

# Editors' Introduction: Light For Ages

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*Volume 7 · Number 1 · 2023 · Pages 2 - 11*

In a matter of days after Dick died on July 4, 2022, Katie Terezakis emailed us to see whether we might be interested in co-editing a volume of *Dewey Studies* in his honor. Katie knew and admired the editor, Paul Cherlin, and he had reached out to her to say he hoped to dedicate an issue to Dick, and he was looking for a guest editor. Without giving it a moment's thought (and still blinded with grief), we both said yes, and Katie put us in touch with Paul. Thus began the project of assembling essays in honor of our teacher, mentor, and friend, Richard J. Bernstein.

The swiftness of this collection reflects the swell of emails, calls, and correspondences following Dick's death. Most of us knew he was ill, but few of us thought the end was so near. Many of us believed he would live forever, given his impossible energy and love of life. In the wake of his passing, a community of those touched by him seemed to spontaneously emerge in life and online, everyone abuzz with stories about his mentorship, his famous lines, his story-telling, his Brooklyn accent, his love of pickles. Friends from long ago and people we had not yet met emailed to say how bereft they felt. The collective grief seemed too large to contain. At the same time, the community of friends and scholars who took themselves to be indebted in one form or another to Dick reminded us all that we were not alone. Dick had a way of making everyone feel like family.

As we draft these opening remarks, much has already been written about Dick's life and his remarkable works in the days and months immediately after his death, including (in chronological order) Thomas Meyer's tribute in the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* on July 5, 2022, Giancarlo Bosetti's in the Italian forum *Reset Dialogues on Civilization*, Santiago Rey's in *El Pais*, Seyla Benhabib's in the *Boston Review*, and a *New Yorker* essay detailing Dick's last seminar on Hannah Arendt by Jordi Graupera on January 3, 2023.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Dick's philosophic impact reaches far and wide, as

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Meyer, "Kritischer Pragmatiker," *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, July 5, 2022, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/richard-bernstein-nachruf-philosoph-1.5615289>; Santiago Rey, "Richard J. Bernstein, el filósofo de los puentes," *El Pais*, July 10, 2022, <https://elpais.com/opinion/2022-07-10/richard-j-bernstein-el-filosofo-de-los-puentes.htm>; Giancarlo Bosetti, "Richard J. Bernstein (1932-2022)- The Great Legacy of American Pragmatism," *Reset Dialogues on Civilization*, July 6, 2022, <https://www.resetdoc.org/story/richard-j-bernstein-1932-2022-great-legacy-american-pragmatism/>; Seyla Benhabib, "Remembering Richard J. Bernstein," *Boston Review*, July 11, 2022, <https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/remembering-richard-j-bernstein>. Jordi Graupera, "A Philosophy Professor's Final Class," *The New Yorker*, January 2, 2023, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/annals-of-inquiry/a-philosophy-professors-final-class>.

evidenced, for example, in the following statement from Colombian former student and research assistant James King:

[his] innumerable trips around the world...led him to extend his bonds of friendship from Patagonia to Canada, from the former Yugoslavia to China and Japan. That is why it was not strange to see him dance tango in Buenos Aires with his beloved wife Carol or accompany a group of Monos de Calenda in Oaxaca—his philosophy was always outside, in the open air, in the streets and in the parks, in the sphere of the public where thought is built among many and where the common good comes before individual interests.<sup>2</sup>

Additional articles by Chris Long and Megan Craig, with Bernstein groups memorializing him online in New York, Beijing, Brazil, and other locations around the world, present many angles of the significance of Dick's imprint.<sup>3</sup>

The goal in assembling the essays in this special issue was to invite reflections on Dick – his work, life, influences, and his teaching – from scholars who knew and loved him. Upon emailing an invitation for contributions, our inboxes were flooded with affirmative replies and moving memories of Dick in various contexts across the globe. We were asking people to write about Dick in the midst of their own grief in having lost him – something that all found difficult and some found impossible. We left the parameters for these essays intentionally open, inviting personal reflections and scholarly engagements of any length, along with an invitation for photographs. The collection of writers in this volume spans temporally from Dick's years teaching at Yale beginning in 1954 (Edward S. Casey and Lorenzo Simpson) to his last seminars at the New School in 2022 (Olga Knizhnik). Spatially, they range across three continents, with contributions from scholars based in North America, South America, and Europe. This is by no means a comprehensive grouping, but it represents a part of the span and breadth of Dick's influence and the love he inspired in his students and colleagues alike. Our collection begins with Judith Friedlander's account of Dick's history of teaching at various institutions, and it ends with an interview

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<sup>2</sup> James King, "Richard J. Bernstein, the Bridge Philosophy," *pledgetimes.com*, July 10, 2022, <https://pledgetimes.com/richard-j-bernstein-the-bridge-philosopher/>.

<sup>3</sup> Megan Craig, "A Wishing Stone for Dick," *Erraticus*, August 9, 2022, <https://erraticus.co/2022/08/09/richard-bernstein-a-wishing-stone-for-dick-megan-craig/>;

Chris P. Long, "Bernstein and the Future of Democracy," July 16, 2022, <https://cplong.org/2022/07/bernstein-and-the-future-of-democracy/>.

conducted by Dmitri Nikulin, Dick's long-time colleague and friend at the New School. These pieces bookend the collected papers with a grounding look backwards at Dick's history and an invitation forward provided by Dick's own responses to questions about the future of pragmatism and the work left to do. We have organized the other papers in this volume into three thematic sections: 1) Memory, 2) Engagement, and 3) Critique. Though all of the essays in the volume evoke specific memories of Dick (many recalling his famous line "I only want the truth!", his distinctive voice, his black turtlenecks, his white hair), in the first section we include essays that remember Dick in light of his generosity as a teacher and a mentor. In fact, *generosity* might be the keyword of this section. It is a word that resurfaces continually in the papers collected here, and it relates both to Dick's spirit and his lifelong commitment to dialogue – his openness to others and his way of generating the right conditions for a special intimacy that made people feel seen and empowered. Dick encouraged his students to follow their own paths, to read texts with curiosity and good will, and to engage in conversations with humility and rigor. He championed students and urged them toward goals and projects that may have seemed initially out of reach. He was magnanimous with his introductions and took pride in connecting younger scholars with those more established in the field, creating unique and ever-expanding constellations of thinkers.

In our opening section of essays, Ed Casey sets the stage by recalling his first philosophy seminar with Dick at Yale University in 1959. Stressing the distinctive quality of Dick's teaching style, Casey elaborates how Dick helped his students find their own voices relative to the classic texts they studied together. Lorenzo Simpson recalls joining the picket line at Yale when Dick was a young teacher being denied tenure and, years later, listening to jazz with him in New York in 2019. David Carr recollects his first student experience at Yale when Dick assigned him a paper on Heidegger's notion of experience. Through this daunting task, Carr learned not only about a difficult subject, but, perhaps even more, about Dick's teaching and humanity, above all in the way Dick treated his students like colleagues. Cinzia Arruzza shares a beautiful memory of Dick and his wife, Carol, visiting Cinzia in Sicily. Her memory offers a touching account of the importance of contingency in Dick's thinking. Mary Rawlinson emphasizes Dick's "voracious curiosity," stressing the rarity of encountering a mentor like Dick in academia and pinpointing the moment he "adopted" her. Eduardo Mendieta remembers the crucial introductions to senior philosophers Dick afforded to him and details four principles of teaching and philosophizing that he learned from Dick, whose robust support of Mendieta's study

of Latin American liberation theology merged with critical theory presents one example of Dick's open-mindedness and inclusivity regarding different traditions and backgrounds. Rachael Cayley describes discovering Dick through his books before she encountered him in the classroom, and, as a professor of academic communication, she considers the influence of his writing style on her own sense of what philosophy is and who it might reach. Michael Weinman remembers his first classroom encounter with Dick as a graduate student at the New School in fall 2000 and their yearslong discussion of a single line in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, reflecting on Dick's approach to close reading as a life-long practice. Brendan Hogan recalls Dick describing himself as a "scavenger," elaborating the significance of that word in the context of Dick's teaching and writing. Megan Craig's paper celebrates Dick's critical refusals against the bureaucratic and myopic approaches to teaching and academia rampant and increasingly worsening over the past several decades, while Roy Ben-Shai considers Dick's teaching in light of an ethical imperative toward unconditional love.<sup>4</sup> Ben-Shai's essay reminds us that Dick urged his students to try to see what any given philosopher sees, instead of honing a critique of what they overlooked. Craig emphasizes the soulfulness of Dick's pedagogy, drawing on Dick's teaching and love of Plato's *Phaedrus*. Indeed, a Platonic *anamnesis* of the love and beauty in philosophy infected all of Dick's work, as these papers well verify.

The second section, *Engagement*, gathers together essays that consider Dick's work in light of other thinkers or topics. The keyword for this section could be *connection*. Dick was a genius at making connections – both in life and in his own texts. It was a part of the pluralistic spirit that he championed in the philosophies of the classic American Pragmatists and that he practiced in his own writing and research. He could see novel ways that disparate thinkers and different historical moments overlap and intersect, guiding his readers through centuries of philosophy with grace and grit. Some of the connections were so surprising that they upended traditional

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<sup>4</sup> Essays from Megan Craig, Judith Friedlander, and Roy Ben-Shai were presented at the October 14 memorial conference for Dick in New York, where their papers constituted a panel on Dick's pedagogy; as such, each one addresses important dimensions of the giving spirit and high-mindedness of Dick's teaching. The conference, "*A Life in Thought*," took place on October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2022, at the New School for Social Research, NY. Several of the speakers at the conference have included their remarks or new work in this volume, including Cinzia Arruzza, Roy Ben-Shai, Chiara Bottici, Megan Craig, Judith Friedlander, Philip Kitcher, Maria Pia Lara, Lucius Outlaw, Jr., and Scott Shushan.

demarcations and cast everything, suddenly, in a new light.<sup>5</sup> Nothing was off-limits for exploration or discussion, everything was interesting. The essays in this section share Dick's intrepid spirit, pairing him with figures he taught or wrote about.

Vincent Colapietro begins this section by asking "What must a Jewish person observe in order to be, in a minimal sense, an observant Jew?" Colapietro considers Dick's 1998 text, *Freud and the Legacy of Moses* as an indication of a career-spanning ethos central to Dick's work: a "will to tarry indefinitely with the other – on the other's terms." Colapietro connects this aspect of Dick's work to the Talmudic tradition of *le-didakh*, bringing out crucial aspects of Dick's Jewish "temperament." In a similar vein, Katie Terezakis argues for a connection between Dick's Jewish spirit and his "engaged fallibilistic pluralism," exploring aspects of his Jewish heritage together with texts by Freud, Arendt, and his close friend and colleague at the New School, Ágnes Heller. Monica Vilhauer describes a relationship between Dick's teaching style and Hans-Georg Gadamer's idea of dialogic play. Simona Forti considers the role of irony in Dick's thinking and his personal experience, drawing on Dick's analyses of Jonathan Lear and Richard Rorty to show the fundamental ties between Socratic irony and philosophy as a way of life. Philip Kitcher writes about friendship in relation to Dick, reflecting upon the impact of Dick's interventions on the trajectory of his own thinking about "the good life," and the ways that John Dewey's stress on social development helpfully augments a Millian fixation on individuality and freedom. Scott Shushan's paper analyzes Bernstein's reputation as a bridge builder, a moniker Dick rejected for the same reasons he resisted the phrase "melting pot," both images suggesting a collapse of important differences.<sup>6</sup> Shushan recounts Bernstein's core philosophic commitments and celebrates how Dick's philosophy was entwined with a close, personal relationship. Ramón Del Castillo, though he does not foreground a particular thinker in relation to Dick, considers Dick's style of dialogue and philosophizing in light of its inherent musicality and, specifically, its relationship to

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<sup>5</sup> See, as one example, the startling juxtapositions in *Praxis & Action*, where Dick considers the nature of action across the traditions of Marxism, existentialism, pragmatism, and analytic philosophy, analyzing Marx, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Sartre, Peirce, Dewey, Carnap, Wittgenstein, Strawson, and Charles Taylor all in one text. Richard J. Bernstein, *Praxis & Action: Contemporary Philosophies of Human Activity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Dick's critique of the concept of the "melting pot" in his essay, "Engaged Fallibilistic Pluralism," *Thinking the Plural: Richard J. Bernstein and the Expansion of American Philosophy*, ed. Marcia Morgan and Megan Craig (New York: Lexington Books, 2017) 223 ff. For his critique of "bridge," see "The Romance of Philosophy," in *Pragmatic Encounters* (London & New York: Routledge, 2016), 16.

twentieth century avant-garde music. Finally, in this section, Cæcilie Varslev-Pedersen draws out Dick's complicated, yet ultimately generative relationship with Kierkegaard. She argues that a chapter on Kierkegaard in Dick's book on *Ironic Life* turns out to say a lot more about Dick's authorship as a whole than one might otherwise expect. Such surprise "engagements" in Dick's thinking continue to delight his students and readers as they discover new insights in his rich *oeuvre*.

Our third section, *Critique*, brings together papers that simultaneously celebrate and challenge Dick, pushing his work into new areas. This group of essays both explains Dick's methods of critique and brings them to bear on his work. If the keywords of the first sections could be "generosity" and "connection," the *topos* of this section might be "agon," understood in the joyful and exciting way that Dick invoked that term. Each of the papers in this section elaborates some of Dick's central commitments or seeks to engage with Dick on topics he is no longer here to discuss. As such, they invite us to continue the work of interpreting and expanding his texts and bringing them into conversation with new audiences. As Dick taught us, the work of dialogue is never finished, and critique is a crucial part of any honest and open discussion in which we take one another seriously.

Olga Knizhnik, Dick's last research assistant, begins this section by describing some of Dick's basic philosophical commitments and relating them to influences from Dewey, Gadamer, and Arendt. Knizhnik points us forward by underscoring aspects of Dick's posthumously published, final text, *The Vicissitudes of Nature*. Rick Lee and Chris Long's co-authored essay centers on friendship and the "joyful agonism" they find in Dick's pluralism. Their work helpfully differentiates between agon and antagonism, drawing out the form of respectful critique Dick championed and practiced in his own work. Lucius Outlaw recalls his time spent teaching alongside Dick at Haverford College, and he laments a lack of engagement with Black thinkers in the American Pragmatist tradition across Dick's published works. Outlaw envisions the work left to do to bring Dick's works into conversation with critical race theory and an evolving and more inclusive account of the pragmatic tradition. Chiara Bottici's paper chronicles the development of Dick's famous pragmatism course at the New School, outlining the relatively dramatic changes he made to the course description and reading list as he added pragmatist philosophers who center race and gender with each of the recent iterations of the course over the past several years.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> We recall Dick talking about his interest in the work of Ruth Anna Putnam in a recorded interview we conducted with him in November of 2017 in New York. During the interview, Dick said he

Bottici also demonstrates the manner and extent to which Dick learned from others in the fine details of the philosophical giants studied and written about by his closest friends. Marcia Morgan's essay takes up a related theme by showing a concrete example of Bernstein's method of critique as a form of engaged fallibilistic pluralism through his willingness and eagerness to revise previous positions and frameworks in light of what he learned from his colleagues and close friends. Morgan draws on the example of his collegial friendship with Ágnes Heller and frames the analysis of Dick's work within an ethical-aesthetic concept of a life of the beautiful. Christoph Menke offers a critique of liberalism that resonates with Dick's Deweyan argument on the necessary radicalization of liberalism. Menke's argument about the inherent contradictions within subjective rights reaches some resolution by thinking through Dick's metaphors of "constellation" and "force-field." María Pía Lara concludes this section by delving into the deep influences from Hannah Arendt and John Dewey found in Dick's work. She demonstrates how Dick's selection of Dewey for his dissertation in 1958 (at a time when Dewey was disregarded as a worthy subject of study) afforded Dick "a broad critical opportunity to question the conventional way of doing philosophy."

Together, the sections on Memory, Engagement, and Critique highlight different aspects of Dick's unique philosophical style and bring together scholars across generations to celebrate and think alongside him. We see this work as just the beginning, and we hope this volume of *Dewey Studies* serves as a moving tribute for those who knew and loved Dick, as well as an introduction to Dick's life and philosophy for generations of philosophers yet to come. Dick's thinking and pedagogy show how alive he was to learning from those around him and to the ongoing practices of education and critique. Dick wanted to learn more. He saw himself as an unfinished project, just as he saw philosophy as a story that requires endless revision and elaboration. The open access format of *Dewey Studies* seems exactly the right model to foster pluralism and to disseminate Dick's work to a broad audience in the spirit of public dialogue, collaboration, and radical democracy.

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planned to write something about her work (independently of Hilary Putnam). The following year he published "Ruth Anna Putnam: A Pragmatic Thinker for Our Time," confessing in the opening paragraph, "Even if we focus on the renaissance of pragmatism in the latter part of the twentieth century and the early decades of the twenty-first century, philosophers interested in the varieties of pragmatism normally direct our attention to such thinkers as Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam, and Robert Brandom. We neglect the many women philosophers who have developed pragmatic themes in their philosophical work. When I speak of 'we' in this context, I include myself." Bernstein, "Ruth Anna Putnam: A Pragmatic Thinker for Our Time," *Pragmatism Today*, vol. 9, issue 1 (2018), 140.



We knew that working on this volume in honor of Dick would be fulfilling, challenging, and poignant in a time when we feel his absence so acutely. We did not anticipate how joyful it would feel to collect these authors and their works together in one place, drawing us all closer in our memories of Dick. What is clear from the various ways that people have approached writing about him is that he made lasting and crucial differences in the lives of each of us. He was irreplaceable. We have all struggled in our own ways with the question of how to go on in the wake of his death, particularly in the field of academic philosophy where he stood as a beacon of goodness and civility. He created and sustained a remarkably *humane* department against all odds in a time of neoliberal consolidation of education – a development that has only worsened since the days Dick rescued the New School philosophy department from near collapse. Many of us continued on in the field as a direct result of his encouragement and the model of a well-rounded and well-lived life that he supplied. We believe these texts reflect his enthusiasm, his relentlessly effervescent spirit, and the sense of a teacher who found such obvious joy in the works and successes of his students. We hope these texts spur new work in new areas, elaborating the constellations Dick inspired and generating ever new kinds of intrepid pluralism. We all felt we were, in some respect, his children. With gratitude we invite readers to remember and think alongside Dick as we mourn his loss, and as we embark on the daunting, but exciting, work of thinking with him in his absence toward a new, unscripted future.

Perhaps the preeminent philosophic conception of futurity is Hannah Arendt's theory of natality, one cherished by Dick because of its emphasis on new beginnings. Dick was highly critical of any philosophic obsession with death, for example, Heidegger's focus on "being-towards-death," and so Dick uttered repeatedly in his final months of life that he instead always would center on life, even when confronted with its end. For this reason, Dick also frequently quoted Spinoza at the end of his life, reminding us that, "A free man thinks of nothing less than of death, and his wisdom is a meditation on life, not on death."<sup>8</sup> This follows Dick's lifelong quest to see the best in things, to find the light. One of his favorite passages was Arendt's opening to her book, *Men in Dark Times*:

That even in the darkest of times we have the right to expect some illumination, and that such illumination might well come less from theories and concepts than from the uncertain, flickering, and often

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<sup>8</sup> Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Edwin Curley (London: Penguin Books, 1996), IV, P. 67.

weak light that some men and women, in their lives and their works, will kindle under almost all circumstances and shed over the time span that was given them on earth...<sup>9</sup>

After recollecting this passage in the context of the severe challenges presented by the current social-political moment during an interview in 2017, Dick said, “We need more *light*.”<sup>10</sup> He provided so many of us with light in dark times. The aim of this special issue is to keep shining that light, motivating new readers to think alongside Dick, and continuing the tradition of the independence of thought for which he fought and to which he committed his life.

Megan Craig and Marcia Morgan

January 2023

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<sup>9</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1983) ix.

<sup>10</sup> Filmed interview with Dick in New York in November 2017 to mark the publication of *Thinking the Plural: Richard J. Bernstein and the Expansion of American Philosophy*.