud, and thus between faith and suspicion, Henning shows how for both authors what is at stake is the work of the imagination that unveils democratic possibilities, that is, a creative contribution to the shared life of an intelligent community.

9 Cedric Braun's article on "communicative power(lessness)" sets forth a dialogue between John Dewey and Erich Fromm. Though apparently unusual, this dialogue is historically grounded on the often overlooked fact that Fromm read Dewey, and that he quoted him in important passages of his work. Moreover – Braun argues – both Fromm's and Dewey's "World War Genealogies" highlight the German historical tendency towards voluntary submission. But while both authors focus on the interplay between social and intellectual factors – e.g., the connection between dualism and social divisions – Fromm's finer-grained analysis of the authoritarian character understands voluntary submission as a defense mechanism against a sense of powerlessness, one ignited by socio-economic changes. Despite these differences, Braun maintains that on a conceptual level a specific kind of powerlessness – i.e., communicative powerlessness – is embedded in the ethical theories of both Fromm and Dewey. Both authors conceive of communication as a means to engage with others and with the social environment, rather than as mere exchange of information. They also share an idea of ethics as active involvement and as the development of growing intellectual and emotional capacities. Consequently, both Dewey and Fromm understand communicative powerlessness as a key ethical issue. Building on this common ground, in the last part of the paper Braun explores a Deweyan-Frommian approach to melioristic social sciences. Drawing on studies conducted or inspired by Fromm, the author argues for the importance and the relevance of empirical studies of

social character from a Deweyan perspective. Both Fromm's socio-psychoanalysis and Dewey's social pragmatism could thus contribute to a hybrid, interdisciplinarily-oriented account in social philosophy, whose main focus lies in the promotion of people's own agency and initiative.

10 Federica Gregoratto's contribution, "Between Anger and Hope: Emotions in Progress," aims to offer a re-articulation of the notion of *progress* starting from the strongly reflexive, rational, and cognitive accounts that have been recently proposed by Jaeggi (2022) and Allen (2016). By significantly expanding on these accounts, Gregoratto argues that emotions play a key role when it comes to distinguishing between "good" and "bad" change. Through the analysis of two case studies, namely radical anger and radical hope, she illustrates how the affective dimension can deeply impact social transformation. The upshot of such analysis is a Deweyan solution – which Gregoratto dubs "troubled normativity" (Gregoratto § 6) – that embraces conflict, ambivalence, and uncertainty as key elements of the path towards social progress and positive change. This paper represents a welcome addition to the recent and lively debate on the role played by traditionally "negative" emotions in social and moral progress (see Cherry 2021 on rage; Protasi 2021 on envy; Giacomoni, Valentini & Dellantonio 2021 as an overview). Gregoratto also contributes to moving this debate forward by illustrating more specific ways in which emotions such as radical anger may be epistemically and politically illuminating. Marginalized and oppressed groups, for instance, "have to learn how to be radically angry" (Gregoratto § 30) and often go through an education process before they come to realize that they are entitled to this emotion. Radical anger can thus act as a catalyst of change *precisely* because it is *prima facie* difficult to accept and understand. Far from being an exaggerated reaction to current circumstances, radical anger often refers to a long history of past injustices – as Gregoratto's example featuring Serena Williams powerfully suggests. The effort required to decode and ultimately understand the object of radical anger thus proves essential to grasp the extent and complexity of the relevant injustices.

Section III: Application to Social Sciences

11 Jeff Frank's contribution, "John Dewey and Psychiatry: Overcoming Resistance to Growth," focuses on the intimate – albeit often overlooked – relationship between psychiatry and education in Dewey's thought. The paper aims to redress a simplistic view of Dewey's philosophy of education, which has been at times accused of relying on an overly optimistic and "rosy" view of human nature. To the contrary, Frank articulates and defends a more complex and sophisticated account, one that heavily draws on psychoanalytic notions. This piece also addresses another interesting question, namely: what does it take to become a truly Deweyan educator? By discussing everyday examples of challenges that educators routinely encounter, Frank provides a similarly interesting answer. The Deweyan educator is someone who learns from successful therapeutic practices to address relevant issues in the classroom, given that these issues are often markedly psychological in nature. Think about cases of learned helplessness, where students show fears and inferiority complexes based on their early upbringing. Another commonplace example concerns perfectionism, where students tend to avoid hard tasks thereby unconsciously hindering their own growth for fear of failure. On a more general level, Frank's contribution provides us with the opportunity

of engaging with Dewey's philosophy of education in depth, also thanks to the closer look into less-known manuscripts such as *The Sources of a Science of Education* (1929/2008). Additionally, the paper offers a refreshing perspective on the conversation between Dewey and psychoanalytic work on change, transformation, and growth (Lear 2003, 2011; Sullivan 1964), thereby further strengthening the connection between the two philosophical traditions.

12   Tibor Solymosi's contribution, "Neuropragmatism, Neuropsychoanalysis, Therapeutic Trends, and the Care Crisis" concludes the issue. The paper thoroughly discusses the complex relation between the two "neuro" counterparts of pragmatism and psychoanalysis, i.e., neuropragmatism and neuropsychoanalysis respectively (Solymosi 2011; Solms & Turnbull 2014). The contribution starts by raising a timely question, namely which therapeutic model would be more appropriate to tackle the current care crisis in psychiatry and mental health. The care crisis, recently discussed by Dowling (2021), is characterized by a markedly neoliberal approach to healthcare, where commodification, inequality, quick fixes, and an overly reductionist approach to treatment run rampant. In such a context, the risk of falling prey to therapeutic tyranny (Martin 2006) becomes particularly salient. According to Solymosi, both neuropragmatism and neuropsychoanalysis aim to counter the care crisis while avoiding therapeutic tyranny, but do so in very different ways. The starting point of both approaches is the rejection of Cartesian dualisms that conceive of the mind as being identical to consciousness. Neuropsychoanalysis, in its attempt to salvage the materialistic assumption of neural correlates of consciousness (Northoff 2023), presents itself as a project aimed at *reconciliation.* On this view, the mental and the physical are better understood as two aspects of the same substance (what is known as dual-aspect monism). By contrast, neuropragmatism adopts an approach geared towards *reconstruction*, which employs a thoroughly non-dualistic conception of experience from the get-go, aided by active inference and allostatic principles (Johnson & Schulkin 2023). Going back to the initial question, Solymosi's contribution shows that both therapeutic approaches offer tools that are potentially effective to deal with the care crisis. Yet, it primarily works as a piece aimed at showcasing some key advantages exhibited by neuropragmatist proposals over neuropsychoanalytic ones.

13   We would like to conclude by thanking all the contributors for allowing us to delve deeper into the issues surrounding the intricate conversation between pragmatism and psychoanalysis. We are also grateful to the EJPAP editors Roberta Dreon, Sarin Marchetti and Anna Boncompagni for their continuous help and support during the preparation of this issue.

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