usable without sacrificing the future and, of course, vice versa. Another historian once expressed a similar thought: “If you could not accept the past and its burden, there was no future” (Robert Penn Warren, All the King’s Men). This means accepting our history rather than rejecting it for pasts and futures which are so utopian that nobody can imagine how we could actually transition from our present situations to seemingly ideal ones.

In the context of the cultural revolution of corporate capitalism, this translates to remaining open to the future possibilities now only nascent in our corporate capitalist inheritance. The key move inaugurated by corporate capitalism was a political economy no longer premised on self-sufficient subjectivity: corporations enabled forms of economic action which are intersubjective by definition. In negotiating the philosophical transition from the old modern individual self to the new post-modern social self, pragmatism and feminism provide philosophical pathways for keeping the promises of democracy alive within the emerging frame of corporate capitalism.

At least, that is Livingston’s argument. And it certainly demands more of a reply than scholars of pragmatism have yet given it.

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The chief aim of Democracy After Liberalism is to extend recent work on deliberative theories of democracy in a decidedly post-liberal direction. The main theoretical novelty Robert Talisse introduces into the discussion is that of using pragmatism to strengthen deliberative democracy. Political theorists and pragmatist philosophers alike will appreciate this innovation in scholarship.

Political theorists will benefit from Talisse’s broad knowledge of contemporary political philosophy and its impasses. Democracy After Liberalism provides a useful survey of recent work in political theory and a convincing account of the difficult questions we now face. (Readers already familiar with Talisse’s article-length publications know the encyclopedic quality of his bibliographies – if for nothing else, you ought to read this book in order to crib from the voluminous references supplied.) Talisse concludes that deliberative democracy remains at an impasse insofar as deliberativists are beholden to either of the two dominant paradigms in contemporary political theory: liberalism and communitarianism. In considering deliberation, liberals “avoid
moral concepts and controversy” whereas anti-liberal communitarians appear “obsessed with morality” (92). The problem with each approach is that it begins with an already-given political framework and tailors deliberation to suit. Talisse contends that “deliberative democracy must be a political theory in its own right” (95). His attempt is thus to develop a more robust conception of deliberative democracy than we have yet seen.

In articulating this stronger deliberativism, Talisse turns to pragmatism as his philosophical field of resource. Pragmatists will appreciate the fact that in doing so, Talisse rises to the challenge of conceptualizing a pragmatist politics that is not strictly Deweyan. This is welcome insofar as pragmatist political theorists have for too long refused to build outside of the boxes left us by John Dewey. Talisse turns to Charles Peirce as a thinker whose concepts are rich for democratic theory. He focuses particularly upon Peirce’s community-based theories of inquiry and truth. Though I suspect many pragmatists (both Deweyans and Peirceans) will take issue with Talisse’s arguments, the arguments are valuable insofar as they enable pragmatists to look elsewhere than Dewey for the philosophical assets requisite for our reconstructions of democracy. This is not to say that Dewey should not remain central to pragmatist political philosophy. It is only to make the obvious, but too often overlooked, point that Dewey by himself is not enough.

Talisse’s idea is to employ Peirce in response to what he understands as the overwhelmingly dominant political theory on the scene today: liberalism. But I detect a simplification in Talisse’s assessment of liberalism. And it is this simplification that makes Peirce seem more relevant to contemporary politics than he really is.

Talisse’s central complaint about liberalism is that it is individualistic. “For liberalism,” he writes, “it is the separateness of selves, not their relatedness, which is analytically primary, and thus basic to political theorizing” (17). While I recognize this as a common quip about liberalism, it nonetheless seems to me misguided. The strength of liberalism is that it affirms our relations to, as well as our separations from, other persons. Any criticism of liberalism that misses this misses the point of liberal theory, which is a political philosophy explicitly tailored in defense of the integrity of the individual within society.

Whereas Talisse suggests that quintessential liberals like Mill and Rawls are individualists, such thinkers are better read as simply insisting that the individual is of ineliminable value, and so is the social. That explains why these theorists give patient and detailed arguments as to why and how individuation can be preserved in the midst of association. Not only does Talisse’s interpretation of liberalism seem to miss the central point of liberal theory, it also confounds the history of liberal practice. While individuality is obviously a key element in modern liberal politics, so is the vast organizational machinery that Hannah Arendt described under the heading of “the rise of