

## INTRODUCTION: A PHILOSOPHER AND HIS ORDINAL CONTEXTS

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This issue of *Pragmatism Today* is a celebration of the 70<sup>th</sup> birthday of John Ryder (b. 1951), American pragmatist philosopher and educator. On the cover of this issue is the “Portrait of a Philosopher” (1915) by Lyubov Popova (1889–1924), a Russian avant-garde artist. The central figure of the composition, the philosopher, melts into his environment. Everything in the painting – the philosopher, the objects that surround him, and the background itself, seem homogeneous. Erasing the distinctions between the organic and the non-organic, the pictorial and the verbal, the foreground and the background, the artist rejects the antagonism of binary systems as well as the very idea of hierarchy, and thus paves a path to an all-embracing worldview. This painting, created more than a century ago, captures something important about John Ryder, that is his openness to the world, his transgression of limited ways of thinking, his advocacy for the closely tied organism–environment relations and for the “pluralistic universe”, and his talent for philosophical generalization.

Like all complexes of nature that are related constitutively to their environments, John Ryder’s thinking has grown out of the complex relations of his professional life. It is shaped by experiences that he has had in various countries of the world, and it is wide in its scope. It is reflected in his publications on metaphysics, epistemology, American philosophy, social and political philosophy, education, in particular university education, art and aesthetics, and philosophical theology. Because of the remarkable breadth of Ryder’s interest and the extent of topics of his philosophical analysis, the papers in this volume embrace the same wide range of themes and ideas. They fall roughly into the following categories that form the four parts of the volume: Pragmatic Naturalism and Experience, Reflections on Philosophy, Aesthetics, and Society and Politics.

The issue opens with an Interview that was conducted by Scott L. Pratt, in which John lays out his views on the origins of pragmatic naturalism and the idea of dif-

ference in the context of part/whole relations, discusses the rationale and value of a social and political theory grounded in common interests, and explains “how we might best understand the character of the environing conditions in which our own natures and interests are enmeshed”. He also reviews appropriate responses to social oppression, and addresses such issues as international relations and climate change in terms of natural complexes and ordinality.

The first part of the volume presents papers that address Pragmatic Naturalism and Experience. Thus, James Campbell in his “Reading John Ryder” explores through the lenses of relational ontology Ryder’s conceptions of pragmatic context for the Ryder’s conception of pragmatic naturalism, democracy and education. Pragmatic naturalism is central in discussions of Ryder’s ideas in articles by Larry A. Hickman, Robert S. Corrington, Emil Višňovský, and John R. Shook. While Larry A. Hickman builds up background and, Robert S. Corrington emphasizes his metaphysical pluralism and compares it to the four main types of naturalism that he identifies – *descriptive*, *process*, *honorific*, and *ecstatic*. Emil Višňovský demonstrates how naturalism and pragmatism become productively intertwined in Ryder’s philosophical conception that surpasses the mind/body dichotomy and other binary oppositions. John Shook, appealing to Ryder’s *The Things in Heaven and Earth: An Essay in Pragmatic Naturalism*, proposes an alternative to normless naturalism, which is a pragmatic “norming naturalism” that serves as the basis for philosophical inquiries into society and culture. Kathleen Wallace and Henrik Rydenfelt address Justus Buchler: Wallace applies ordinal ontology to social groups, and intersectional social groups in particular, and Rydenfelt, in a critical account of Ryder’s view, relates Buchler’s theory of judgement to various spheres of human experience. Andrew Fitz-Gibbon argues that *The Things in Heaven and Earth* does not only seek to make an account of everything but is “a complex and expansive ‘theory of everything’”.

The second part of the volume presents Reflections on Philosophy. Paul B. Thompson in his “Pragmatism in a

Post-Truth Era” highlights the tension between pluralism and realism, and makes use of Justus Buchler’s idea of ontological parity, a concept that Ryder also advances. Carlos Mougan reads Ryder through “open-mindedness”, which allows him to relate open-mindedness as a virtue to Ryder’s pragmatic naturalism. Sami Pihlström proposes a pragmatist philosophy of the humanities, and Vincent Colapietro in his article “Conventions, Institutions, and Commitments: Coming Together Anew” honors Ryder by complementing his pragmatic naturalism with the analysis of the “elusive” concept of conventionality.

The application of pragmatist ideas to art is discussed in the four papers presented in the section on Aesthetics. Richard E. Hart in “A Note on Ryder, Literary Modernism and Philosophical Pragmatism”, following Ryder on relationality and experience, traces similarities between literary modernism and American pragmatism. Lyubov Bugaeva finds inspiration in Ryder’s application of the theory of ordinality to art when she claims that film images constitute an interesting case for discussing ordinality and the relations of the natural complexes of which they are constituents. Roberta Dreon ponders “On the Natural Roots of the ‘Aesthetic’ in John Dewey and William James” and pays tribute to John Ryder by demonstrating that the characteristic features of pragmatic naturalism that he identifies are part of the Classical Pragmatists’ conception of the aesthetic. Rosa M. Calcaterra examines the relationality of time and space in gardens’ spaces, and argues that the aesthetic experience of gardens corroborates the dynamic entanglement of space and time.

The next set of papers, Society and Politics, deals with pragmatist ideas put into action in social practice and politics. Herman J. Saatkamp discusses the challeng-

es that higher education faces and elaborates on Ryder’s response to those challenges. Radim Šíp places Ryder’s educational theory in a broader social context, while Charles Munitz, Robert Howell and Leszek Koczanowicz focus on the concept of democracy, democratic society, and common interests, and Ryder’s contribution to the topic. Alexander Kremer and Nikita Pokrovsky examine philosophers that they find relevant to the discussion of Ryder’s philosophy. Marjorie C. Miller in her article “Billiard Balls, Ordinal Relations, and China” picks up the “baroque” metaphor of billiard balls that Ryder uses in his work and applies it to a discussion of the People’s Republic of China. Not surprisingly papers in this section refer a good deal to John’s educational ideas. His educational aspiration, like Dewey’s, was to bring together two understandings of the nature of education, as “the preparation for the social position of life, the preparation of the individual to play his proper part in the community or state of which he is a member,” and as “the complete development of all the powers of the individual, intellectual, physical, and moral” (LW: 17, 226). John consistently pursues this objective, both in his work and in his life. This is the reason he co-founded with Emil Višňovský the Central European Pragmatist Forum in 2000, and for ten years served as president of the Alliance of Universities for Democracy.

John Ryder’s goal was and is to form community in Dewey’s sense – community as the sharing of experiences and values. The authors who have contributed to this anniversary volume constitute such a community. And the result of the joint efforts presented in the articles in this issue is, to echo Popova’s painting on the journal’s cover, the *Portrait of John Ryder, a Philosopher*.