*Political Education and the New Ordinary*

Online seminar, Wednesday, November 23, 2021

Funded by JSPS Promotion of Joint International Research (Fostering Joint International Research (B))

“Political education for living with the other: a Japanese initiative in international  
dialogue on American practical philosophy”

Opening

8:00 UK, 9:00 France, 10:00 Finland, 17:00 Japan

**Sami Pihlström** (40 minutes) (University of Helsinki)

*Losing (One’s) Religion? Pragmatist and Humanist Considerations on Pluralism and Worldview Education*

Chair*:* Naoko Saito (Kyoto University)

**Sandra Laugier** (40 minutes) (Paris 1st University)

*TV Series, Education and the New Ordinary*

Chair: Naoko Saito (Kyoto University)

Break . . . 9:20 UK, 10:20 France, 11:20 Finland, 18:20 Japan

9:40 UK, 10:40 France, 11:40 Finland, 18:40 Japan

**Emma Williams** (40 minutes) (University of Warwick)

*Mental Health, Education and Narrative*

Chair: Paul Standish (UCL Institute of Education)

**Naoko Saito** (40 minutes) (Kyoto University)

*Cultivating the Sapientist: Democracy, Citizenship and the Possibilities of Pragmatism*

Chair: Sami Pihlström (University of Helsinki)

Break. . . 11:00 UK, 12:00 France, 13:00 Finland, 20:00 Japan

11:40 UK, 12:40 France, 13:40 Finland, 20:40 Japan

**Paul Standish** (40 minutes) (UCL Institute of Education)

*Appropriations of Race*

Chair: Adrien Skilbeck (UCL Institute of Education)

General Discussion (40 minutes)

**Sari Kivistö** (Tampare University)

**Anton Sevilla-Liu** (Kyushu University)

**Adrian Skilbeck** (UCL Institute of Education)

**Baptiste Cornardeau** (Paris 1st University/ University of Chicago)

**Léa Boman** (Paris 1st University)

Ending

13:00 UK, 14:00 France, 15:00 Finland, 22:00 Japan

Abstracts

**Sami Pihlström** (University of Helsinki)

*Losing (One’s) Religion? Pragmatist and Humanist Considerations on Pluralism and Worldview Education*

<Abstract>

My aim in this paper is to investigate the phenomenon of losing (one’s) religious faith, both as a general philosophical topic and as something that needs to be taken seriously in “worldview education”. In a sense it seems obvious that one cannot lose anyone else’s religion but only one’s own. The deeper question I wish to examine is this: does a religious faith or, more broadly, outlook have to be, philosophically speaking, *mine* in order for me to be able to lose it, and if so, in what sense exactly? That is, does a person have to be *genuinely religious* – whatever exactly that means – for a loss of faith to be so much as possible in their life? What, moreover, does it mean to lose a religious outlook? Can the process be described as (primarily or even exclusively) an epistemic one, or is it (also) an irreducibly ethical one?

We will investigate this set of issues, which have obvious educational significance, by first drawing some important distinctions – and then hopefully overcoming them. My reflections on this topic will yield an indirect argument for a *pragmatist* approach in the philosophy of religion (as well as, by extension, in the study of religious and worldview education), because I will suggest that it is (only) from a pragmatist point of view that the process of losing (one’s) religion is comprehensively accountable as an epistemic-cum-ethical transformation of a person engaging in religious practices (or habits of action). However, the problem of losing one’s faith has not been adequately studied in pragmatist philosophy of religion. Therefore, this paper also hopes to expand the scope of that philosophical approach in the study of religion.

It is in the *pluralistic* spirit of pragmatism that I am proposing to include this “negative” issue of loss on our philosophical (as well as, e.g., political and educational) agenda. The topic is educationally relevant especially because a serious (religious or secular) worldview education must, as a condition of its very possibility, be open to a plurality of outcomes, including the potential loss of one’s earlier religious or secular worldview. Otherwise the educational process is hardly the kind of serious personal transformation one would hope to achieve by engaging in educational activities in the first place.

One meta-level motivation for exploring our topic is the fact that the philosophy of religion has, in my view, too strongly focused on investigating the more “positive” question about the kinds of reasons – epistemic or non-epistemic – that we might have for holding or embracing religious beliefs. The “negative” questions concerning the giving up of, or losing, one’s religious beliefs have not received as much attention among serious philosophers of religion, even though such questions could be seen as relevant to the philosophy of religion, just as much as analogous negative questions are relevant, for example, in moral philosophy, where evil is arguably as important as goodness as a topic of discussion.

Militant atheism argues, apologetically, that all religious beliefs ought to be given up, or lost. A person who failed to abandon their religious beliefs would be irrational; losing one’s religious faith is something to be expected as a result of scientific education and enculturation. However, this is *not* the kind of sincere discussion of losing one’s religion that I am interested in. This paper is fundamentally opposed to apologetics of any kind, whether pro-religious or anti-religious. In particular, I hope to defend a pragmatist way of examining both religious faith and the loss of religious faith as *personal* (albeit also irreducibly cultural) traits of one’s individual existence that need to be analyzed from a standpoint incorporating epistemic or intellectual as well as ethical and – possibly – irreducibly religious or theological dimensions. We cannot really understand, philosophically, the phenomenon of losing one’s faith unless we understand what it is, or may be, for an individual to *have* religious faith as a central element of their lives, as something that thoroughly characterizes their existence and habits of action.

Moreover, we can hardly understand these phenomena at all if our primary purposes are apologetic. As has sometimes been remarked, people never come as close to losing their faith as they do when desperately clinging to it – and engagement in apologetics may be seen as a form of such ultimately self-deceptive desperation. Instead of succumbing to the temptations of apologetics, we should seek a critical (and self-critical) understanding of what it means to hold and lose religious faith, and my suggestion in this paper is that this understanding can be best achieved by approaching these issues from a pragmatist standpoint – a standpoint that I find *inherently anti-apologetic*. It is to this firm rejection of any apologetic attitude that a truly pluralist worldview education should in my view transform us all.

**Sandra Laugier** (Paris 1st University)

*TV Series, Education and the New Ordinary*

**Emma Williams** (University of Warwick)

Mental Helth, Education and Narrative

<Abstract>

Governments and societies and around the world are currently concerned by the decline in young people’s mental health, as captured in large-scale studies and reported on widely by the media. The notion of mental health has recently found its way into education, with schools and other educational institutions now being called upon to protect and promote their students’ mental health. Therapeutic approaches and practices have in this way come to gain a new momentum in education. In this paper I will explore the role and significance of narrative in mental health education, in light of conceptions of therapy and the understanding of our lives as language beings. I will draw upon and consider intersections between accounts of narrative found in Jerome Bruner, Stanley Cavell, and Adam Phillips, a prominent psychoanalyst and author whose book ‘Terrors and Experts’ Cavell reviewed in 1999.

**Naoko Saito** (Kyoto University)

Cultivating the *Sapientist*: Democracy, Citizenship and the Possibilities of Pragmatism

<Abstract>

Today in the 21st century, we are confronted with issues that threaten the future of democracy – issues involving nuclear weapons, environmental destruction, poverty and exploitation, ethnic and religious tensions, and nationalism. To aggravate the situation, the pandemic of COVID-19 has drastically changed the world. Under these circumstances science and the humanities face the need to reconsider their mission from a global perspective. In solving global problems, science should join hands with the humanities – something that is required more than ever if we are to have an ethical perspective on how we should live. This is the very issue that John Dewey struggled with in the early 20th century, which he saw as the task of democracy and education. *How can philosophers, scientists, humanities and social science scholars, educators and citizens at all levels and together respond to the crisis in liberal democracy? How can such alignment contribute to education for citizenship?* These are the central questions I would like to pursue in this paper. In response, I shall try to explore the contemporary significance of Dewey’s pragmatism in its integrative approach to science and the humanities. I shall consider its implications for the cultivation of citizens as the task of democracy and education.

**Paul Standish** (UCL Institute of Education)

*Appropriations of Race*

<Abstract>

At a previous meeting that some of you attended, I spoke briefly about the series of television films, *Small Axe*, directed by Steve McQueen. McQueen is director of such films as *Twelve Years a Slave* and *Hunger*, as well as a winner of the prestigious Turner Prize for Art. In the present discussion, I shall make some reference to aspects of *Small Axe*, but this will be related to the idea expressed by Alain Lock, the philosopher associated especially with the Harlem Renaissance, that culture is appropriation. Appropriation is a matter of some contentiousness in matters of race. I want to consider this alongside contemporary concerns about White virtue signalling and the sensitivity that attaches to this. Together these ideas raise questions about nearness and neighbourliness – themes that surface, sometimes through their obvious absence, in the film series.