

Opponent's Report on M.A. Thesis by

Peter Luba

“Ralph Waldo Emerson, Friedrich Nietzsche, John Dewey, and the Creative Reader”

Mr. Peter Luba's thesis work interrogates the highly charged notion and enormous problematic of the active and creative reading agent within the framework of the philosophy of pragmatism. This task is executed in the light of texts authored, above all, by R. W. Emerson, F. Nietzsche, and J. Dewey. The thesis contains 100 pp. across some preliminary matter, an Introduction, and individual chapters on respectively: I. Kant and J.G. Fichte, Emerson, Nietzsche, and Dewey. There is also a Conclusion. A rich six-page Bibliography both caps, and attests to the considerable curiosity and energy brought to bear, on the textual enterprise. As for the prose style, it reads well, and is a clean manuscript. There is one typo in which a passage from Emerson reads, “Insists on yourself” (40), and it should read as, “Insist on yourself.”

In the Introduction, the candidate notes that “pragmatism is a philosophy that stresses the development of individual and creative ways of thinking, it is also an immensely individualistic philosophy” (6); he then proceeds to describe the four leading attributes of philosophical pragmatism. Chapter one, “Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, and the European Beginnings of Subjective Idealism” (5) does an excellent job of framing the whole intellectual-historical dynamic of the thesis. Chapter three, “Ralph Waldo Emerson: Poet, Maker, Creator” enlists the American thinker to throw valuable light on the problematic of the individual agent as a creative reader. In Chapter 4, “Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosopher, Discoverer, and a Creative Reader”, we read that

Nietzsche, in agreement with Fichte, posited that we can never know anything for sure; according to this pragmatic approach, this is true for science and humanities alike. But in his *Gay Science*, Nietzsche develops this thought further; predating modern pragmatism, he deliberates on whether this mendaciousness of our perspective might not be an excellent opportunity to fuel our personal creativity. (46)

The idea of a life based on creativity, which is stage center in Nietzsche's philosophical project, gives the reader much to think about, and engage with, regarding one of the candidate's neo-Nietzschean target fields of attention, to wit, a preternatural concern for “the one who develop[s] his/her own values” (45). The candidate convincingly argues that Nietzsche “was, above all, a believing, hoping, infinite creator, with an appreciation for practical, instrumental thinking” (49). To continue this unit of text, “This side of Nietzsche, his affirmation of creating as learning” (49), thus towers up in Mr. Luba's critical account.

Compellingly, with regard to Nietzsche, “The first primary ingredient for effective reading, is, paradoxically, slowness, rumination, a cow-like serenity” (59). Another key point adduced in the thesis is that for Nietzsche friendship is ““a *shared* higher thirst for an ideal above them”” (63). This segues us into “the development of this creative and democratic reader that became the primary concern for the American philosopher of education, John Dewey” (63), which brings us to Chapter 5 entitled, “John Dewey and the Democratic Reader”. Crucially,

For Dewey, not only should everyone be an artist, but the hierarchy of art, the higher vs. lower forms of art, should be abolished and be replaced by universal appreciation for the esthetic experience. In other words, Dewey's theory is radically social. And it is this collective/creative approach that is very salient in Dewey's theories of education, community, and democratic reading (68).

First question: Does the candidate find anything problematic about this foregoing angle of vision of Dewey's? If so what would it be? And if nothing here seems problematic, why is that the case?

Not only this, let it not go unmentioned that in a luminous moment of critical thinking from Mr. Luba,

Nietzsche encouraged his readers to live dangerously, and art (however construed) is, in its essence, a dangerous thing. Life itself, according to pragmatism, is "an adventure", our thinking "tentative or hypothetical", and a strike of radical contingency can reevaluate/alter almost anything considered to be set in stone (69).

Furthermore, in an extraordinarily interesting take on morality "For Dewey, morality is always practical [...] it must be socially integrated and useful in some way. Starting with "Open-mindedness", Dewey then introduces some fundamental character traits that correspond to "moral traits"" (79). Crucially, at the end of the thesis we read not irrelevantly that,

In the age of increasing digital nomadism, the ability to discuss one's ideas with others is becoming undernourished. [90] The approach of pragmatism, stressing the collective creativity in conjunction with respect for the individual, might therefore be one of the most useful ways to help counteract these alienating and dangerous tendencies. Pragmatic pedagogy, therefore, prepares our students for a life in an inherently uncertain world, which is full of risk and creative opportunity alike. It equips them for a life full of danger and adventure. (89–90)

All in all, this is an incisive and illuminating piece of work. Second and last question: what does the candidate consider the weakest link in the program of philosophical pragmatism and its relation to the creative reader that he has outlined in this thesis?

In light of the foregoing mentions, I hereby recommend the pre thesis defense mark of a 1 (výborně) for the thesis work.



doc. Erik S. Roraback, D.Phil. (Oxon.)
31 August 2021