

CHAPTER THREE

PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS OF CRITICAL PRAGMATISM

Introduction

This chapter explores the roots of critical pragmatism in order to uncover the analytic elements that would frame an analysis of planning practice. This is a necessary exercise in understanding the fundamentals of the concept in philosophy before examining the interpretation of this concept in planning.

The roots of critical pragmatism lie in a sometimes tense relationship between two fields of philosophy – critical theory and pragmatism. Critical pragmatism is seldom referred to as an independent concept and more often as a concept suggested by authors who have taken an interest in the collaboration between critical theory and pragmatism. There is a growing field of interest in the relationship between, and the revisioning of, each of these two traditions. The integration of elements of critical theory into traditional approaches of pragmatism, as well as the use of pragmatic approaches to compensate for perceived shortfalls of critical approaches, have been argued in philosophy by a number of writers (Kadlec, 2005; MacGilvray, 2000; Shalin, 1992; Lekan, 2006; Reynolds, 2004). Together, these, and the more direct claims to critical pragmatism such as those made by Alaine Locke (Harris, 2000) and Jurgen Habermas (Shalin, 1992), inform my conceptual framework for a critical pragmatic approach.

Critical pragmatism has not been widely used as a philosophical term and can certainly not claim to be a movement or school. In the 1930s Alain Locke applied pragmatic theory in what was seen as a ‘critical’ or radical approach, as a means of conceptualising cultural pluralism – with reference to the debates around African American ‘race’ and ‘culture’. Locke’s philosophy dealt with issues of race and with forging an approach to representation and collective identity that was neither inauthentically colour blind nor Afro-kitsch (Harris, 2000). He was considered pragmatic in rejecting fundamentalist metaphysics and in focusing on personal experience (a link to pragmatism that will be

elaborated in this chapter) as the measure of an idea. He extended this pragmatism with a concept of broad democracy and also gave weight to the impact of power and domination in social life. Unlike many pragmatists of his era, Locke did not believe in a harmonious orchestrating of the differences between immigrant groups as a means to democracy. He viewed these differences within a political economy frame, and understood that it may be necessary for a dominated group to forge a cultural identity as a weapon of struggle against domination (Fraser, 1999). Through this, and through his general concern with empowerment of the oppressed, his work was considered critical. His desired end-state was a unity within diversity in a broad democracy characterised by tolerance, reciprocity and diversity (Harris, 2000). In the 1980s Jurgen Habermas drew a link between pragmatism and critical theory in an ambitious effort to move the critical theory school beyond an impasse which had to do with the apparent inability of rationality to effect emancipation. In drawing on Habermas' philosophical work – which culminated in a theory of communicative action – planning theorist John Forester applied first the notions of communicative rationality (Forester, 1989), and then, notions of a critical pragmatism (Forester, 1993) to the analysis of planning practice. Forester sometimes made direct reference to the term but more often he implicitly applied elements of the concept in his work. More recently, revisionists have also interpreted pragmatic leanings in Foucault's later works. These are addressed later in this chapter.

With the limited and partial exception of Forester's work, 'critical pragmatism' has not been articulated as a coherent approach in planning analysis. In spite of its limited application in planning literature, the term seems to offer potential as an analytical and even informative tool in research. Critical pragmatism suggests, at the very least, the interplay of an action-oriented, practice-based approach with an approach that is concerned with an analysis of structural issues and of power in planning. This resonates with the issues that arise out of a review of the Kathorus Special Presidential Project (KSPP).

Moreover, while Forester's work relies heavily on the philosophical writings of Habermas, the current dissertation is located in a wider body of critical theory. This

includes the writings of Habermas as well as the work of Michel Foucault. Foucault's studies of relations of power and domination in French institutions crystallised into a theory that he termed a genealogy of power. In his tight scrutiny of the roots of what is taken for granted as current knowledge and what informs the rules and regulations that govern society, Foucault exposed the 'lowly' origins of much of contemporary social practice (McCarthy, 1994). Foucault is credited in contemporary planning theory with directing theorists towards an examination of the "dark" side of planning – planning embedded in power relations (Flyvbjerg and Richardson, 2002). This work cannot be discounted in any account of power in planning, and is especially relevant to Kathorus, although it also has its limitations, especially in terms of projecting a normative agenda for planning.

This chapter proceeds in the following manner: It commences with a short introduction to pragmatism and critical theory. Secondly, it focuses on Dewey's pragmatism and, in particular, the extent to which this pragmatism can be considered critical. Thirdly, it explores critical theorists' concern with pragmatism. Fourthly, it discusses critical theory, its contributions and relationship to pragmatism. Here Habermas' project of the collaboration of critical theory and pragmatism are explored. Thereafter the contribution of Michel Foucault to the conceptualisation of knowledge and power is outlined. His (limited) pragmatic leanings are then noted. The final section extrapolates the broad elements that constitute critical pragmatism, drawing on both salient fields.

Introduction to Pragmatism and Critical Theory

In their crudest sense, critical theory and pragmatism foreground the notions of power and outcome, where critical theory represents an emphasis on power and pragmatism represents a focus on the experienced world. These two concepts bind a notion of progressive planning where the mechanisms of planning are engaged in pursuing outcomes that are emancipatory. These philosophical traditions have, not surprisingly, influenced contemporary planning thought. This section searches the two traditions of

critical theory and pragmatism for the interrelationship between these two concepts of power and outcome.

Pragmatism as a philosophy (or an anti-philosophy) was born in the post-Civil War period in America. In a context that was known for not taking philosophy seriously, pragmatism arose in response to a distrust of theorising. Pragmatism is in the first instance an approach to solving intellectual problems and is concerned with what constitutes knowledge and truth. Pragmatism emphasises the practical nature of reasoning and reality (Thayer, 1981). It is based on the notion that the purpose of philosophising is to resolve difficulties that arise in the course of our experience. The ‘cash-value’ of ideas is to be found in the use to which ideas can be put (Popkin and Stroll, 1996). Thus theory is an instrument used to solve problems encountered in experience, and a theory is neither true nor false until tested in experience. By extension, truth is changeable [for what may work today may not work at another time].

The Pragmatist, in William James’ view: turns his back resolutely and once and for all upon a lot of inveterate habits dear to professional philosophers. He turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad apriori reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems and pretended absolutes and origins. He turns towards concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, action and towards power... (Allmendinger 2002:14 after Muller, 1998)

In spite of James’ claim about power, however, pragmatism in practice has been limited in its engagement with issues of power. Furthermore, since pragmatism requires us to act on what works, it provides no automatic moral guidance for ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ other than whether or not taking a certain action would solve the problem at hand. While it is not devoid of normative content, its limited moral and ethical guidance is the key shortcoming of pragmatism.

Lekan points out that pragmatism as a philosophy of action does not simply mean that moral theories must be applicable in practice. Rather, it means that “theorizing is an intrinsic feature of our habits and practices. Theoretical distinctions arise from our deliberative practices” (Lekan, 2006:270). For pragmatism we are continually co-

negotiating between theoretical concepts, practical experience and a consequent revising of those concepts. This is implicitly normative.

Critical theory, on the other hand, is primarily a philosophy of inquiry. It emerged as a response to eighteenth century European Enlightenment and the waning of confidence in the capacity of a bourgeois society to realise the ideals of enlightenment. Critical theory questions and challenges the seeming obviousness of ‘the way things are’ (Foucault’s ‘normalisation’) it is constantly suspicious of the powers and of interests that are invested in maintaining a social order, and it seeks to critique established ‘reality’ in a quest for a better, egalitarian world. The foundations of critical theory lie in the work of Karl Marx but are grounded in a broader European intellectual movement that criticised the human condition in political society. It frames its concerns around a society dominated by wage labour and economic exploitation, a society in which human beings are alienated from the very order they have created (Kirkpatrick, Katsiaficas and Emery, 1978). Critical thinking posed a key challenge to the universalistic theories of the Enlightenment tradition, which necessarily exclude differences and repress alternative views. Critical thinking presented an alternative view rooted in the social realities of difference and of thinking being shaped by differentiated personal and social beliefs. In short, critical theory called for an analytical approach that is ‘suspicious’ and that is mindful of social inequality. While critical theory has narrowly come to define the Frankfurt school that begins with Horkheimer and Adorno and stretches to Habermas and Marcuse, it is more broadly associated with any philosophical approach that addresses the political aims of human emancipation in circumstances of domination and oppression, and the unmasking of relations of power.

Two philosophers in the broad tradition of critical theory have influenced contemporary planning theory. They are the German philosopher and foremost contemporary thinker in the late Frankfurt school, Jurgen Habermas and French philosopher Michel Foucault. While both philosophers have rooted their work in examinations of power relations, their philosophies are famously different. A brief examination of the outlines of their work and

differences is provided below, before the relationship between the foundations of pragmatism and these critical approaches is unpacked.

The original critical theorists linked up specifically with the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant. From Kant's heralding of the 'age of criticism' as distinct from the 'age of reason' came a critical idealism – a commitment to a rational, self-reflective approach to understanding the world and to uncovering its meaning. Emancipation was to come through criticism. This notion influenced the young pre-revolutionary Marx. While Marx and Hegel maintained a commitment of philosophy to struggle for emancipation, their philosophies were rooted in a historical materialism that was distanced from Kant's notions of philosophical reasoning as a transcendental judge over theoretical and practical worlds. Hegel, Marx and Weber influenced the Frankfurt school of critical theorists, including Horkheimer and Adorno in the 1930s and later Marcuse and Habermas from the 1960s, in taking 'reason' to task and in arguing against emancipation through reason. Democracy's capacity and tendency to control institutions of law, morality and philosophy posed the key impediment to reason fulfilling an emancipatory goal. The capitalist state's ability to use these mechanisms to obfuscate its control and oppression, as well as the power of the ruling class to protect its own interests made it unlikely to bow to universal reason and to yield power (Nielsen, 1991; Stanford, 2005).

Habermas' disillusionment with the traditional Frankfurt school's conception of the emancipatory project, led to his search for more practical forms of knowledge-making and to dispense with any vestiges of a transcendental philosophy. He identified with specific forms of social scientific knowledge to analyse general conditions of rationality manifested in various human conditions and powers. In this he saw practical knowledge or reason embedded in "cognition, speech and action" (Habermas, 1984:10). He called for reconstructive approaches that aim to make theoretically explicit the intuitive, pre-theoretical know-how that underlies human speech and understanding. He used the concept of abstract systems to make sense of the world. Abstract systems are the rationally organised systems that provide the economic and political frameworks within which we live and construct our personal life-worlds. Habermas argued for a

renegotiation of these abstract systems and the way they shape our contexts. He specifically called for an interrogation of communication. His theory of communicative action identifies the pathologies of communication – of what he termed distorted communication – and outlined conditions for successful communication, or communication that is freed from the distortions of power. His aim was free and open communication. The rules he established for unfettered dialogue (such as rules of argumentation) were intended to reform deliberative institutions (which would include spaces of negotiation in planning) into democratic spaces. His focus was normative, outlining notions of ‘what should be done’ (Flyvbjerg and Richardson, 2002).

More influenced by the work of Nietzsche than Hegel, Michel Foucault also levelled critique at rationalism. His work was focused on the issue of power and its relationship to rationality. In fact he is credited as the historian and social commentator who introduced power into the contemporary philosophical landscape (Parker, 1992). For Foucault there is no separation of knowledge from power. Transformation and revolution do not bring emancipation but new forms of power, and power produces both knowledge and practice. The production of knowledge is intimately tied to and embedded with power (Parker, 1992). Foucault’s studies of care-taking institutions such as prisons and mental-health facilities in France showed how these institutions could paradoxically subject individuals to new regimes of control (Hoch, 1996).

Foucault saw power as omnipresent. His distinction between modern power and earlier forms of power is instructive for the use of his theories in planning discourses. Foucault considered modern power to be “local, continuous, productive, capillary, and exhaustive” (Fraser, 1989:22). He believed this power has emerged gradually and is rooted in disciplinary institutions of the eighteenth century. A web of power relations was developed in these institutions, which were the first to face the organisational and management problems that are the problems of modern government. The techniques of surveillance, both in terms of a global visibility across institutions, and an intimate surveillance of individuals – to the extent that individuals would even internalise what Foucault called ‘the gaze’ – were a basis of domination. These processes cause power to

operate continuously (Fraser, 1989:23). Foucault's concern was to challenge power in all its forms. He would thus subject any form of government to critique and would ground critique in the actual context and not in any universal ethical morality that is expected to be acceptable to everyone. Rather than a normative position, Foucault adopted an analytical focus on "what is actually done" (Flyvbjerg and Richardson, 2002:44). Foucault has no interest in an ideal society. He maintains that our task is to cast aside the utopias and to search for how power actually functions in society (Rabinow, 1984).

In conclusion, the works of both Habermas and Foucault reject absolutism. They also share a belief in the primacy of the practical over the theoretical. Since they both embrace culture and society rather than consciousness as a foundation for philosophy, they both acknowledge that knowledge is embedded in society. Both reject an instrumental rationality. Their differences lie in their goals. For Foucault the critique of reason leads to a radical attack of rationalism at its roots. Habermas' intentions are not revolutionary. Foucault is rooted in a contextual analysis, whereas Habermas combines contextualism with a universalism that allows him to construct general accounts of the systems that govern the world as well as general rules for communication. While Habermas understands critique to be working to reduce the relations and effects of power, Foucault does not see his theory as being in the service of freedom and justice – rather he would argue that there is no escaping the effects of power altogether, as it exists throughout social life (McCarthy, 1994).

Pragmatism and the Critical Critique

Foundations of Pragmatism

The philosophical school of pragmatism is indigenous to America. It is a wide-ranging school with different interpretations wrought by the writings of Pierce, James, Dewey, Mead, Rorty, West and Bernstein. These philosophers have interpreted pragmatism in various ways including scientific realism (Pierce), radical empiricism (James), and social reconstructionism (Dewey). The diversity of pragmatism means that this movement lends itself to more than one reading (Harrison, 2002a). The focus of this dissertation's use of

pragmatism is the concept as developed by John Dewey who provides the most prolific writings in pragmatist philosophy and is the pragmatist most focused on public problems. As a derivative of pragmatism, the term critical pragmatism is most closely associated with Dewey and with his particular strand of pragmatism. His claim that “people learn the truth of things from the consequences of their actions” is pragmatic (Hoch, 1984:336). It is the consequences of ideas and reflection that leads to altered future practical experience. This is the cornerstone of pragmatism, a philosophy of action, and of learning through action, rather than of knowing or of being. While precise definitions of pragmatism are elusive, Harrison identifies key characteristics of the school: “a recognition of the fallibility of knowledge; an emphasis on the outcomes of knowledge rather than on the relationship of knowledge to the ‘truth’; an emphasis on experience rather than on abstracted theory; a rejection of the dichotomies of modern science and philosophy (such as theory / action); the centrality of community and social relationships; and a recognition of the importance of language in creating realities and in shaping social practice” (Harrison, 2002a:158).

While critical pragmatism shares the elements of transition, multiplicity and democracy upheld by pragmatism, it extends the concept to embrace a more questioning or sceptical approach that is concerned with structural relations of power. The term critical pragmatism is not well grounded in the literature. Kadlec (2005) notes that Dewey, in fact, never referred to the term. It was, however, used in the 1930s by Locke to underpin his cultural pluralism approach in the context of the Harlem Renaissance and has received more recent but limited attention in philosophical writings by authors such as White and Shalin (Kadlec, 2005).

Maxcy (2004) shows that pragmatism – whilst born in an American frontier society – was itself influenced by European traditions of post-Kantian thought, British Empiricism, Utilitarianism, Biological Evolutionary Theory, the New Realism, Descartes’ ideas and the philosophies of Kant and Hegel. Although it was applied in a context that was suspicious of theory, it was nevertheless deeply rooted in an intellectual tradition.

Dewey's "Critical" Pragmatism

This section draws extensively on the work of Alison Kadlec (2005) in outlining the relationship between critical theory and pragmatism focussing on the work of Dewey and, in particular, on his *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920). The focus on Dewey provides a perspective in which pragmatism leans towards critical theory. This discussion is followed, in the next section, by the converse approach – i.e. the leaning of critical theory towards pragmatism. Habermas' critical work and in particular his communicative rationality are shown to be linked with pragmatism. In the case of communicative rationality, pragmatism is considered to compensate for the shortcomings of communicative rationality and in combination these provide the basis for a revised critical social science (White, 1995; Shalin, 1992).

The philosophical status of the term critical pragmatism and even pragmatism is contested by Maxcy: "Pragmatism is not a 'system' or fully formed 'philosophy.' In fact, understanding pragmatics is limited if one adopts a 'framework' or 'school of thought' perspective" (2004:4).

It has been argued that, as a social philosophy based on multiplicity and contingency, pragmatism is at most an 'ethos' containing "some minimal direction and sensibility" (White in Kadlec, 2005). Pragmatism was dismissed as instrumental reason run amok and as technocratic determinism with no substantive-rational moorings (Shalin, 1992).

Several revisionist authors have distanced themselves from this aversion to pragmatism and have called for critical theory to be pragmatic and vice versa (White in Kadlec, 2005; Shalin, 1992). Others have upheld pragmatism as a philosophy capable of providing ethical direction (Lekan, 2006). Kadlec (2005) has argued that the plurality and sociality of pragmatism requires the fortification of a more *normative* research tradition to ground it as an adequate approach. For White, critical theory can offer pragmatism such normative capacities, while pragmatism, in turn, can reign in the dogmatic impulses of critical theory. Pragmatism has already been employed to provide flexibility to a critical approach in Habermas' communicative turn. The key elements for elevating pragmatism

to a useful framework and specifically to making it critical are, firstly, a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ and secondly, ‘a guiding focus on social structures of inequality’. The first criterion calls for an awareness about ways in which specific interests are built into world views, while the second requires the exposing of structures of inequality in communication (Kadlec, 2005).

However, Kadlec puts forward an argument that in fact Dewey’s ‘critical pragmatism’ [not a term that Dewey used but rather one that she applied in labelling his work adequately critical] or ‘reconstructive pragmatism’ fulfils the requirements of a critical theory. Kadlec calls for a dialogical relationship between pragmatism and critical theory. This dialogue differs from calls for a combination of the two traditions where these are seen as two distinct and even competing schools that need to be integrated. MacGilvray (2000) similarly finds that pragmatism has been poorly understood and wrongly judged and exposes five ‘myths’ of pragmatism. These recent readings of pragmatism recognise parallels and overlaps between critical theory and pragmatism. They also see Dewey’s pragmatism – far from being deficient – as a sufficiently critical endeavour (Kadlec, 2005). The basis of this enterprise as well as the hostilities of critical theorists towards pragmatism are discussed below.

Pragmatism and Context

Pragmatism has been critiqued for being parochial. Certainly, its concern with the local and the situated, in terms of *experience* as the yardstick for evaluating the validity of claims, opens it to this interpretation. Bertrand Russell associated pragmatism with the youthful optimism of a frontier society and called it naïve – knowing no non-human limits to human power and being self assured of its victory. He explained this naivety in terms of pragmatism being contextualised in a new and growing country with less complex problems than Europe.

However, MacGilvray (2000) shows that pragmatism does not bind itself to the moral or cultural norms of a particular context. Rather, it begins with the principle of human experience as motivated inquiry, organised and guided by an examination of the

consequences. MacGilvray concludes that pragmatism goes beyond contextualism to specify how evaluations should be made. This leads to the notion that the needs and interests that we bring to a particular enquiry arise out of that context. The solutions are not fixed. Since the context is the particular problem to be addressed, the outcome needs to be assessed according to the particular purposes of the specific actors involved. Lekan also shows that the causal factors that affect outcome cannot be separated from outcome. He adds that:

Pragmatism claims that ignoring the deliberative contexts from which theorizing is born will at best be irrelevant to intelligent governance of these practices. At worst, such ignorance will positively inhibit the intelligent adjudication of our practices. (2006:270)

The Pragmatist View of Reason and Experience

Dewey's ideas of pragmatism stemmed from a conviction that philosophy should not be a product of idle speculation. Rather, it must be centred in real interests and real crises faced by society. His *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920) focuses on exposing what he considers a split of reason from experience in philosophy. He maintained that pragmatism did not equate with classical positivism or Empiricism. The works of Bacon and Darwin, in particular, framed the context in which Dewey was working and influenced his anti-foundational thinking. Evolutionary theory of a dynamic rather than static universe enabled Dewey to redirect the course of philosophy away from idealism and toward practical thinking. Instead of absolutes he embraced contingency, process, random choice and chance. The importance of change rather than permanence, and the emphasis on consequences rather than absolute truths, enabled Dewey to approach philosophical problems according to what the world is and what kind of world it may become, rather than according to who made the world (Kadlec, 2005).

Pragmatism is focused on practical enquiry. For Dewey logic is the "method of intelligent guidance of experience" (Dewey in Kadlec, 2005:24). Experience is the activity, enquiry the thinking and logic the method by which experience is rendered critical, through reflective inquiry. Rather than being fixed, logic is social in nature. Absolutisms and the myopic views of scientism / positivism provided obstacles to free inquiry.

This abandonment of absolutes presents a dilemma. Esoteric discourses are replaced with “the pursuit of tangible social and political goals” (MacGilvray, 2000:481). However, Locke warned that in dethroning our absolutes, we must not eliminate our imperatives; indeed we live by these imperatives or principles (in Harris, 1989b). Giving up on absolutes poses the danger of losing the normative force required for anchoring our judgements. White claims that in order to be critical a philosophy must rigorously expose the interests at work in our interpretations [where these interests may be absolutes]. However Kadlec (2005) finds that Ricoeur, who first coined the phrase “a hermeneutics of suspicion”, also noted that this rigour cannot be grounded on any claim to absolute objectivity. Rather, what must be absolute is the commitment to suspicion. The so-called absolutes have themselves been constructed to serve class interests and must be unmasked through a commitment to a suspicion around hidden interests. So what is needed is continual enquiry into distortions, illusions, interests that masquerade as truths. While pragmatism may hope that present judgments will hold in future situations (and so we may learn from experience), it does not bind these in a demand for universality. Pragmatism is sensitive to contingencies, to chaos and to indeterminacy.

Dewey, Ethics and Growth

The ‘death’ of pragmatism, which coincided with Dewey’s death and saw a revival only in the late twentieth century, came about largely because of the perceived inability of pragmatism to distinguish between good and bad consequences (MacGilvray, 2000). In ethical terms it was vulnerable to acquiescing to prevailing social and cultural forces. This was clearly linked to pragmatism’s abandonment of ‘absolutes’. Following this strong criticism (levelled most fiercely by Lewis Mumford), it became popular to associate pragmatism with consumerism (MacGilvray, 2000). Rorty, the contemporary pragmatist, did little to dispel the notion that pragmatism’s philosophical premises do not provide evaluative standards. In fact he embraced open-endedness to moral judgment, saying that choosing between courses of action on the basis of greater rationality or morality is simply a mechanism for commending what our own sense is of what is worth preserving in the present context (Rorty in MacGilvray, 2000).

Dewey believed that a normative position cannot be taken until the action it proposes has been tested in practice (MacGilvray, 2000). The ethical dimension of this argument is that morality cannot be fixed to a theory of ultimate meaning but that “every moral situation is a unique situation” (Dewey in Shalin, 1992:263). We cannot reduce lived experience to a formulaic instrumentality to which we can simply apply a moral prescription. As a deliberative philosophy, pragmatism requires a continual evaluation and re-evaluation of moral content. We may begin with a general moral concept, test it in practice, and then revise it on the basis of experience. But it is never cast in stone, for new experience or reflection may be cause for re-assessment. This continual reflection and deliberation between theory and action provides an ethical element in pragmatism (Lekan, 2006).

Dewey maintains that we need a moral consciousness, as opposed to an inflexible moral code. Rather than a fixed end or final standard of judgment, we need to engage with ways of actually addressing the real conditions in people’s lives. Philosophy then has a political responsibility. For Dewey the only ends to strive for are growth. He does not define growth or provide parameters for his notion of growth as a moral end (Kadlec, 2005). This does not mirror Utilitarianism’s objective of achieving the greatest good for the greatest number (Maxcy, 2004). Rather Dewey would prefer the community to adjudicate on the soundness of solutions. Dewey’s elusiveness about growth is a limitation in his work. Clearly the notion of growth is contestable – what growth, any growth, at what cost? Dewey also does not define what ‘the community’ is or acknowledge the relationships of power within community. The homogenising of community in this sense fails to see difference within groupings and thus does not recognise the multiple values (of multiple individuals) at play within a given situation (see Campbell, 2006).

In conclusion Deweyan ethics resist theories based on ‘moral perfection’ (Good, 2006:301) provide two guideposts for judging practice. One is that good practice furthers individual growth. The other is that good practice leads to outcomes that are experienced as good by the beneficiaries of that practice. Practice cannot be judged separately from its impact.

Power and Deliberation in Pragmatism

Critical theory is centrally concerned with uncovering power relations and structures of domination. By contrast, pragmatism, as a ‘problem-driven’ approach, has been accused of being unsuspecting about structures of power. Kadlec disagrees that Dewey’s pragmatism is entirely power blind. Like Habermas, she focuses on Dewey’s emphasis on deliberation as the forum for the expression of interests and relations of power. Dewey emphasises that the quality of a democracy should be judged, not by the quality of its institutions, but by the quality of deliberation in a multitude of public places (Kadlec, 2005). Critical theorists, however, argue that the deliberative ethos of Dewey’s pragmatism is inadequate. It does not supply the requisite scepticism about how specific interests are furthered. Nor does it aid in identifying structures of inequality within communities. Contrary to this view, Kadlec points out that Habermas found pragmatism appealing precisely because he recognised that claims about interests, rights and identity are played out and understood in a communicative, deliberative forum. These claims exist within the frames of communication.

The commitment of Dewey’s pragmatism to openness, communication and constant enquiry renders it open and aligns it with a “hermeneutics of hope” (Ricoeur in Kadlec, 2005:34). Communication is the means of developing a critical intelligence – the capacity to engage in shared enquiry is the aim of the pragmatic project. While counter debate to this position holds that that communication is not the only avenue of intelligence in the pragmatist project, the exploration of other avenues of intelligence in pragmatism and whether these may offer insights for planning is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Rather, this dissertation sees planning as a primarily communicative enterprise, with a vehicle in practice writing.

Kadlec (2005) maintains that Dewey pointedly linked class interests and the maintenance of dualism in philosophy. He thereby brought a fundamentally critical perspective to his work.

Pragmatism and Politics

Central to critical theory is the questioning of social structures of inequality, that is, relations of power. In contrast, pragmatism has been labelled conservative and incremental. Whether it is capable of radical critique has been questioned (and calls for its affiliation with critical principles are associated with this concern). The traditional concern of pragmatism is that philosophy, or the act of thinking, is a response to some previous experience and does not exist without it. The intellectual effort driven by the doubt that arises from previous experience is therefore oriented toward problem-solving. This focus does not preclude or require incrementalism, but nor does it preclude radical action. Pragmatism per se is neither conservative nor progressive but can be used in either direction. Richard Rorty, for example, is widely recognised as being on the conservative wing, while the pragmatist Cornel West is regarded as being politically radical and Dewey also had a progressive reputation.

The blatantly political and social statements of Dewey's pragmatism concern *democracy*. Dewey's notion of philosophy as having a social purpose is linked to his belief that 'growth' and 'process' are the only real ends of any society. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to critically or minutely frame democracy. But it is instructive to fleetingly note Dewey's conception of the term. For him, democracy is not about a set of institutions. Rather, it is to be judged on the contribution that its institutions make "to the all-round growth of every member of society" (Dewey in Kadlec, 2005:29). Still, democracy is not grounded in a 'common good'. Rather, "democracy is itself a process of associating in ways that reveal the common or shared aspects of our experiences and values, despite the manifold and often contradictory nature of those values" (Kadlec, 2005:30). The strongest normative political claim made by pragmatism is for the realisation of the experimental capacities of individuals to the fullest extent possible. This view provides a strong directive for political and social action. It is opposed to barriers to participation by any individual in any field (MacGilvray, 2000). The approach is inherently egalitarian.

Contrary to the accusations of conservatism levelled at pragmatism, Dewey in fact articulated a decidedly radical appeal:

Human liberalism in order to save itself must cease to deal with symptoms and go to the causes of which inequalities and oppressions are but the symptoms. In order to endure under present conditions, liberalism must become radical in the sense that, instead of using social power to ameliorate the evil consequences of the existing system, it shall use social power to change the system. (In Shalin, 1992:249)

Moreover he is credited as one of the pragmatists who were ahead of their time, in anticipating the multiplicity of values and the importance of experience, while acknowledging that their own beliefs were historically shaped, fallible and open to continual evaluation and revision (Festenstein, 1997).

Further overlaps between Dewey's work and that of critical thinkers, notably Habermas and Foucault (as discussed below) have been interpreted in recent years. In addition, an associate of Dewey, Jane Addams, has been credited with extending pragmatism to a critical pragmatism. She insisted that democracy must extend beyond political equality to equality for blacks, youths, women, workers, the poor and immigrants. She did not believe in extending democracy in a way that homogenised all groups, but that recognised the contributions of individuals and groups to society (Mahowald, 1997). The critical element of Addams's pragmatism mediates the uncritical permissiveness possible in conceptions of democracy – the possibility that the majority of persons may agree to a fundamentally unjust system. This critical pragmatism upholds the principle of inclusion and insists on the participation of minorities (Mahowald, 1997).

Limitations of Pragmatism

The above section has explored the parameters of pragmatism in terms of both its intentions and the critiques levelled at it for being inadequately 'suspicious'. The discussion has shown that pragmatism is centred on a contextual situatedness. In terms of practice, pragmatism has been shown to elevate lived experience as the primary measure of truth. By extension experience is the only means to evaluate action or ideas. Pragmatism regards deliberation as the mechanism for the expression of interests and the

mechanism for social action. In terms of power dynamics, pragmatism suggests the full and unhindered participation of all individuals in social action, with emancipation being the state of all individuals having the potential to develop to their full capacity. Finally, in terms of rationality, pragmatism is focused on experience, but also embraces change and contingency.

The open-endedness of pragmatism, however, still exposes it to being unanchored in both political and moral terms. While it is not necessarily entirely anti-foundationalist or opposed to radical action, it does not prove that it is capable of generating, rather than simply allowing, moral and political commitments. The ideas in pragmatism about the contextual nature of experience and of judgement do not provide a clear foundation for making difficult value-laden choices. In addition pragmatism's broad commitment to democracy remains theoretical in a complex modern society – how the realisation of individuals' capacity for experimentation is to be achieved or evaluated has not been explored.

The limitations of pragmatism in terms of ethics and power inspired an interest in a collaboration between pragmatism and critical theory. A converse dialogue was also ignited within critical theory for a closer relationship with pragmatism. This relationship is explored below.

Critical Theory and its Relationship to Pragmatism

Hostility of Critical Theory toward Pragmatism

The distance between the traditions of critical theory and pragmatism lie in conceptions of rationality. In short, critical theorists deal with totalities – with rationality at large. Within this frame, they have particular reservations about bourgeois democracy and are committed to a collective consensus. Pragmatists, on the other hand, discard totality in favour of dealing with the particular, are likely to embrace the idea of multiple rationalities and are committed to democratic institutions where many voices and rationalities may be aired (Shalin, 1992).

The critical theorists of the Frankfurt School may be seen as a second generation of critical neo-Marxists with direct antecedents in the work of Antonio Gramsci and others. While this dissertation does not delve into the vast work of Gramsci, as the focus is on the philosophers who have most influenced contemporary planning theory, it is useful to note that it is from Gramsci that this school inherits its hostility toward the pragmatist tradition. Interestingly, it is precisely in his affiliation with the practical that Gramsci differs from pragmatists. Gramsci constructed a ‘philosophy of praxis’, which subjects specific problems posed by reality to a practical understanding of philosophy as political action. He contrasts this with pragmatists whom he finds too closely associated to a ‘vulgar utilitarianism’ (Kadlec, 2005). Although their concern with the political dimension of everyday experience and their identification of human agency as something developed through social interaction are correct, for Gramsci pragmatists fall short of a critical dimension in their analysis. He argues that pragmatists have failed to uncover the hegemonic structures at work and only judge immediate reality. As such they are reactionary and best suited to buttressing the status quo (Kadlec, 2005).

The strongest attack on pragmatism and the direct association of this tradition with positivism came, however, from Max Horkheimer who found pragmatism to be aligned with the narrow quantitative, scientific rationalism approach to reason that was embraced by positivism. This, Horkheimer considered to be a decline or even an ‘eclipse’ of reason. Scientific rationality abandoned claims of a higher objective truth in favour of empiricism. For him pragmatic reason was stripped of its capacity to challenge structures of domination and reduced any understanding to mere conduct. In adopting this approach pragmatism is considered by Horkheimer to become a crude apology of the status quo.

In terms of this critical perspective pragmatism cannot provide reasoning for a better world. Rather, using scientific rationality, it can only provide for more efficiency, expediency and prediction. It typifies the world of business and American commercialism. In short pragmatism was seen as a thin philosophy of anti-foundational bourgeois liberalism – one that jettisoned both reason and reflection (Kadlec, 2005).

Habermas' Communicative Rationality and the Dialogue between Critical Theory and Pragmatism

It was only in the 1960s that critical theory began to take pragmatism and its sociological counterpart, symbolic interactionism, seriously. Most notable in his embrace of pragmatism was critical theorist Jurgen Habermas who identified with “that radical democratic mentality which is... articulated in American pragmatism” (Habermas in Shalin, 1992:238). In his theory of communicative action, Habermas made a concerted effort to incorporate this democratic ethos of pragmatism into the essentially European project of critical theory. The background to this effort concerns the question of rationality in critical theory.

The relationship between emancipation and reason was re-opened in a post World War II Europe. Bourgeois democracy had failed to prevent fascism in World War II and the Frankfurt school argued that, worse, liberal rationalism ‘produces’ the total authority state. While critical theorists recognised that America did not wholly fit this mould, they were convinced that its media-based domination fulfilled the same script and that a market-bondage was inevitable. On the Left, critical theorists were disillusioned by the Marxist states and Left totalitarianism. Critical theory was left without an “intellectually grounded hope” (Horkheimer in Shalin, 1992). In this climate of uncertainty, Weber’s thesis of global rationality appealed to the critical theorists. Reason – seen as an agency to control power, to increase efficiency, to calculate the future – was termed ‘instrumental rationality’. The capacity to judge value, to pursue justice or to achieve a higher cause was termed ‘substantive rationality’. The two rationalities bore a counteractive relation to each other.

It was in this atmosphere that Habermas sought to move beyond the Frankfurt school and to re-open the question of emancipation through reason. Habermas accepted the premise that instrumental rationalisation produced consequences that were not egalitarian and problematic to the democratic project, but he did not find these to doom democracy or to justify the undue pessimism of the critical school. He maintained that collectivism was possible and that salvaging the project of modernity through reason could be achieved

(Fraser, 1989). This, he believed, required a prescription borrowed from pragmatism: “mobilising the public, revitalising public discourse, and getting personally involved in politics” (Shalin, 1992). His congeniality toward pragmatism represented a major break with the critical tradition of dismissing pragmatism as a positivistic approach that encapsulated instrumental rationality.

Habermas owed a great debt to pragmatism in his work on communicative rationality. Pragmatism illuminated for Habermas the notion of a community of thinkers and of rationality not as a unitary phenomenon but as a social phenomenon. Reason became interactive and a communicative action became the basis for emancipation. Reason becomes entrenched in communal existence and under social control it is continually self reflective. Instrumental reason gives way to substantive reason as reason turns to questions of value (Fraser, 1989; Shalin, 1992).

Habermas did not take these insights uncritically (Shalin, 1992). For Habermas, pragmatism was lacking in a system-theory sense: it ignored the normative underpinnings of society, and it did not explain adequately how communicative distortions and social oppressions were produced and reproduced. Habermas found pragmatists lacking in explaining how structures of power could be changed – yet this is the aim of democratisation. This led Habermas to complement pragmatism with several critical concepts. He formulated his theory of communicative action through a combination of pragmatism and ideas of differentiated value spheres from Weber, normative content from Durkheim, and systems theory from Parsons and Luhman. From others including Wittgenstein, he took the theory of speech acts and also applied Kohlberg and Piaget’s theory of moral growth in his work (Shalin, 1992).

Communicative rationality, an ideal state achieved under conditions of unfettered communication in ideal speech – becomes the reason that may bring emancipation. This rationality is a pragmatic logic of argumentation; it is rooted in praxis. Habermas saw the move toward a communicative rationality as a process of evolution as society moves away from foundationalism towards a foundation of “common will, communicatively

shaped and discursively clarified in the political public sphere” (Habermas in Shalin, 1992:252). These shifts can come about with increased human rights, the rise of voluntary associations, an independent judiciary and so forth.

Rationalisation within modernity serves to undermine communicative rationality. Bureaucratisation, juridification, mediatisation all distort and undermine communicative rationality and public discourse is reduced to a formalised business or to entertainment in the media. Critical debate comes to fulfil a function of “a tranquilising substitute for action” (Habermas in Shalin, 1992:252). Habermas sought not to break rationalisation but to bring together the different value spheres that become fragmented in this process, for example the ethical and technical; personal and public. The move towards this is through opening discourse according to procedurally rational communications. Even if this is not possible to achieve, the move towards opening legitimation claims to all members of society is a move towards achieving a substantively rational democracy.

Both Habermas and Foucault recognised the need to resist and struggle against the imposition of an instrumental rationality or subjugation. Habermas (and Dewey) offer a more hopeful view of the social conditions required to make resistance liberating and binding without imposing power relations. Foucault does not accept that communication can break the tendrils of power (Hoch, 1996). Where Dewey and Habermas differ is that Habermas sees the replacement of one overriding rationality (enlightenment) by another (inter-subjective rationalities) whereas Dewey does not subscribe to an overarching rationality as a liberating force. For pragmatists this resistance is rooted in individual creativity in an interdependent social context, and in the capacity for empathy and solidarity: the planner in this mode can create ‘free space’ to influence democratic planning.

Gaps in Habermas’ Application of Pragmatism

Shalin (1992) identifies several gaps in Habermas’ interpretation of pragmatism, gaps that limit the communicative rationality project. These gaps relate to fundamental principles and are thus important in considering what pragmatism may bring to a concept

of ‘critical pragmatism’. The first gap is between cognitive reason and emotion. Shalin argues that Habermas’s elevation of cognitive reasoning (thinking, understanding) to the exclusion of other non-cognitive processes (emotion, sentiment) ‘shrivels’ what pragmatists have called experience into verbal intellect. For pragmatists, feelings, shared sentiment, sympathy and the whole emotional world are important. Reason is centred in the lived experience. Secondly, while Habermas finds categorical distinctions between the objective, social, and subjective worlds, pragmatism expects an uncertain, pluralistic universe in which no one perspective – even a perspective generated by consensus – can be accepted as Truth. Thirdly, for Habermas validity claims are redeemed through argument as actors are forced to reason a yes or no position. For pragmatists it is both in argument and in practice that validity is proved, and not in one without the other (Shalin, 1992). Finally, Habermas considers normal and rational communication to be largely conflict free. By contrast, pragmatist writings do not draw a relationship between procedural rationality and consensus, and consensus and dissensus are accorded equal value. For as Shalin quips, “a consensus based on good reasons alone is a poor guide for action and... the ideal speech situation must include... an agreement to disagree” (Shalin, 1992:274). Thus, according to Mouffe:

(The pragmatists’) disagreement with Habermas is not political but theoretical. They share his engagement with democratic politics but they consider that democracy does not need philosophical foundations and that it is not through rational grounding that its institutions could be made secure... democratic action does not require a theory of truth and notions like unconditionality and universal validity but rather a variety of practices and pragmatic moves aimed at persuading people to broaden the range of commitments to others, to build a more inclusive community.” (In Harrison, 2002a:163)

Foucault and the Link between Power and Rationality

Like Habermas, Foucault rejected instrumental rationality. His genealogical project was concerned with analysing rational practices and he understood these as being inextricably linked with the socio-historical contexts in which they emerge (McCarthy, 1994). The striking difference between Foucault and Habermas is that for Habermas rationalisation has a two-sided normative character – on the one hand there is partial, insufficient

rationalisation, and on the other there is a fuller, political and practical rationality. For Foucault, there is no contrast in rationality and no normative element. He considers rationality to either be neutral, or (more often) to be an instrument of domination (Fraser, 1989).

The work of Foucault is unequivocally devoted to matters of power and its abuse: “Foucault (expresses the) desire to challenge ‘every abuse of power, whoever the author, whoever the victims’ and in this way ‘to give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom’” (Foucault in Flyvbjerg, 1998a:200-201). Foucault’s concern was with how knowledge came to be accepted in different historical periods, and how power was linked with this through the concept of discourse. He provides a framework through which the subtle ways in which power is exercised in society may be analysed (Tait and Campbell, 2000). The so-called rational practices of society are questioned as Foucault shows that people are penalised, stigmatised, given authority or rewarded on the basis of a knowledge that informs rules and regulations but is in fact highly political. Similarly, Foucault links the discourses of the sciences and of the experts who practice within these discourses to the socio-historical contexts in which they operate. He examines the many ways in which power relations affect and are produced by knowledge about human beings. These sciences (that would include planning) were not only conceived in hierarchical institutional structures; they continue to function mainly in such settings. Coercion by violence has been replaced by coercion by a gentler force of administration by experts. The sciences are implicated with domination and control and power / knowledge are inextricably linked (McCarthy, 1994).

Foucault’s thesis is based on an ‘analytics of power’ that is concerned with a ‘multiple and mobile field of force relations’. This power analytics, Flyvbjerg explains, is characterised by six features: Power is productive / positive and not simply restrictive / negative. Power is a dense net of omnipresent relations and not simply localised in “centres” or an entity one can “possess”. Power is dynamic; it is appropriated and re-appropriated and exercised in a constant back-and-forth movement in relations of strength, tactics and strategies. Power produces knowledge and knowledge produces

power. How power is exercised is more important than who has the power (Flyvbjerg, 1998a:207). Foucault thus dismissed any notion of value-free or power-free knowledge, but asserted rather that every society constructs its own ‘regime of truth’ or ‘general politics of truth’ that serves to legitimate its activities and structures (Harrison, 1996).

For Foucault, the notion of power must be understood as pervasive and unavoidable. This frame perceives power as having both coercive and productive potential. Deeply opposed to idealism, Foucault dissociates the discussion of power from utilitarian perspectives of good and evil. He paves the foundation for looking at planning rationality as Flyvbjerg has done, not in terms of what ‘should be done’, but in terms of ‘what is actually done’ (Flyvbjerg’s ‘real life rationality’). Foucault also dispenses with notions of a uniform morality. He resists grounding of action in a normative judgment of universal right or wrong. Rather, Foucault contends that only the socially and historically conditioned context can be a grounding and a basis for action (Flyvbjerg and Richardson, 2002). By extension then, different approaches may apply to different contexts. This has opened his writings to criticisms of relativism.

Foucault’s Pragmatic Leanings

A recent reading (Reynolds, 2004) of Foucault’s later works makes the claim that, contrary to much critique, Foucault’s work is, at least partially, normatively grounded. Furthermore, his later work demonstrates significant overlaps with the pragmatism of Dewey. Reynolds (2004) finds parallel claims between Foucault and Dewey, primarily in the areas of ethics. She argues that, in the end, Foucault turned towards a pragmatic ethics to supplement his theories of knowledge and power as the bases of subjectivity. Foucault’s work indicates that he did not abandon the notion of knowledge as a base for how we are formed as subjects, but he extended this with a shift towards how individuals constitute themselves as subjects through morally significant actions.

Similar themes occupy Foucault and Dewey. These include Foucault’s notion of “ethical self-creation” as a way to overcome negative forms of power (Reynolds, 2004:955). The concept holds that once we can recognise the discursive and the political limits that are

placed on us, we can move towards thinking about ways to transform them. We do this by problematising the nature of these forces. Similarly, Dewey believes that there are no preconceived notions of the self, of freedom or of reason. Rather, these notions are the result of interactions (deliberations) between people living in an uncertain world.

Reynolds (2004) finds that both Foucault and Dewey advocate testing the limits of experience through enquiry (critique), both reject foundationalism, both emphasise individual freedom through self-creation, and both consider individuals to be products of history. Importantly for planning, both believe that activity (Foucault would term this ethico-political practice) must be the cornerstone to experience. This activity covers both theoretical knowledge and lived experience. The link between theory and practice, knowledge and action is thus common to both.

Neither Dewey nor Foucault subscribe to an ultimate moral stand or to fixed ethical positions. Rather ethics are employed as tools of critique. For Dewey the role of criticism is central to democracy – social enquiry is the key. Democracy relies on the capacity to process intellectually the conditions and the consequences of political practice and thereby to revise practice, to grow individually and to develop. Foucault's work is more centred in knowledge and rationality, but for him critique is the means whereby philosophy becomes action – it is the route for tracing the genealogy of the conditions we face, and is the path to open up new and experimental ways to change situations. Foucault does not bring an ethical theory per se to his work, but in its focus on the relationships between theory and practice in his later work is implicitly normative (Reynolds, 2004).

Conclusion: Elements of a Critical Pragmatism

The pragmatism of Dewey, while more critical than it has been credited with, remains insufficiently versed in relations of power. Critical theory offers an analysis of power dynamics and a firm normative stance related to liberation from domination. But it has failed to provide a practically applicable guide to action. It has also held onto absolutes that do not resonate with the current conditions of multiplicity and unknowables.

Habermas' approach to pragmatism from a critical perspective and his consequent critical pragmatism suffers various shortcomings. It relies on consensus, reduces the tolerance for contingency that pragmatism offered, and limits experience to communication. He foregrounds communication as the mechanism for interfacing with relations of power. Foucault offers an analysis of knowledge that is implicitly linked with power. His contribution is the illumination of power in all aspects of practice and the highlighting of the relationship between expert action and relations of power.

Both the pragmatic tradition and aspects of the critical tradition engage with issues of ethics, as demonstrated in revisionist readings of these texts. The guideposts offered are an interrelationship between theory and practice that provides for reflective practice, as well as a commitment to democracy from the pragmatists and a commitment to overcoming domination, foregrounded by critical theorists.

Each of these perspectives offers a contribution to an analytical approach to assessing practice that is at once problem-oriented and mindful of the underpinnings of power, as well as being sensitive to obligations to moral questions of justice and ethics. The various traditions do not define a 'critical pragmatism' but can define the elements of such an approach. From pragmatism, the elements of context or situatedness and outcomes are key. This school also provides a broad commitment to social inquiry, albeit open-ended and not directive enough for planning practice. Critical theories contribute a focus on power relations and on rationality. Critical theory offers a normative stance, which arguably does not extend far enough, it provides the beginnings of an element of ethics or values to a framework. Importantly, both critical theory and pragmatism hold that the situatedness or contextualising of conditions is necessary for understanding and for action. This will be shown to be relevant to South Africa, where the contextual conditions require that an ethical position for planning practice be more tightly defined, and not be open-ended.

In conclusion, it is argued that the elements of a critical-pragmatic analytical approach are: context, outcomes, rationality, power and ethics. Together the current chapter and the next two form the theoretical foundation of analysing the planning practice case study.