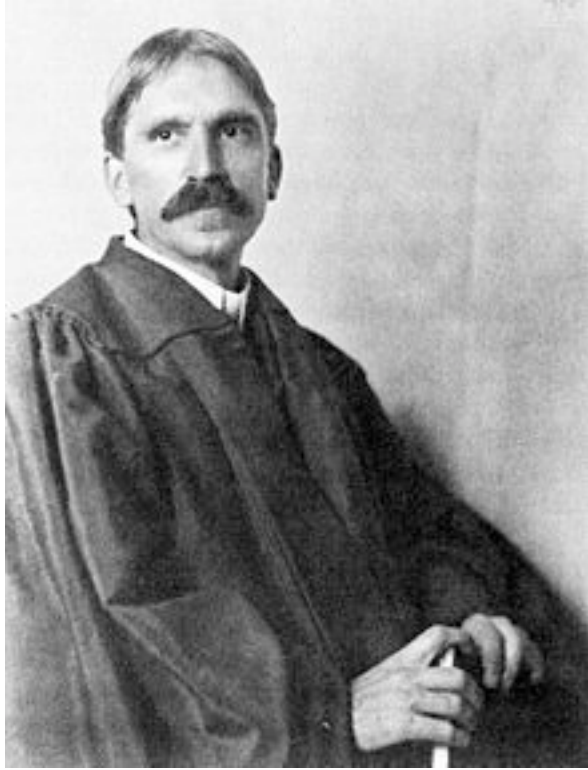


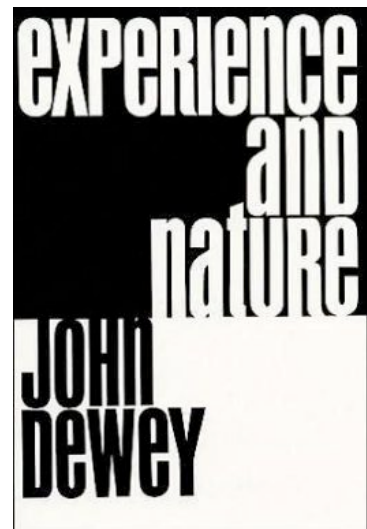


Part Four: This part of the book centers around John Dewey, Menand's fourth central character in his "story of ideas in America." Chapter Ten, "Burlington," focuses on John Dewey's early education, highlighting Dewey's intellectual impulses and suggesting what he retained and what he shed in his early education at the University of Vermont. John Dewey became one of, if not the most influential intellectual in the 20th century, not just in his writing but in his activism. Dewey is also someone often treated as an ecological and environmental thinker. See, for example, Benjamin Minteer, The Landscape of Reform: Civic Pragmatism and Environmental Thought in America and Neil W. Browne, The World in Which We Occur: John Dewey, Pragmatist Ecology, and American Ecological Writing in the Twentieth Century.

1. What was Dewey's relationship – and his philosophy's relationship – to the rise of corporate capitalism in the late 19th century? How did the Dartmouth (1819) case help to unleash capitalist enterprise in the United States?

John Dewey and American Liberalism: The Individual and the Group: Menand begins by orienting Dewey in the history of American liberalism. If we think of liberalism as tearing down hierarchies, then Dewey was indeed a liberal. He saw virtually all distinctions as invidious and sought to break them down (many of his books are of the "something and something" variety,

Experience and Nature (1925), Democracy and Education (1916), Experience and Education (1938), as examples, in which he shows that the two things are really one thing. But in almost every other way, thinking of Dewey as a liberal is misleading. Dewey did not share, to say the least, the traditional liberal commitment to free markets and individual rights, nor did he subscribe to the



liberal definition of freedom as personal autonomy. He rejected the fundamental distinction between the individual and the group that is central to mainstream liberal thinking. His opposition to rigid distinctions between the individual and society began as a philosophical orientation but as Dewey matured as a thinker, the United States increasingly embraced modern forms of organization (mass markets, bureaucratic procedure, and impersonal authority). In such a world, the persistence of older understandings of individualism generated confusion and conflict, even violent conflict (as in the Pullman strike of 1894 which a later chapter will describe). Dewey's influence stemmed from his recognition that his philosophy could help Americans cope with this new situation by providing a philosophical "method. . . for dealing with the problems of men."

Dewey and Liberalism: Group Solidarity, Self-Realization, and the Modern World: More

radical than most American liberals in his embrace of group solidarity over individual independence, Dewey also showed more equanimity than most liberals in embracing the modern world and its peculiar forms of social and economic organization. He felt comfortably at home in the modern world and believed "self-realization" would be entirely possible within it. He had nothing of nostalgia in him. Never looking back, Dewey gladly left Burlington behind, initially by attending its local college, the University of Vermont.

"Philosophy recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men." (Dewey, "The Need for a Recovery in Philosophy," 1917; Middle Works 10:42).

[Insert Blake review]: see end of this piece.

Dartmouth College to 1817: When Dewey left for the University of Vermont, he entered the



world as the last of the Vermont transcendentalists. But what were Vermont transcendentalists? Menand explains this with reference to the landmark Dartmouth College case and its influence on James Marsh, who became the first of the Vermont transcendentalists. A Connecticut minister, Eleazar Wheelock, founded Dartmouth College in 1769, with money raised in England and a land grant from the



royal colony of New Hampshire. The colonial government of New Hampshire issued a charter of incorporation for the school, establishing a board of twelve trustees that effectively wrested control of the enterprise from Wheelock's British backers. Initially intended as a charity for the Christian education of Native Americans, Dartmouth became a rival of Harvard and Princeton in the training of Anglo-American men. Eleazar died in 1779, passing on the presidency (as he was empowered to do under the charter) to his son, John. Around the time of the War of 1812, John Wheeler became embroiled in a series of petty disputes with the board of trustees. He invited the New Hampshire legislature to investigate, upon which the trustees fired Wheelock.

Origins of *Trustees of Dartmouth College v. Woodward* (1817): Wheeler's appeal to the New Hampshire legislature coincided with the last chapters of the struggle between old-line Federalism and insurgent Jeffersonian Republicanism. The Republican governor of New Hampshire, William Plumer, encouraged the legislature to rewrite the college's charter, expanding its board, which then voted off the old trustees, renamed the institution Dartmouth University, reappointed Wheelock as president, and fired the faculty. Plumer defended this state takeover of the college with the Jeffersonian principle that a democratic government had every right to change the terms of a charter. Anything else would suggest "that the earth belongs to the dead, and not to the living" (240). Wheelock was himself a Federalist and Calvinist and one of his key opponents among the trustees was a Republican, so all of this smacked of opportunism on his part. But the case became a major public and ideological confrontation, especially when the fired faculty and the old trustees set up shop as the original Dartmouth College and sued the College's former treasurer (William Woodward) for recovery of the charter and other property.

The *Dartmouth* Case Decided: In the New Hampshire Supreme Court, three Plumer appointees rejected the Dartmouth College argument that, in rewriting the charter, the legislation had

violated the Constitutional prohibition on "impairing the Obligation of Contracts" (241). The New Hampshire Supreme Court asserted a distinction between private and public corporations, arguing the contract clause only protected a private corporation pursuing private interests. But if established to secure a public good, a corporation – regardless of



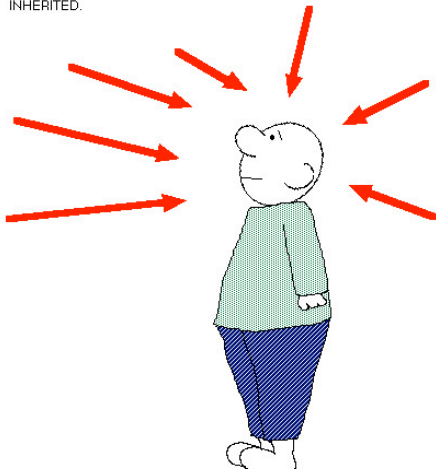
where its funds came from – was a public concern and subject to public control. As education was clearly a public concern, Dartmouth College was a public corporation. This represented sound Republican reasoning, part of the effort to subject corporations to the democratic will. But the case went to the U.S. Supreme Court, where Daniel Webster argued that the college was a private charity and the charter of incorporation was Wheelock's means of insuring that it would be administered effectively and in the way he intended. Like Webster, the presiding Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court John Marshall opposed Jeffersonian doctrines and favored the development of both national power and commercial enterprise. Marshall thus found the legislature's interference in the affairs of the college "repugnant to the Constitution of the United States" (243); Marshall also secured a majority on the court to reverse the decision. The court rejected the distinction between private and public corporations, arguing that if the foundation of the corporation is private (established and funded by private citizens), then the corporation – regardless of the scope of its activities – remains a private corporation protected by the contract clause. Often cited as a victory for academic freedom, the decision also shielded private business corporations from state regulation and "helped to unleash capitalist enterprise in nineteenth-century America" (243).

2. What did James Marsh's Vermont Transcendentalism have to offer John Dewey, who was so taken by Thomas Huxley's inspiring image of "the human body as an interdependent and interrelated organism" (252)? What was it about Henry Torrey that suggested the Vermont Transcendentalist tradition might not hold Dewey?

Marsh's Opposition To Lockean Empiricism and Atomism: James Marsh had been a student at Dartmouth College during all this and he regarded the actions of the legislature an example of mob tyranny at the bottom of which one would find John Locke's philosophy. At the time,

EMPIRICISM

ALL KNOWLEDGE OBTAINED
THROUGH SENSES - NOT
INHERITED.



Locke's philosophy stood for two things, empiricism (the idea that the

mind begins as a blank slate and only experience, in the form of images and impressions, gives shape to our ideas) and the social contract (the idea that autonomous individuals entered into a social contract in order to form governments whose sole purpose is to protect the natural rights of those individuals). This atomistic Lockean philosophy left little room for a whole greater than its parts.

"In Lockean thinking," Menand explains, "human beings are essentially rights-bearing ciphers" (244).

Nor did his empiricism leave room for the supernatural (beyond the senses) or miraculous (an uncaused cause). Marsh rejected Locke's vision in favor of the propositions that individuals became fully realized only through their role in the group and that our faith in the supernatural and miraculous does not just stand aside from science and philosophy but that it can be squared with them.

Marsh's Rigorous Romanticism and the Unity of Knowledge: Educational Organicism

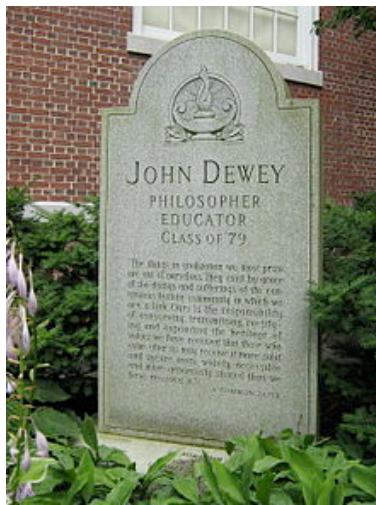
(248): Marsh found a means of squaring science and philosophy with faith in the work of Samuel

Marsh's Vermont curriculum, a member of the faculty later recalled, presented knowledge as "the unity, not of an aggregation, nor of a juxtaposition, nor of a merely logical arrangement, but of a natural development, and a growth; and therefore the study of it, rightly pursued, would be a growing and enlarging process, to the mind of the student."

Taylor Coleridge. While we might not be able to ground our faith in evidence of the senses or in cold logic, Coleridge thought introspection provided all the grounds we needed. When we look inside our minds, we find innate ideas, mental contents that provide the consistency and harmony missing from the sensual world.

This provided a rational basis for faith.

Coleridge could find support for this in Plato's eternal world of ideal forms and Kant's reason (perceiving universals). But above all, Coleridge found support for it from the romantic reaction to mechanism (which he found in the German interpreters of Kant). Reason apprehends the transcendent and metaphysical unity "of part and whole, matter and spirit, mind and nature" (247). What Marsh took from all this was an indictment of a Lockean philosophy that turned humans into brutes, simply reacting to external stimuli, mechanistic beings incapable of moral choice. Marsh's edition of Coleridge's Aids to Reflection became a founding document in American transcendentalism and also guided Marsh's successful reorganization of the University of Vermont's curriculum (to emphasize the unity of all knowledge). But Vermont transcendentalism was quite different from Emerson's version. Marsh thought Emerson a superficial epicurean while Vermont stressed systematic, rigorous thinking. Vermont transcendentalism also rejected the anti-institutionalism of the Emersonian strain. It remained an essentially conservative movement, believing that the moral depravity of humans was not going to be eradicated.



Dewey and Torrey: Embracing Unity, Escaping Doctrine:

Dewey took in all of this from one of Marsh's successors at

Vermont, Henry Torrey.

Although Dewey's family did not share the conservatism of Vermont

Dewey found Torrey "a man shackled to doctrine. 'Undoubtedly pantheism is the most satisfactory form of metaphysics intellectually,' Dewey remembered Torrey saying to him during one of their walks, 'but it goes counter to religious faith'" (252).

transcendentalism (most Vermonters were dedicated abolitionists and Dewey's father, although nearly 50 years old, enlisted in the Civil War), Dewey embraced the idea of the unity of knowledge. Dewey had found in Thomas Huxley's physiology textbook, that explained the human body as an interdependent and interrelated organism, "a kind of type or model of a view of things to which material in any field ought to conform" (252). The Vermont curriculum appealed to Dewey's desire for a unity of knowledge, his need to square the Christian piety he inherited from his family with the modern thought, including Darwinism, to which he was drawn. But he increasingly found Torrey himself to be too timid, a man uninterested in the larger world and too immersed in his doctrines. Worse yet, Torrey's rejection of pantheism, despite its intellectual attractiveness, because of its incompatibility with Christian doctrine suggested that Marsh's effort to square science, philosophy, and faith had come up short. Torrey helped Dewey gain confidence in his ability but Dewey needed a wider field and so headed to Johns Hopkins University in 1882.

Menand, The Metaphysical Club, 255-284

This chapter on "Baltimore" focuses on the development of the programs of philosophy and psychology at Johns Hopkins University where John Dewey attended graduate school. The chapter is more or less roughly organized around three of Dewey's teachers, George Sylvester Morris, G. Stanley Hall, and Charles Peirce.

1. What made Johns Hopkins University different than any other US university? How did the need to reconcile reason and faith create two challenges for President Daniel Coit Gilman in hiring a professor of philosophy (or of "mental science") for Hopkins?

Gilman and Johns Hopkins University: Johns Hopkins was the first research university in the United States, endowed with the then unprecedented sum of \$3.5 million (with an equal sum given to found a hospital) in 1876. Daniel Coit Gilman served as the university's first president and, like many American educators, he had studied in Germany and been impressed by the German university system. Americans, however, had taken the German emphasis on academic freedom, "pure learning," and *Bildung* (personal mental development) and reduced it to "science." While Harvard delayed creating rigorous graduate programs, Gilman attracted the best researchers in the country to come to Baltimore and built up a first-class research university.

A Public Relations Issue: Gilman as Marsh: But six years into its history, Johns Hopkins still lacked a philosophy department when Dewey arrived in 1882. Gilman faced two issues here, one of public relations and the other about the field of philosophy itself. The public relations issue hinged on a conflict between German-trained American intellectuals wedded to laboratory science and empirical and positivist attitudes and the American public's allegiance to Christian

and moral principles derived from divine revelation. Thomas Huxley's inaugural address in September 1876 illustrated the danger, as many interpreted the agnostic Huxley's presence (he invented the term agnostic) and the lack of prayers as an indication that Hopkins was a godless institution. Gilman thus faced Marsh's challenge, to reconcile science and faith, mechanics and miracles, only Gilman – unlike Marsh – found mechanics more compelling than miracles.

Physiological Psychology vs. Philosophy: Huxley's steam whistle: The second issue, about the discipline of philosophy, arose from an emerging split in the field. Philosophy had long explored “the laws of the mind” in purely speculative ways (as in the “debate” between Marsh and Coleridge and Locke and Hume). When philosophers spoke about minds they were doing “mental science.” But now physiological psychology (“psychophysics”) posited a distinction between mind and the brain, the first a matter of consciousness, the second simply another organ in the body. So now “mental science,” of the sort William James went to Germany to pursue, meant experimentation into the processes of the brain and not speculation. And in its extreme form, physiological psychology treated consciousness (thoughts and feelings) as a byproduct of organic changes in the brain. Huxley's “steam whistle” analogy treated consciousness as an irresistible and automatic result of molecular change in the brain (just as the whistle on the train is a product of its steam engine).

The Uncertain Future of Philosophy: This view excluded philosophy from the field of “mental science,” and relegated it to metaphysics. This was Huxley's agnosticism; that which we cannot measure, remains unknown and unknowable. Huxley rejected the hypothesis that mental processes might be the cause of the physical changes simply because he could not test it. Physiological psychology made epistemology (how do we know what we know) into a laboratory science, what came to be known as the “New Psychology.” It also turned psychology into a respected academic field, and left philosophy in a tough spot, without a research agenda (see text box). So Gilman sought a leader for a department whose future was unclear. He tried to get James (who, characteristically, couldn't make up his mind) and then settled for the three people James recommended, hiring each on a temporary contract to hedge his bets.

“If the mind could be studied scientifically, and if what could not be studied scientifically was not knowledge, what exactly was the research program of philosophy?”

2. How did Hegel's “completion” of Kant's philosophical system help Morris and Dewey close the gap between religious faith and scientific thought? What did Morris mean when he said that self-realization is a social process?

How Does the World Hang Together? From Kant's Mental Categories to Hegel's Absolute: Dewey chose initially to study with Morris with whom he shared an attachment to the Burlington

philosophy. Marsh's "Burlington philosophy," however, had been built on a misunderstanding of Kant. Kant did not reject empiricism or attempt to establish religious truths. He accepted the distinction between things knowable and unknowable. But he did want to explain how we knew a limited set of things – causality, space, time – that cannot be apprehended through the senses. He asked, that is, how the world appeared to hang together from a set of discrete, unique, and separate sense impressions. Kant concluded that the mind was not a blank slate but came "accessorized" (in Menand's lovely phrase) with categories, specifically the categories of causality, spatiality, and temporality. Phenomena that corresponded to these categories could be known; those that did not correspond to these categories (things omnipresent, eternal, or without cause such as God, free will, and immortality) could not be known.

Marsh had gotten his Kant wrong because he got it from German philosophers (Fichte, Schelling) who had desired to get beyond empiricism. Hegel picked up their project and completed it and, as he saw it, completed Kant as well. Hegel argued that we believed the world was unified, that it hung together, but we could not grasp this ourselves because our temporally-

Ever-present, the Absolute revealed itself in both nature and history, through time, in the collective consciousness of humans just as "the circle which presupposes its end as its purpose, and has its end for its beginning; it becomes concrete and actual only by being carried out, and by the end it involves." Hegel quoted on 264.

and spatially-conditioned minds provided only partial and relational knowledge. For the world to hang together, however, some mind must be able to comprehend it (since as Kant showed, things did not hang together by themselves). Hegel believed such a mind existed, unconditioned by time or place or antecedent cause, and he called this mind the Absolute. "Reality is an Idea

in the mind of the Absolute, and history is that Idea's gradual coming into consciousness itself" (264). German science aimed at true knowledge of this "inner being of the world" as a means of communal growth and spiritual completeness (*Bildung*).

Self-Realization is a Social Process (uniting self and society, soul and body, nature and God): George Sylvester Morris, Dewey's first teacher at Hopkins, used Hegel's idea of the Absolute to resolve his own crisis of faith (precipitated by reading Hume). Hegel's Absolute coincided perfectly – and not accidentally – with the Christian God. So Morris believed that scientific thought and religious belief had the same endpoint – knowledge and understanding of the Absolute/God, just as Marsh had argued that "CHRISTIAN FAITH IS THE PERFECTION OF HUMAN REASON." And, like Marsh, Morris embraced an organic conception of education in which all fields were connected into an organic, living whole. Morris, quite unlike Torrey, was also an engaged person, seeing both his Christianity and his Hegelianism as guides to a life of action. Self-realization (that is, both individual development and satisfaction) came from

engagement with others and with the world; it was, in short, a social process (266). Dewey joined Morris in finding in Hegel an intellectual answer to a deep emotional need for connection and unity, for a reuniting of self and world, soul and body, nature and God. Dewey quickly became Morris's best student and a star in the graduate program.

3. What role did the concepts of "attention" and "apperception" (see 269) play in the new psychology? How did the last five pages of Wundt's two-volume textbook – and Dewey's understanding of the New Psychology (272) -- appear to unite physical and metaphysical explanations of mind?

Hall, James, Wundt, and Dewey: Measuring Attention in Selective Minds and Finding

Consciousness: Dewey also studied with Granville Stanley Hall who had once been a follower

of Morris and a devotee of Hegel but who had, upon reading Wilhelm Wundt's textbook on physiological psychology, embraced the laboratory-based New Psychology. Hall went to study with William James then landed at Hopkins. James and Hall recognized that German experimental psychology was not

"'Human consciousness,' Wundt wrote, 'constitutes a decisive point in nature's course, a point at which the world becomes aware of itself'" (269).

attempting to "reduce mental phenomena to physical laws" (268-9) but to use laboratory methods to solve traditional issues of philosophy. Wundt, for example, had studied the "personal equation" in astronomy – that tendency for individual observers to measure the position of a star differently (the issue that gave rise to the method of least squares). Wundt noticed that it mattered whether the observer looked first at the star or first at the instrument of measurement.

Consciousness, he concluded, was unitary (we could attend to only one thing at a time) but also, crucially, that the mind did not simply receive stimuli passively, but the mind selected. This faculty of attention (Kant's apperception) could be measured, providing the scientific basis for the New Psychology. But Wundt and, later, Dewey also saw the experiments as a means of uniting science and metaphysics. What was happening inside the brain was the emergence of Hegel's Absolute in the form of human consciousness, individual and collective.

4. The last two questions concern pages 272-280 which are, for me anyway, mind bending. What are the reasons for and against treating a law as absolute that Peirce put forward in "Design and Chance"?

Since "nature evolves by chance variation, then the laws of nature must evolve by chance variation as well" (277).

The Pragmatist's View of Law: Peirce was, of course, the third philosopher at Hopkins who helped to shape Dewey's emerging thought. After a discussion of Peirce's chaotic and disastrous private life, Menand focuses on Peirce's paper, "Design and Chance," that Dewey heard at

Baltimore's (and Peirce's) version of Boston's Metaphysical Club. The paper most likely summarized the main points of Peirce's course on logic that Dewey decided not to take (perhaps fearing his mathematical understanding was not up to Peirce's demands). In the paper, Peirce began with Maxwell's demon and the assertion that scientific laws are only predictions of the probable results in a given situation. Our decision to treat such laws as absolute or not, Peirce argued, is purely pragmatic (that is, a result of what we think the consequences will be). If questioning the law will produce only more confusion, then we accept it. But sometimes questioning a law opens up new hypotheses that can help us learn new things. A law, in other words, is a path of inquiry (as the law of gravity helped reveal Neptune to us). So we must never block a new path of inquiry.

5. What did Peirce mean by - and what did he conclude about – his question as to whether the law of causality had a cause?

The Uncaused Cause: Absolute Chance: The question Peirce posed is whether one can explain the principle that everything has an explanation, a question which might be translated as, does the law of causation have a cause? He ultimately answered it by saying no, that something called “absolute chance” had created a universe (that only later took on the quality of causation) out of the blue; no other cause or law gave rise to “absolute chance.” It might seem to us that the doctrine of “absolute chance” implies there is freedom, originality, free will in the universe, that things are ultimately not determined, not statistically predictable, not capable of being reduced to a system. But he didn't see it that way. The universe from start to finish remained, he believed, a system (280).

Sow a Habit, Reap a Universe: We, however, might see something different in his reasoning about the role of chance in the universe, especially if we resist the temptation to find the uncaused cause that sets the system in motion (resist as Darwin, Venn, Boutroux, and others did). For (now going back to 276) Peirce took Maxwell's demon one step further, arguing that an infinitesimally small chance variation might fundamentally change the entire system (as with a pair of dice whose shape is changed ever so slightly). Such chance variations are happening all the time, an idea he took from Darwin and applied not just to nature but to the laws of nature. A tiny variation or deviation, over time, could produce new physical laws (“Laws are adaptive.” 277). Variations are essentially habits. In other words, the significance of variations is in their behavioral consequences. Bigness in finches' beaks is whatever big beaks do for finches; hardness in a material is all the things such a material can do for us. Laws were also habits, Peirce argued, a function of the way the universe behaves. There is the crazy story of Peirce showing up late to read a paper for the Metaphysical Club in Boston and then discussing the process whereby “the different moments in time got in the habit of coming one after the other” (277). He wasn't joking. He believed time sorted itself out into this temporal arrangement by

“developing good habits” (278). In the example that makes the most sense to me, the law of gravitation is the product of a system where all the bodies that did not have the gravitational habit have left the system. Gravity or temporality did not exist in the universe at the outset any more than giraffes did; those “laws” evolved out of minute variations and the behaviors they created, behaviors that either proved useful in keeping things in the system or not. Think about that the next time you fill your car with gas, plant a tomato, build a house, or plan a city.

[Insert Blake Review: Blake is also a Lasch student and a biographer of, among others, Randolph Bourne (Dewey’s one-time student and eventual critic): the pragmatists’ big idea about ideas (tools) served to “replace timeless principles with experimental methods, comprehensible procedures, and open participation in decision-making as the legitimating creed for democratic institutions.” This big bang, says Menand, changed everything from natural sciences and educational practice to understandings of race, ethnicity, and nationality; and although pragmatism mainly animated the Protestant upper and middle classes, Menand does insert pragmatism into the national narrative (from Holmes’s Civil War agonies through Dewey’s Pullman strike experience). But Blake sees two omissions, two silences: 1. Pragmatism’s critics from all political perspectives (fair, I guess, although Bourne gets his – brief – say) and 2. More tellingly, the omission of “those figures in the pragmatist community who formulated a sustained critique of free-market political economy” (this would, in my view, include Dewey; and see if you don’t think this is at least partly evident in the Pullman chapter – although late Dewey launched a fuller critique). Key among these criticisms is that pragmatism “takes interests for granted; it doesn’t provide a way of judging whether they are worth pursuing apart from the consequences of acting upon them.” It’s not clear how we would judge them apart from consequences but perhaps a stronger point is that the pragmatists failed “to explain the genesis of new values” (a criticism I think Dewey took to heart and addressed, not least in Art as Experience). The great test was the American intervention into WWI; instead of guiding the ship of state (and its interests) Bourne-Blake think the pragmatists should have stood up for – indeed created – an alternative set of values. Catholics and other religious thinkers and conservatives too added that a “culture without foundation in faith would drift into moral chaos.” On the left, a host of voices treated pragmatism as a worship of efficiency and technology at the expense of humanistic values. By mid-century, totalitarianism suggested the dangers of the pragmatists’ idea of a social self, that had been remaking both American culture and personality. Perhaps human freedom did (in Trilling’s words) lay “beyond culture.” The Cold War is not the only reason for the skepticism about pragmatism’s “moral thinness.” Then there is politics. Menand praises pragmatism mainly for its defense of free speech and its reckoning with ethnic and racial diversity. But back when liberalism had a popular base, expectations had been higher or at least more diverse. Pragmatism, its critics suggested, had something to do with the rise of the modern welfare state. Menand might have done more to place pragmatism in a trans-Atlantic debate

about “the relationships among pragmatism, corporate capitalism, and the modern liberal state.” That debate pitted Marxists, populists, social gospellers against advocates of laissez-faire and limited government. Dewey and the editors of The New Republic (at the time, something of a pragmatic journal) seemed allies in the cause of crusading social science and state intervention. Some of this effort surely reigned in the power of corporations but other aspects of the effort appear “to have enhanced the power of professionals and experts at the expense of ordinary citizens.” If the revival of pragmatism neglects this older debate and this social-democratic aspiration, it “may energize the academy with the promise of cultural innovation, while producing only the faintest echo in civic life. One name for that popgun burst is neoliberalism.”