

**Bordering Critical Thought in Cosmopolitan Education: Pragmatic Liberal  
Hegemony or Cross-Cultural Dialectical Recognition?**

**Nicolas Tanchuk**

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Belief in moral diversity is quotidian, a late modern platitude. Paired with the growth of scientific power following the Enlightenment, this mundane fact ascends to ethical urgency. Science allows us to create and destroy more than ever before in human history. Despite increased consensus in scientific knowledge, our ethical beliefs remain divergent. We quarrel over which projects to create, sustain, or dismiss. We question which responsibilities, to ourselves, to others, and to the environment, if any, are constitutive. As the increasing reach of scientific power adds urgency to the diverse hermeneutics of our flourishing, we, as late-modern educators, are called to ask: “What does it mean to be educated as a citizen of *this* late-modern world?” and, by implication, “Amidst such plurality, is critical ethical thought even possible?”

I distinguish two responses to the question of critical ethical thought. Call the first, affirmative possibility, ‘progressive idealist’ and let it hold that ‘We have sufficient reason to believe that persons have the potential, however fallible or as yet unrealized, to rationally assess the ends to which we aspire in public life.’ Call this first position ‘progressive’ because it maintains the possibility of recognizing ethical progress, ‘idealist’ because the notion of progress presupposes an ideal or improved way of being, however inarticulate or partially understood, toward which we strive. Call the second, negative response, ‘pragmatic’ and let it negate progressive idealism’s affirmative position on critical ethical thought. Let a pragmatist hold that ‘It is not the case that we have sufficient reason to believe that we have the potential, however fallible or as yet unrealized, to rationally assess the ends to which we aspire in public life.’ Refer to this latter position as ‘pragmatic’ due to its rejection of efforts to rationally grade ethical theories in favor of ‘practicing’ such perspectives in public life. An exhaustive taxonomy of thinkers within this dialectical framework extends beyond the scope of this paper. For reference, however, I take Charles Taylor and Michael Sandel to stand as notable contemporary exponents of progressive idealism. By contrast, I take a diversity of writers in the tradition of, though not limited to Nietzsche, Dewey, Wittgenstein (early and late) and Heidegger to pragmatically reject critical ethical rationality and by implication progressive idealism.<sup>1</sup>

In this study, I endeavor to accomplish four tasks. First, I attempt to show that pragmatism and progressive idealism entail distinct views of personal identity, progress, and ethical agency as deductive implications of their rejection of critical ethical thought. Second, I argue that two competing views of cosmopolitan educational practice follow from these distinct views of identity, progress, and ethical agency—one pragmatic and imperialist, the other progressive idealist and fallibilist. Thirdly, I aim to show that the pragmatic imperialist view of persons and pedagogy projects a hegemonic form of late-modern political liberalism, a fact that renders its preponderance within the higher educational institutions of liberal societies unsurprising, though troubling in its infallibility. Fourthly, and finally, I call the pragmatic liberal imperialist picture of persons and of education for global citizenship into question, arguing that it is a less

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<sup>1</sup> Some defenders of these thinkers I dub pragmatic would, no doubt, object to this characterization. I argue, despite protest, that it is an implication of these writers’ respective stances on the issue of fundamental ethical ontology. Dewey’s skepticism regarding metaphysics, I claim, for instance, despite his emphasis on democratic progress undermines the possibility of explaining democratic values and engagement as a candidate for *actual* rather than merely apparent progress when contrasted with the possibility of non-democratic forms of order and engagement. In the face of the Other, democratic values, on Dewey’s framework is placed in an imperialist stance, both in relation to citizens of democratic and non-democratic cultures, due to the lack of a non-imperialist alternative.

explanatory account of human ethical practice than a progressive idealist view. I conclude by recommending progressive idealism as a more coherent and explanatory framework from which to orient our pedagogical practice and the critical ideal of cosmopolitan citizenship.

To begin, for the sake of clarity amidst various conceptions of the ethical, let's stipulate that, for our purposes, 'a conception of ethical flourishing' will refer to 'a view of what it means for a person to live more fully able to (a) understand and (b) practically realize her identity in the world.' We leave open the question of what the thicker contents of a life going well amount to beyond this form. In affirming critical ethical rationality, we, therefore, affirm only that we have sufficient reason to believe that we have the potential, however fallibly or as yet unrealized, to notice that some conceptions of our individual or collective flourishing are less rational, less explanatory, less *warranted* than others. Thus, progressive idealism, as defined, is consistent with the possibility that some ethical conceptions might be equally warranted, given our epistemic standpoint, in their claims to enable our flourishing. Progressive idealism is *inconsistent*, however, with the view that all conceivable pictures of the good life are equally warranted (or unwarranted), given our epistemic standpoint.

Secondly, to consider whether or not we have 'sufficient reason' to hold that persons 'have the potential to rationally grade conceptions of ethical flourishing', we require some methodological clarification regarding the criterion we shall use to identify when we've succeeded or failed to motivate this commitment. In the absence of a test, it might be claimed that our assent to the claim of sufficiency is epistemically arbitrary. Request for such a standard seems reasonable. Nevertheless, it seems, also that the justification for any candidate test will terminate, ultimately, in our intuitive recognition of that standard's legitimacy or lack thereof from our first person phenomenological point of view. Regardless of whether the standard in question is foundationalist, coherentist, or epistemically skeptical, our first person, Nagelian, experience of 'what it is like' to recognize an epistemic commitment will either ground or fail to ground the relevant commitment. The arguments provided in this study endeavor to appeal to this sense of intuitive recognition from within first person phenomenological experience to the extent that I see no alternative. It is incumbent, therefore, on the critic of this commitment to provide an alternative model of discourse without this presupposition. With these definitional and methodological commitments in mind, we can now develop the implications of progressive idealism and pragmatism for teachers, learners and citizens of the late-modern world.

First, and fundamentally for the present study, progressive idealism and pragmatism entail distinct accounts of personal identity, progress and agency. If we follow pragmatism in denying critical ethical thought, and by implication any constitutive criteria by which to grade between candidate descriptions of our personhood, then the ontological status of the descriptions we live under is sharply reduced. If there is no reason sufficient to recognize any view of our condition, as individuals or as persons, as any more warranted than any other, as pragmatists hold, then all views of identity become, at least from our epistemic standpoint, ontologically indistinct. Amidst such rationally indistinguishable plurality, the *reality* of persons is, thus, relegated to the domain of 'non-theoretical' entities, alienated from the reach of our critically assessable language. The privation of ontological contrast, for the pragmatist, must, failing further explanation, include all conventional and non-conventional narratives of the human condition. Thus,

the rejection of critical ethical thought leaves us in a state of radical *aporia* where we seek to non-arbitrarily choose between identity categories and practices as expressing the reality of our condition and thus, to determine what practical flourishing is *for us*. In such a state, practically and theoretically, at least in principle, anything goes—no matter how outlandish the candidate description or practice—provided the commitment survives. For the pragmatist, we simply go on, non-rationally, doing what we do, in evolutionary fashion, with one view or another. Immediately, the self-referential difficulty becomes evident: ‘Is the pragmatic view, with its strikingly revisionist implications, *itself*, incoherently, a critical view of our identity?’

To attempt to escape the self-referential paradox, pragmatic thinkers invoke a plurality of ‘thinned out’ conceptions of the human condition as a discursive space somehow contingently unavailable to critical discourse. Nietzsche, thus, appeals to us to recognize our ‘nothingness’, while embracing the self-referential paradox as a virtue.<sup>2</sup> Heidegger offers a view of our condition as ‘dasein’ as ‘the clearing’ or negative space against which the world emerges, juxtaposing the Nietzschean picture of our absence against the backdrop of an historical world.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Wittgenstein challenges essential definitions, including those of personhood, in favour of a view of language as tool and of definitions as non-essential ‘family-resemblances.’<sup>4</sup> Finally, Dewey, implores us to identify with a view of persons as autonomous democratic citizens while denying the metaphysical grounds for such a commitment, prominently, in his debates with Robert M. Hutchins.<sup>5</sup> The articulations are distinct, but each of these thinkers and a multitude of others working in their wake stand united in their skepticism regarding human rationality’s ability to penetrate the world as we experience it to infer the presence of a formal structure phenomenological, linguistic or existential life.

Pragmatists, of course, cannot coherently rule out the possibility that we might arrive at the truth, failing an omniscient stance—this is why the inaccessibility of the human condition to critical discourse must be *contingent* rather than *necessary*. The possibility of ontological progress must remain open, therefore, if there is sufficient reason for its recognition. What is called into question is, instead, how without standing outside the mediating force of experience, historical language, or a form of life, one can claim to ever identify a method by which to discern when we’ve understood the world or our condition progressively. Epistemic skepticism rather than a blanket denial of reality thus leads such thinkers to attempt to abstain from ontological commitment regarding personal identity and the nature of the world. Where Aristotelian and Kantian metaphysicians might attempt to provide a lucid account of human nature, pragmatists redescribe the linguistic categories of personal identity we have as mere tools we *use* to cope with practical experience, following Wittgenstein, or, perhaps more consistently, given problems raised regarding instrumentality above, as mere expressions *of* language in the linguistically deifying tradition of Heidegger. In both cases identity categories and

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<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (New York: Random House, 1966).

<sup>3</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York, New York: State University of New York Press, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> James Scott Johnston, "The Dewey-Hutchins Debate: A Dispute Over Moral Teleology," *Educational Theory* 61, no. 1 (2011): 1-16.

their related notions of flourishing emerge as a linguistic constructs rather than as the disclosure of a metaphysical essence.

On such views, because there can be no non-relativistic notion of identity, our ordinary language notions of intellectual and ethical progress are rendered unintelligible. Progress, like practicality, is always *for* someone—that is, an identity interpreting a discernibly structured world—and so, with the question of identity itself rendered unanswerable in any non-arbitrary sense, the cogency of progress is lost, instead redescribed, as a question of brute survival. Though a pragmatist might be tempted to appeal here, following Rorty, to social norms to attempt to anchor a culturally relative notion of progress, these norms, as we've noted above, must be equally undermined in their ethical-epistemic status, once we reject critical ethical thought and can therefore be of no aid. In addition, we might notice, as Amy Guttmann and K. Anthony Appiah rightly note, that social rules, themselves, are neither univocal nor as H.L.A. Hart famously showed, self-interpreting in novel cases, due to the 'open texture' of language.<sup>6,7,8</sup> Where critical ethical thought is undermined, we are left, as a result, with without means to decide amidst such radical plurality—we either survive or die.

Progressive idealism's affirmation of critical ethical rationality, by contrast, entails a fallibilist and therefore potentially progressive view of personal identity and practice. For progressive idealists, discernible *error* in the ontological ascription of truth-values remains a part of our explanatory practices within ordinary language, ethical languages inclusive. Progressive idealists, thus, hold that due to the possibility of recognizing error, we take some theories of the human condition and the world to be defensibly true, though our views are always up for revision, given our finitude. Self-realization for progressive idealists such as Taylor and Sandel is thus a richly reciprocal theoretical and practical project.<sup>9,10,11</sup> Practice presupposes a view of our personhood and the world framed within language, from which we render practical judgments. Theory, likewise, is developed in a process of expressing the relationships implicit *within* our practices and the world, toward making these relationships explicit.<sup>12</sup> Both concepts oscillate around an autonomous ethical centre essentially engaged in a process of dialectical, relational, self-realization.

Both ethical theory and practice, for progressive idealists, are essentially open to the possibility of progressive improvement, though whether or not progress ever, in fact, occurs remains an historically contingent question. Theoretically, self-realization is *progressive* for idealists such as Taylor and Sandel if one develops a more explanatory view of one's identity and the world in which one lives by way of rational reflection immanent to historical experience. A more explanatory view might be defined further, following R.G.

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<sup>6</sup> Amy Guttmann, "Communitarian Critics of Liberalism," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 14, no. 3 (Summer 1985): 316.

<sup>7</sup> K. Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005): 248.

<sup>8</sup> H.L.A Hart, *The Concept of Law* (New York: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> Charles Taylor, "Explanation and Practical Reason," in *Philosophical Arguments*, 34-60 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997): 36.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Taylor, "Self-Interpreting Animals," in *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers Volume 1*, 45-76 (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice: Second Edition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998). 179-180.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Taylor, "To Follow a Rule," in *Philosophical Arguments*, 165-180 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

Collingwood, as one that, relative to an historical field of inquiry, “solves the problems which defeated it in the last, without losing its hold on the solutions already achieved.”<sup>13</sup> The spirit of Collingwood’s remark can be extended equally to questions of practical progress. Practically, self-realization is progressive, on a progressive idealist view, when an individual or community becomes empowered through insight to solve new problems that previously impaired the flourishing of persons in the world, without losing the ability to overcome the problems solved in the past.

In both cases, for progressive idealists such as Taylor and Sandel, the element of critical progress is understood within historical experience, rather than through the attempt to stand outside of linguistic or phenomenological life, as pragmatists demand, to adjudicate the fit of history to an ahistorical reality. For thoroughgoing historicists, such a commitment to *immanent* notions of progress seems intuitive. If we reject philosophical ahistoricism, demanding that we meet an ahistorical standard to recognize the legitimacy of our well-established historically immanent practices of adjudicating truth and progress seems incoherent. Thus, Taylor reads at least some post-modern thought, in this light, as *extending* the ahistorical empiricist paradigm of representationalist epistemology, substituting historical mediation in the role classically played by primary qualities and sense data.<sup>14</sup> Against ahistoricism, progressive idealists such as Hilary Putnam, at least in one iteration, hold that the fact that we can recognize at minimum genuine ethical *difference* as an *insight* rather than the construct of a merely *monolithic* culturally imperialist view seems to presuppose something like this notion of immanent progress across horizons.<sup>15</sup>

From pragmatism’s and progressive idealism’s disparate conceptions of identity, necessarily contrasting views of agency follow. Pragmatists’ denial of an epistemically adequate ground upon which to commit to a constitutive view of persons implies that the attribution of agency, as a *feature* of persons, is necessarily rendered non-rational. Where our attributions of moral agency or its negation are grounded in private, non-rational interests, the public character of constitutive moral norms is destroyed. In such a case we are committed to a radically compatibilist view of agency and ethical anti-realism—the view that so-called ‘ethical’ theory and practices are, from our standpoint, at least, non-constitutive of persons.<sup>16</sup> Where the considerations that lead us to hold others morally responsible or to absolve others of blame are non-constitutive of our condition, our demands are no longer distinguishable from the non-ethical demands affirmed by moral skeptics. If I can seek to hold you a responsible agent and you can claim with equal warrant that you are a wholly determined wholly non-reasons-responsive bio-machine and where there is, in addition, no rationally adjudicating between these claims, ethics collapse into rules of effective force. All that remains are the brute facts of what we can do and the politics of unfettered will.

Progressive idealism, by contrast, in owning critical ethical thought and the ideal of autonomy, retains the rationality required for a reasons-responsive view of autonomous

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<sup>13</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994): 332.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995): viii.

<sup>15</sup> Hilary Putnam, “Why Reason Can’t be Naturalized,” *Synthese* 52, no. 1 (1982): 3-23.

<sup>16</sup> This is not to deny that pragmatic thinkers can *claim* to be ‘moral realists’ but to deny that they can consistently hold any of their moral commitments to be constitutive of persons—a fact that renders such claims indistinct from moral anti-realism.

ethical agency oriented by the ideal of self-realization.<sup>17</sup> Our natural interest in our flourishing, for progressive idealists, thus grounds our commitment to figuring out, collaboratively, what such flourishing amounts to and what conditions are requisite to this process of collaborative self-realization. Our interest in collaboration, in turn, can be made sense of as a feature of our historical finitude. Because we are finite and therefore fallible, where we can aspire to understand each other's views of the human condition and the world through dialectical exchange, we gain the possibility of coming to understand our collective ethical flourishing more fully, more clearly and with less distortion. For self-realizing beings, on progressive idealism's view, this process of mutually edifying critical dialectical reflection emerges as a source of intrinsic ethical value—one that matters inescapably, though the fact may be denied, for persons living a life engaged with the question of historical flourishing.

As should be intuitive, at this point, the competing ethical views of persons and agency projected by progressive idealism and pragmatism entail distinct conceptions of educational practice and global citizenship. For pragmatists who deny the possibility of rationally grading ethical projects, 'critical ethical thought' and 'cosmopolitan education' are most coherently seen as terms reducible to parochial forms of ethnocentrism and imperialism, that is, as signs of initiation into a form of life rather than part of a progressive process aiming at the dialectical recognition and realization of the ideal of ethical autonomy. Importantly, we should recognize that ethnocentrism and imperialism lose their status as ethical criticisms on this view, precisely because there is no ideal notion of personhood in light of which the pragmatic cosmopolitan citizen might stand in a non-ethnocentric, non-imperialist contrast. Criticism relative to a form of life or historical vocabulary might be possible, pragmatists can claim, but since there is no ground available for recognizing any given form of life or local historical vocabulary as constitutive when contrasted with other divergent forms and vocabularies, ethical criticism ends where pragmatism stands. All to say, on pragmatism's view, *none* of the rules, not just those that are, in fact, ethically misguided, *really* matter as guides *for you*, if you can persist without these fetters on your will.

Faced with others who disagree on a mutually exclusive question of ethical theory or practice, the global citizens produced by a pragmatic form of education are forced into this imperialist, non-rational, view of political persuasion. On this view, not only is it the case, as K. Anthony Appiah rightly notes, that there is nothing that precludes imperialism; worse, for those who hold anti-imperialist intuitions, there is nothing on a pragmatic view more exalted than survival and preponderance, expansion and domination. The norms and practices that survive, simply are the norms and practices that survive; no more or less justification is needed.<sup>18</sup> While some pragmatists such as Susan Mendus and John Gray unsurprisingly reject talk of ethical cosmopolitanism and universality, embracing the Nietzschean turn as a kind of *insight* into the importance of diversity and the fact of plurality, it is equally unsurprising that others, such as Appiah, Will Kymlicka, Martha Nussbaum and Richard Rorty aspire toward 'going global' with liberal traditions and

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<sup>17</sup> For example, whether our agency is best seen as non-compatibilist or compatibilist is a matter on which progressive idealists might disagree and must be bracketed for further inquiry.

<sup>18</sup> K. Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York, New York: Norton, 2006): 25.

institutions—despite the absence of metaphysical justification and thus, ethical warrant, for claiming that such efforts are, in fact, non-imperialist.<sup>19, 20, 21</sup>

Progressive idealism's affirmation of critical ethical thought, by contrast, projects a view of cosmopolitan education as a process of inter and intra-cultural philosophical learning wherein our dialectical fallibility runs through our belief set as a whole. We are, on this view, all philosophical teachers and learners so long as we are persons and are therefore committed to the belief that through reflective cross-cultural encounters, both down the street and across the world, we can come to understand the human condition, the world in which we exist, and our flourishing more completely. As Hans Georg Gadamer and Donald Davidson have shown in different traditions, that we can recognize activity as linguistic at all presupposes the presence, in advance, of a "deep common accord" in shared meanings. To even notice disagreement, we must, on this view already agree that a great many beliefs count as true.<sup>22, 23, 24</sup> The hermeneutic priority in agreement entails, ethically, that where we disagree we must already *recognize* one another as language users, that if we are having a *conversation* where facture has occurred, then, in a manner of degrees, self-realization has also, already, been successful. For progressive idealists, the possibility of ethical progress, implicit in disagreement, provides us with reasons, both as teachers and as students, to regard the commitments and views of others as potentially constitutive interpretations of our shared condition, as valuable means to our self-realization to be examined with care, respect and as wide a range of tolerance as possible. Of course, this does not rule out the possibility of protracted disagreement, or the absence of easy solutions to hard questions. Rather, it is to affirm a characteristically philosophical spirit amidst such hard questions and disagreements, one that takes seriously our thoroughgoing ethical fallibility. On this view, through cosmopolitan educational practice, students and teachers aim together, from a variety of comprehensive perspectives, toward epistemically fixing beliefs relevant to our flourishing—including beliefs regarding philosophical method—that we can honour with the designation of 'true'. The ideal picture of citizenship for progressive idealism is, thus, at once political and philosophical—oriented by the possibility of cross-cultural dialectical learning, broadly construed, in light of the relational ideal of collective self-realizing autonomy.

As noted by John White and Eamonn Callan, the picture of cosmopolitan education projected by progressive idealism, in committing to the good of our shared interest in philosophical learning, runs in tension with the liberal priority of the right to the good. For progressive idealists, liberalism's view, is itself is treated as one view among many of the good life, to be adopted or rejected upon rational reflection. By contrast, against progressive idealism's emphasis on the intrinsic value of intellectual activity in

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<sup>19</sup> Martha Nussbaum, "Kant and Cosmopolitanism," in *Perpetual Peace: Essays on Kant's Cosmopolitan Ideal*, ed. James Bohman and Matthias Lutz-Bachmann (Cambridge: MIT Press).

<sup>20</sup> Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Odysseys: Navigating the New International Politics of Diversity* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Richard Rorty, "Postmodernist Bourgeois Liberalism," in *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers Volume One*, 197-202 (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>21</sup> John Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1995); Susan Mendus, *Toleration and the Limits of Liberalism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989): 108.

<sup>22</sup> Hans Georg Gadamer, "Language and Understanding," *Theory, Culture and Society*, 2006: 13-27.

<sup>23</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976): 7-8.

<sup>24</sup> Donald Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 47 (1974): 196-197.



guiding practical and political life, Callan and White ask: “But why should such activities be privileged, given the great variety of other pursuits around which an autonomous life can be built?” (97). Progressive idealists, it seems, can reply to this challenge on two fronts. First, they might point out that autonomy—if it is valuable in the way Callan and White suggest—depends on our ability to understand both why such value obtains for *us* and why it does so against competing accounts of value advanced by non-liberal societies, that is, *on* the work of prior intellectual activity that establishes such a commitment meta-ethically. Moreover, and rather confusingly, as Callan and White acknowledge, autonomy, by definition *presupposes* self-knowledge. How, though, if not by intellectual activity, broadly construed, are we to attain self-*knowledge* as itself a *form* of progressive understanding without a prior affirmation of the intellectual activity presupposed in this end? Callan and White, it seems, to remain coherent, must either abandon any non-trivial normative commitment to their favored notions of autonomy and self-knowledge—taking up meta-ethical skepticism more rigorously, or grow into the apparently ‘illiberal’ tradition of progressive idealism, with its emphasis on the intrinsic value of intellectual life that they reject.

While observing the limitations of Callan and White’s rejection of progressive idealism, we should note that Taylor and Sandel, in fact, affirm human rights as legal norms, but argue that the basis for our interest in rights is anchored in the overarching good of facilitating collective ethical and intellectual progress. By recognizing these commitments as rational, they moreover open them up to the possibility of fallibilist, non-imperialist inspection, where challenged, as liberalism is, throughout the world. The ideal of reason, and its identity, here, extends beyond borders. The pragmatic view of persons as non-theoretical entities, by contrast, projects a metaphysically skeptical social contract view of liberal politics, reticent of commitment to a shared notion of the good, and, notably, infallibilist. On a Hobbesian social contract view of politics, the individual is positioned ontologically and ethically prior to the community, entering only into communal life for the sake of realizing an empirically generalizable interest in peaceful survival.<sup>25</sup> Classically, for example, in Hobbes, the social contract view of politics was motivated by a commitment to empiricist epistemology and metaphysical materialism. Pragmatic thinkers who reject the rationality of the Hobbesian picture extend the theoretical priority of the atomistic individual and her non-rational projects to questions of epistemology and metaphysics. Thus, for Hobbes, we enter only into the *social* contract to survive peacefully as atomistic individuals. By contrast, for pragmatists, skeptical of epistemology, we enter into political, epistemological, and ontological commitments, only for the sake of the peaceful survival of the non-theoretical liberal subject—in effect, asserting the liberal contractarian view of persons as the *unassailable* starting and end point for all practical and theoretical debates. To the extent that the pragmatic view of cosmopolitan education is political liberalism’s own, the wide popularity of pragmatists—of, for example, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Nietzsche and Dewey—within liberal societies should be no surprise, as they express exactly the hegemonic, pre-reflective political view of identity projected within our institutionalized pedagogy. Pragmatism simply extends the priority of our political conception of persons to *all* theoretical questions, placing *our* view beyond the possibility of rational critique via any of these philosophical modes of consideration.

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<sup>25</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, ed. Sterling P. Lamprecht (New York, NY: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1949).

A defender of a pragmatic view, here, might object: Though no ethical account may be discernibly better or worse than any other, surely, our self and world descriptions might nevertheless *evolve* to reflect a diversity of changing, contingently relevant ways of flourishing over time, some liberal, others non-liberal. We might evolve to hold one view or another of persons as constitutive, it might be said, followed, perhaps, with talk of Kuhnian paradigm shifts. The desire for a neutral standpoint on questions of ethical flourishing is understandable—indeed we all desire at one time or another to escape the trials of ethical life, the comedy and tragedy of engaged existence. To say that the evolution of thought, however, *shows* that the liberal view of personhood is up for revision is deeply misguided. It is deeply misguided because the evolutionary view of conceptual change *is* exactly the view of theory revision *logically entailed* by the rejection of critical ethical rationality and thus, liberalism’s non-theoretical self. Evolutionary conceptual change cannot, therefore, save us from the reifying force of hegemonic liberal politics in pedagogical practice because evolutionary, anti-progressive models of conceptual change *are* the pedagogy of liberal imperialist politics. Perhaps, worse for those who find fallibility an attractive feature, evolutionary theories cannot, by their nature, have an evolutionary *end*; to get over evolutionary views of conceptual change, we require an historicist notion of intellectual *progress*—precisely what conceptual evolutionists emphatically deny. Progress requires critical ethical thought, and so, where we commit to the pragmatic imperialist picture, we can now recognize that we commit to it as *necessary* and *essential*—rather than as contingent due to denying exactly what is required to make sense of the view’s revision. Is this revealed *essentialist* reification of a post-ethical political liberalism, one that says nothing in favour of the value of democratic autonomy, the end game of philosophy and, likewise, the transcendental border of critical ethical thought?

The possibility of a progressive idealist non-imperialist politics provides us with reasons to resist this liberal imperialist account within our pedagogical practices, particularly, where we strive toward building community and sustaining human life on a shared planet. The reasons to resist imperialist liberalism are both practical and theoretical. Practically, as should be evident, the ‘might is right’ view of cross-cultural discourse, implied by pragmatism, counts against any view of education that endeavors to prepare future citizens for life in an increasingly interconnected world, at least where a viable alternative exists. Indeed, that few people, even while holding a pragmatic view, want to be recognized as opposed to fallibilist cross-cultural learning and dialogue and as in favour of an imperialist politics of brute force seems evidence of an intuition against the truth of pragmatism. Where a number of liberal pragmatists urge us, in the style of Appiah to treat each other ‘as if’ we are engaged in “a shared search for truth and justice” or with Rorty, to embrace cultural exchange through the arts while, ironically, denying that we might learn that our worldview is misguided where such exchanges are genuinely cross-cultural, we should, therefore, count such utterances as evidence that exploring non-pragmatic frameworks is in order.<sup>26,27</sup>

Of course, much dialogue, in actual practice, (thankfully) occurs, not as a contest of brute force, but as though we could, in fact, be mistaken about our fundamental ethical, epistemological, and ontological commitments. We, in fact, at least sometimes offer reasons for why we believe what we believe and consider how well our world-views

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<sup>26</sup> Appiah, K. Anthony. *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005): 250.

<sup>27</sup> Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

cohere in light of dialogue with others. This, however, is to expose, once again, the explanatory limit of the pragmatic view. To understand the force of this limitation, an example is apposite. Consider the possibility of a woman who says that having considered the arguments of classical Islamic natural law thinkers and Rawlsian liberals, that she has concluded that only the former and not the latter are correct—that an Islamic comprehensive moral view granting priority to the good over the right is a *better* representation of epistemology, the human condition, social reality and of what it means to *truly* flourish.<sup>28</sup> Faced with this woman, pragmatism's view is trapped in irresolvable paradox. The pragmatist cannot respond by considering this woman on her own terms, by examining her philosophical commitments and whether her interpretation of the relevant considerations is *in fact progressive*, as we might in practice, because the pragmatic view rejects the possibility that she has done exactly what *she* describes herself as doing. If he concedes her terms of self-description, then pragmatism is shown false and progressive idealism true by this woman's counter-example. In this case, progressive ethical thought is recognized as actual and therefore possible. Alternatively, if pragmatism *requires* that her view be redescribed into naturalized relativist terms, different than those she herself uses, our pragmatist, in practice, holds his anti-realist view *to be* ethically progressive—as sufficiently *significant*, to warrant the practical interjection. Where this woman's description is challenged, pragmatism is trapped, once again, in contradiction: the pragmatist practically expresses his reductive view as progressive, while denying just that possibility within our practices. In this case, the pragmatist becomes the counter-example to *his own position*, demonstrating that critical ethical thought, in practice, is *treated* as actual and as therefore possible. Once again, pragmatism is revealed false and progressive idealism a more coherent description of our practices. While denying critical ethical thought, I see no way out of this dilemma.

Finally, deep problems revolve around the central pragmatic commitment to epistemic doubt. If, like pragmatists, we have epistemic doubts, then it seems that some critically important features about our condition also follow. Particularly, where we have doubt, it seems that we are, in addition, neither omniscient nor intellectually void. Doubt *presupposes* non-omniscience because all-knowing beings cannot have missed anything relevant to any question. That we doubt some meanings, nevertheless, presupposes that we have at least some semantic content, some meanings we understand, to be doubtful *of*. Where we have doubts, we are therefore best described not as omniscient, nor intellectually void, but as finite beings, understanding at least some but not all meanings. If we can recognize our finitude as an implication of our doubt, then, pragmatism, once again, is in peril. In this case, we accept a shared fallibilist notion of intellectual and ethical progress, holding that descriptions of persons as totally non-cognitive or as omniscient are *less explanatory* views of our condition due to their failure to capture these features. Of course we could be wrong in our assignment of truth-values, but this is progressive idealism's central claim—that progressive understanding and, therefore, error regarding our ethical life *is* possible. Without progress, talk of error, which supposes a more lucid view, ceases to make sense.

Combined with the Gadamerian and Davidsonian insights that in disagreement we already recognize each other as language users, recognizing our finitude progressively,

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<sup>28</sup> I am indebted to Carly Scramstad for this thought experiment—which is rooted in the example of two friends she met studying at an international high school in Canada.

though the insight is small, is sufficient to recognize that the non-theoretical vision of the self, at the heart of pragmatic liberalism's hegemonic political myth, is mistaken. If we can recognize one another as finite beings expressing language, then we are not, at least entirely, non-theoretical entities. If the non-theoretical picture of the self is mistaken, then, once again, progressive, dialectical, self-realization toward the ideal of relational autonomy is established as a more explanatory view of our condition and with it a rationally guided view of agency, ethical responsibility and cosmopolitan education. Progressive idealism and not pragmatism is revealed as *our* view, though we widely err, in late-modern pedagogical life, in recognizing this fact. Our progressive recognition of this possibility entails, furthermore, that, practically, there is a viable alternative to pragmatism's 'might is right' view of pedagogy and politics, that there is the possibility of living, together, in a shared search for the conditions of our flourishing. If we own this possibility we advance the dialectical process of philosophical education and the material conditions required for its realization as our egalitarian ideal, as our political and pedagogical ethos. In so doing, we invert the dogmatic priority of mass politics to education—asserting perhaps for the first time in history, the spirit of philosophical learning in the lead. That we embrace this possibility is the recommendation of this study.

While many important questions remain, in light of the options before us, I have claimed that a progressive idealist view of education for global citizenship, anchored in a fallibilist notion of critical ethical rationality appears as a fundamentally more explanatory view of our practices than pragmatic accounts denying critical ethical thought. Pragmatists and progressive idealists each offer a critical narrative of ethical rationality and cosmopolitan education. Progressive idealism alone, however, makes sense of pragmatism's own appeals to significant dialectical recognition, which presuppose the possibility of progressive ethical rationality. In addition, progressive idealism, and not pragmatism, makes sense of our commitments to epistemic skepticism and doubt as features of a progressively recognizable shared finitude. If defensible, this study has shown that the hegemonic liberal imperialist narrative of cosmopolitan education requires revision to reflect the possibility and intrinsic value of critical ethical thought. Progressive idealism's call to a non-imperialist philosophy of education motivated by the ideal of autonomous dialectical recognition stands as a more cogent alternative from which to orient our politics and our pedagogy—taking seriously both our diversity and our unity amidst difference within a shared and interconnected world.

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