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Introduction by John M. Cooper

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Introduction by John M. Cooper, University of Wisconsin, Emeritus

What is it about Scandinavians and Woodrow Wilson? He had no ties of ancestry or culture or any special affinity with that part of the world. Yet the two scholars who have delved most deeply and incisively into “this man’s mind and spirit” (Churchill’s phrase) have been Scandinavians. In 1988, Niels Aage Thorsen, who studied at Princeton with Arthur Link, published *The Political Thought of Woodrow Wilson 1875-1910*,¹ and now three decades later, Trygve Throntveit has published *Power without Victory: Woodrow Wilson and the American Internationalist Experiment*. As the titles suggest, the two books are different in scope, and the authors are contrasting types of Scandinavians. Thorsen, who died several years ago, was a gloomy Dane, who seemed foreordained to play Hamlet. Throntveit is a Norwegian-American from Minnesota, whose contrasting good humor would fit him better for the cast of “A Prairie Home Companion.” Of the two, Throntveit’s book, which is reviewed here, perhaps suits its subject better because it is more ambitious in scope and presents a more controversial portrait and analysis.

The best indication of the controversy of both book and subject comes from the three reviews here. At the risk of evoking blank stares from readers under a certain age, I would liken these reviews to the movie reviews done on television by the late critics Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert from the 1970s to 1990s. They gave their ratings with their thumbs—two thumbs up, one up one down, two down. Here we have three ratings, one thumb down, one wavering between up and down, and one up. Each of these reviewers rates the strengths and weaknesses of this book not only on different scales (direction of the thumb) but on different grounds.

The longest and most negative review comes from Ross Kennedy. He finds little to like in Throntveit’s book. The effort to link Wilson’s thought to William James’s Pragmatism strikes him as unimpressive. The treatment of Wilson’s neutrality policies, war aims, and vision behind the League of Nations strikes him as unconvincing. In all, Kennedy dismisses Wilson as “a traditional statesman” who disguised himself in highfalutin rhetoric and was animated far more by “hypocrisy . . . than pragmatism.” This view bears some resemblance to the depiction of Wilson in Patricia O’Toole’s recently published book *The Moralists: Woodrow Wilson and the World He Made*, which one reviewer said would have been better entitled “the hypocrite” (which greatly overstates O’Toole’s critical stance).²

The mixed review comes from Adriane Lentz-Smith, who finds both good qualities and a huge shortcoming in this book. She finds the link between Wilson and Pragmatism convincing, and she likes Throntveit’s departure from ‘realist’ critics who deplore Wilson’s internationalism as naïve and those who dismiss it as a cynical cover for American imperialism. She finds the book deficient, however, in its treatment of Wilson and race. Instead of seeing his racial views and actions as a moral and philosophical failure, the way Throntveit does, she judges them as the products of a committed white supremacist. Here, it seems to me there may be a distinction without a difference. Lentz-Smith characterizes Wilson on race as another episode in “white

¹ Niels Aage Thorsen, *The Political Thought of Woodrow Wilson 1875-1910* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

² Patricia O’Toole, *The Moralists: Woodrow Wilson and the World He Made* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018); the review is found at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/01/books/review-moralist-woodrow-wilson-patricia-otoole.html>.

supremacy's pervasiveness and compatibility with the American project." Is that really different from Throntveit's judgment?

Finally, the positive review comes from John Thompson. He praises the book as "intensively researched and beautifully written." He finds the matter of intellectual influences on Wilson more problematic than Throntveit does, but he does give him credit for having dug deep for evidence in Wilson's annotations in books he read and in personal encounters. This is a commendable display of hard evidence of the kind that many intellectual historians ignore or even disdain. On race, Thompson finds Throntveit's treatment "much more insightful and balanced than most discussions of the subject." If I may be pardoned for inserting myself here, I agree with Thompson and urge anyone interested in this to read pages 89-90 in Throntveit's book in particular. Thompson does take Throntveit to task for finding Wilson's part in the repression of civil liberties during the war "baffling." Thompson goes further and says, "But it may be a general rule that historians who find phenomena 'baffling' need to re-examine their premises." *Mea culpa*—I am with Throntveit, and I guess premise-examining will become my new pastime.

In all, these varying reviews are thought-provoking, and they should impel anyone interested in this subject to read this book forthwith. My only quibble with these reviews, aside from my undisguised disagreements, is that they do not deal much with the larger subject of internationalism and its life after Wilson. Throntveit has incisive and thought-provoking things to say about those, too. Given the current hue and cry about internationalism versus 'America First' (a term Wilson coined), this book demands reading not only for itself but also for its timeliness.

Participants:

Trygve Throntveit is Dean's Fellow for Civic Studies at the University of Minnesota College of Education and Human Development, where he edits *The Good Society: A Journal of Civic Studies*. He is the author of several articles and book chapters on the history of American politics, diplomacy, and social thought, and the winner of the American Political Science Association's Richard E. Neustadt Award (from the Presidents and Executive Politics Section) for *Power without Victory*. His first book was *William James and the Quest for an Ethical Republic* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), and his current projects include *The Essential Woodrow Wilson*, co-edited with John Milton Cooper, Jr. (Princeton University Press), and two book-length projects, respectively and tentatively titled *Pragmatism and Civic Renewal* and *The Last Internationalist: Quincy Wright and the Alternative American Century*.

John M. Cooper is Professor emeritus at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and author of *The Warrior and the Priest* (Harvard University Press, 1983), *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), and *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography* (Knopf, 2009).

Ross A. Kennedy is the author of *The Will to Believe: Woodrow Wilson, World War I, and America's Strategy for Peace and Security* (Kent State, 2009), which won the Scott Bills Prize in Peace History. He also edited *A Companion to Woodrow Wilson* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013) and has written extensively on American politics and foreign policy during World War I. Kennedy's current project, entitled *The United States and the Origins of World War II*, analyzes how the policies of the United States contributed to the dynamics of Great Power

politics from 1918 to 1939. He is a professor of history at Illinois State University and chairs the History Department.

Adriane Lentz-Smith is Associate Professor of History, African & African-American Studies, and Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies at Duke University. The author of *Freedom Struggles: African Americans and World War I* (Harvard, 2009), she studies histories of the United States & the World and the black freedom struggle in the long twentieth century. She is currently working on a new book, “Afterlives: Sagon Penn, State Violence, and the Twilight of Civil Rights,” on police violence in late-Cold-War San Diego.

John A. Thompson gained his BA and Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge where he is now Emeritus Reader in American History and an Emeritus Fellow of St Catharine’s College. His publications include *Reformers and War: American Progressive Publicists and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), *Woodrow Wilson* (London: Longman, 2002) and many articles on the history of U.S. foreign policy. His latest book, *A Sense of Power: The Roots of America’s Global Role* (Cornell University Press, 2015) was the subject of an H-Diplo/ISSF Roundtable in 2016, <http://issforum.org/roundtables/8-15-sense-of-power>.

Review by Adriane Lentz-Smith, Duke University

When Oswald Garrison Villard, grandson of William Lloyd Garrison and founding member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), met with Woodrow Wilson in fall 1913, he spent an hour behind closed doors discussing the President's commitment to his African American constituents. Wilson assured Villard that "he was working for the colored people steadily" but that his efforts were hampered by his relationship to his own party as well as to his Republican opposition. "You know I came to Washington with the reputation of being a schoolmaster, a taskmaster, without good red blood in my veins," he explained. "[A]nd I have had to overcome a great deal of prejudice among congressman and senators to prove to them to that I was not what they thought." His primary concern, he told Villard, was to make the Democrats "a great instrument of public welfare and advancement." In a party dominated by senators and congressman who had built their power through the turn-of-the-century white supremacy campaigns, a schoolmaster did not establish manly bonafides by making the Negro problem a central issue of public welfare.¹

The Woodrow Wilson of Trygve Throntveit's *Power without Victory* carries his scholarly background as an asset, not a burden: he has good red blood in his veins and a healthy dose of Jamesian pragmatism in his mind. His heart, we find, is divided. Building on the argument and insight that "pragmatism, progressivism, and internationalism were closely related ideas," the book offers an intellectual biography of Wilson as Progressive and pragmatist (19). It traces assiduously and convincingly the influence of philosopher William James on Progressive intellectuals, broadly, and, more specifically, on the conception and institutionalization of Wilson's internationalism. James comes through paths direct and indirect: from the advice and writings of James's co-thinkers and acolytes like John Dewey, Felix Frankfurter, and *New Republic* co-founders Walter Lippmann and Herbert Croly; the challenges of intellectuals and critics like W.E.B. Du Bois and Randolph Bourne; and Wilson's direct engagement with James's philosophy. For all their differences, these and other Progressive reformers shared James's orientation towards social experience as the base of philosophical truth, contingency over theory in assessing the past and present, and a commitment to "participatory, deliberative democracy" as an ideal political form (83). At its best, Wilson's 'New Freedom' promised to root this philosophy in the practice of government.

The League of Nations promised to do the same, and it is the exploration of this promise that truly animates *Power without Victory*. Although the interdependence of Progressivism at home and abroad makes it necessary to understand how pragmatism infused the President's domestic politics, the book focuses more on Wilson and the world. It provides a careful exploration of Wilsonian internationalism not as "brain-addling effects of the Cold War" (perhaps my favorite phrase in the entire book) have reconstructed it, but as Wilson originally developed it (306). The book does not jump right into World War I. Rather, it traces Wilson's thinking about the nation's role in the world from the Spanish-Cuban and Philippines wars on through the Great War that came to define his presidency. Whether he sought to reason through U.S. invasions and occupations of both sides of Hispaniola, the incursions into revolutionary Mexico, or the slow drift away from neutrality into combat, Throntveit writes, "Wilson believed that American diplomacy ought to be every bit as democratic as American domestic policy, and work just as hard to expand its scope" (103).

¹ Oswald Garrison Villard, "Woodrow Wilson and the Negro," *Crisis* 45 (December 1938), 384.

His two terms as president—and the feedback, sometimes solicited but often not, from those pragmatist Progressives who functioned as his Greek chorus—might have changed the details of his vision or how he sought to implement it, but the underlying conviction remained the same. When he called for a “Peace without Victory” after the war, some mechanism of collective power in which “the people of the United States” played a large role, he saw its pursuit as an extension of “the very principles and purposes of their polity” (210). The book argues that this belief and the League it begat were neither as naïve as international relations realists would have it, nor as cynical as critics of American empire might claim. Instead, the book portrays Wilsonian internationalism as both idealistic and practical, consistent and adaptable, balancing faith and empirical assessment. In this Jamesian sensibility and sensible-ness, the book finds much to admire.

For all its care with Wilson, the book struggles with him, too. This comes as no surprise; Wilson is not easy. Others scholars have gotten a handle on Wilson by interpreting him through one aspect of his character—for instance, John Morton Blum’s slim volume focuses on a faith that alternated between rigid moralizing and capacious moral decency—or using a foil to bring him into stark relief—John Milton Cooper’s Woodrow Wilson, for example, gains coherence through his contrast with Theodore Roosevelt.² In recent years, scholars have tended to either disaggregate the ‘Wilsonian moment’ from Wilson himself or to focus on the Wilson administration writ large, with the understanding that ideas and policies emerge from a constellation of thought and actors.³ *Power without Victory* combines multiple approaches: it uses pragmatism as its point of access for Wilson and other Jamesian thinkers for his constellation of influence. It does so expertly. Yet, for all its fine and nuanced argumentation, the book runs aground when it aims to tackle Wilson and white supremacy.

Indeed, the book talks little of white supremacy as a system of gendered and racialized power that organized thought, relationships, and resource allocation. Instead it treats Wilson’s racism as “a certain blindness,” to use a phrase from James that supplies the title of chapter three (85). Blindness and the accompanying Jamesian term, “affliction” provide odd metaphors here; they naturalize and pathologize something that was socially and politically produced. In the book’s telling, Wilson’s racism and apathy about American apartheid was “a moral and political failure of terrible consequence,” certainly, but it does not structure fundamentally how he engaged the world (87). It does not even make him a white supremacist, since the book places white supremacy in the realm of “racial views” rather actual than law and governance—as an unfortunate idea rather than a governing ideology (91). Racist though he may have been, Wilson is absolved of the greater sin of white supremacy because he did not believe in immutable biological inferiority nor obsess about Negro domination with the monomania of demagogues like Mississippi Senator James K. Vardaman or South Carolina’s Pitchfork Ben Tillman. In other words, one might say, he is no more of a white supremacist than

² John Morton Blum, *Woodrow Wilson and the Politics of Morality* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1956); John Milton Cooper, *The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

³ Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Eric Yellin, *Racism in the Nation’s Service: Government Workers and the Color Line in Woodrow Wilson’s America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

the average southern moderate—which, a southern historian would be quick to point out, is highly white supremacist indeed.

Perhaps blindness is a useful metaphor after all. Blind adherence to a white supremacist order is little different from its active championing. Most folks in the South were invested in this order and no more thought about it, in the words of historian Timothy Tyson, “than a fish might discuss the wetness of water.”⁴ Many white folks beyond the South approved of Jim Crow if they thought of it at all, and adopted it when they found it useful. Clutching his blind spot like armor, Wilson forged ahead by painting his cabinet members as the leaders and himself as the led. He also steadfastly refused to engage with African Americans as anything other than abstractions: black journalist and activist William Monroe Trotter tried to engage him red-blooded man to red-blooded man, and it went so poorly that historians are still talking about the conversation a century later (97). Like many white Americans, the President was a white supremacist. To argue this does not serve to make him unique, nor simply work to dub him a hypocrite—that favorite word of newly ‘woke’ undergraduates everywhere. Rather, it speaks to white supremacy’s pervasiveness and compatibility with the American project. It speaks to the limited commons in Wilson’s common counsel.

Conceding Wilson’s white supremacy raises more interesting questions about liberalism and liberal internationalism than does trying to argue it away. Is white supremacy’s pervasiveness symptomatic of an issue with liberalism itself? We might ask, as does Uday Singh Mehta, whether “the universalistic theoretical framework of liberalism” contains within it some kind of “politically exclusionary impulse.”⁵ Or we instead might follow Nikhil Pal Singh in positing that liberalism poses the conundrum of “being not only ill-equipped to combat white supremacist notions of peoplehood, but invested in their reproduction.”⁶ If so, whither William James? And how might we reinvigorate the American internationalist experiment without reinforcing the racialized and gendered “preconditions” that Mehta and Singh identify—“cultural, historical, material, biological, and psychological” signifiers—that have “delimited” liberal conceptions of a worthwhile subject?⁷

Questions like these take us beyond Wilson’s legacies into a bigger rumination about what has been and what remains possible. They make Wilson and the world in which he thought and acted feel even more complex—dauntingly so—and the philosophy that James produced seem even more hopeful—bracingly so. If we are to follow James’s instructions “to consider the possible as well as the proven,” then I choose to believe that liberalism might yet be equipped to counter white supremacist notions of peoplehood (298). Wilson was not

⁴ Timothy Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 20.

⁵ Uday S. Singh Meta, “Liberal Strategies of Exclusion,” in Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 59; see also Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 29.

⁶ Singh, *Black Is a Country*, 28.

⁷ Singh, 29.

the man for the job, but as *Power Without Victory* convincingly argues, he left us some tools to get the job done.

Review by Ross A. Kennedy, Illinois State University

Trygve Throntveit's *Power without Victory* offers a new interpretation of Woodrow Wilson's internationalism during World War I, focusing on the philosophical underpinnings of the President's diplomacy. Throntveit argues that pragmatism lay at the heart of Wilson's political thought and deeply informed his statecraft, including especially his plan for the League of Nations. Few scholars, to be sure, would doubt that pragmatism influenced Wilson's political outlook and policies to some degree. But Throntveit's book overstates the pragmatic character of Wilson's wartime diplomacy. In so doing, it puts forwards an unpersuasive account of the President's neutrality policy and war aims. The analysis of the Covenant of the League of Nations exaggerates the limits it placed on national sovereignty and fails to explain the commitments imposed upon the United State by its most important provision, Article 10. While Throntveit views Wilson as a pragmatic visionary, the book obscures Wilsonianism more than it illuminates it.

Since Throntveit is an historian of William James's thought, it is not surprising that the best part of his book is his chapter on pragmatism and the progressive era.¹ "Pragmatist progressives" like John Dewey and Walter Lippmann, he asserts, believed that policies, institutions, and ideas "were historical, fallible, and improvable; politics . . . always would and should be an experiment" (19). James himself was a "self-proclaimed 'radical empiricist' who argued that "ideas.... *derived* both meaning and value from their origins and verification in human activity" (20). Ideas that were verified by experience became "truth" for people, but only provisionally because as one acted on those "truths" circumstances inevitably changed, creating new "facts" that could evolve into new "truths" for individuals (23). James expressed this line of thinking most succinctly in his concept of "the will to believe: the notion that belief in an idea often creates the conditions necessary to confirm it, by inspiring actions that bring them about" (24). Progressive reformers and social activists embraced this ethic, Throntveit emphasizes, as they perceived that reality was not static, "that change is real and that people can consciously order their lives to direct it, "guided by "a democratic sensibility" (46).

According to Throntveit, this pragmatic political outlook shaped the policies of Wilson as a political leader. He begins his analysis of Wilson and World War I, which forms the bulk of the book, by arguing that Wilson, like other pragmatist progressives, perceived that global interdependence made the war in Europe "uncontainable" (125). To establish a lasting peace, the world needed to substitute "flexible institutions" of international co-operation and collective security for the anarchy of a system based upon unlimited national sovereignty (125 and 170-171, 176). Wilson also perceived that European leaders failed to recognize the need for international reform because they deemed "conflicts of national interest unavoidable and use of force to resolve them rational" (131). So long as they continued to think this way, the current war would persist and future conflagrations were bound to occur.

Therefore, Throntveit asserts, Wilson "set to work changing minds" (131). During the 1914-1917 period, Wilson pursued this objective by proposing a plan of political co-operation and conflict resolution for the Western Hemisphere and, more so, by remaining neutral in the war and mediating an end to the it on the basis of a draw. Throntveit concedes that Wilson was biased towards the Allies to some degree, stating that Wilson saw France and Britain as democratic and as the "likeliest partners" in achieving international reform

¹ Trygve Throntveit, *William James and the Quest for an Ethical Republic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

(146). Wilson also feared that a German victory would force America into defense measures threatening to its republican ideals. Despite these sentiments, argues Throntveit, Wilson did the best he could under the circumstances to stay impartial toward the belligerents and he approached neutrality policy in a “philosophically pragmatist” way (134). He did not forcefully confront Britain over its maritime system, which interfered with U.S. trade bound for neutral states near Germany, for several reasons: he thought the United State benefitted from trade with the Allies; he did not think it “fair” to deprive Britain of its “maritime advantage when Germany controlled most of northwestern Europe;” he made a distinction “between illegally boarding ships and illegally invading countries,” and, Throntveit suggests, there was not much Wilson could do to persuade Britain to modify its blockade in any event (134, 150). Wilson similarly practiced “pragmatist diplomacy” toward Germany’s submarine warfare campaign, engaging in “deliberative discourse” with Berlin rather than war and tying his defense of American neutral rights to the larger goal of preserving international law (144, 142).

There are several problems with this interpretation of Wilson’s neutrality policies. The British did not simply illegally board U.S. ships. They also threatened the lives of American citizens because they illegally mined the North Sea—something Wilson knew about but failed to protest. The President also had tools available to coerce Britain into respecting American rights. These included denying port clearance to British merchant ships and discouraging U.S. banks from extending credits to the British government. Indeed, Wilson reached for such coercive instruments in late 1916, when he wanted to pressure Britain into accepting his mediation of the war. At the same time, far from engaging in “deliberative discourse” with Germany over submarine warfare, Wilson defined the American rights at stake in the submarine crisis in the most inflated way possible, tried to coerce Germany into respecting them, and rejected German proposals to safeguard American vessels from attack. However much the President tried to frame his policies as the efforts of a neutral trying to serve humanity’s interests, in reality his actions clearly aligned the United States with the Allies.²

Wilson’s approach to mediation contradicts Throntveit’s narrative. A truly pragmatic diplomacy aimed at achieving international reform would have made mediation efforts an example of cooperative, deliberative statesmanship in action. The Woman’s Peace Party (WPP) led by Jane Addams, who is identified by Throntveit as a leading pragmatist progressive, embraced this position. Its representatives urged Wilson to assemble a conference of neutral nations to offer “continuous mediation” of the war.³ Such a conference would develop proposals for negotiations, mobilize public opinion for peace, and provide the belligerents with a showcase of international cooperation. William Jennings Bryan, Wilson’s secretary of state, also saw no

² See Rodney Carlisle, *Sovereignty at Sea: U.S. Merchant Ships and American Entry into World War I* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009), 20-21; Thomas A. Bailey and Paul. B. Ryan, *The Lusitania Disaster: An Episode in Modern Warfare and Diplomacy* (New York: Free Press, 1975), 31-32; John. W. Coogan, *The End of Neutrality: The United States, Britain, and Maritime Rights, 1899-1915* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1981), 203-7; Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: Campaigns for Progressivism and Peace, 1916-1917* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 165-289. On the submarine crisis, Link has the most detailed narrative, although I do not agree with his interpretation of events. See Link, *Wilson: The Struggle for Neutrality, 1914-1915* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960); Link, *Wilson: Confusions and Crises, 1915-1916* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964); and Link, *Campaigns for Progressivism and Peace*.

³ Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 50-52.

point in waiting for the belligerents to ask for mediation; the United States should constantly press for it because the belligerents themselves were too caught up in emotions of hate and fear to ask for mediation themselves. After the German attack upon the *Lusitania*, moreover, Bryan appealed to Wilson to state a willingness to investigate factual disputes concerning the incident—in effect to invoke the principle behind the ‘cooling off’ treaties signed by the administration with thirty countries. This would de-escalate the crisis, show that America was willing to put its ideas about international reform into practice, and, Bryan argued, “might even exert a profound influence upon the making of the treaty between belligerent nations at the end of the war.”⁴ Wilson, however, rejected all of Bryan’s recommendations as well as the tactic of ‘continuous mediation.’ He opted instead to threaten Germany over its submarine warfare and, from late 1914 to late 1916, to delay a mediation bid until the military fortunes of the Allies improved. Throntveit considers the President’s choices pragmatic, but the policies proposed by the WPP and Bryan—proposals Throntveit ignores in his narrative—fit the author’s definition of pragmatic diplomacy much better than Wilson’s.

Throntveit’s analysis of Wilson’s war aims and policies after April 1917 is also questionable. He argues that despite entering the war, Wilson remained a pragmatist because he called upon Americans to “fight without rancor” and because his peace program, outlined in his Fourteen Points address, was designed to foster self-government around the globe and to create a new cooperative order, the league of nations, that would allow “all peoples . . . to live on equal terms of liberty and safety with one another” (255). In the very act of proposing such a “radical experiment in international governance,” emphasizes Throntveit, Wilson aimed to spark “the world’s will to believe in its possibility” (242).

The means to generate this belief, however, included more than just Wilson’s pronouncements. They also involved warfighting—defeating Germany’s armies in order to coerce the German people into deposing their existing government and accepting Wilson’s peace program. Throntveit sees this component of Wilson’s wartime diplomacy as completely consistent with pragmatism because Imperial Germany represented the “doctrine of unlimited national sovereignty” that blocked the achievement of a more co-operative world. Its existence and the victories of its armies made it less likely that people would believe in the project of international reform and invited “a resurgence of falsely confident militarism, dooming democracy in Germany and all Europe” (239, 260). Hence, Wilson demanded “a crushing defeat for Germany’s militarist master class” and its removal from power by the German people, who would presumably replace it with a deliberative democracy (260).

Important components of Wilson’s Germany policy are missing from this depiction, and they undermine Throntveit’s argument about Wilson’s pragmatism. First, the author does not mention the fact that Wilson’s stance toward Germany closed off the possibility of any negotiations with the Reich. Indeed, Wilson did everything possible to sabotage talks with the Germans. He rejected the Petrograd Soviet’s call for a peace of no annexations, no indemnities, and self-determination; denied passports to American socialists hoping to attend the Stockholm conference, a socialist initiative aimed in part at engaging the German left in peace talks; rebuffed Pope Benedict XV’s proposal for negotiations essentially based on a return to the status quo ante bellum; urged the British not to pursue peace feelers from Germany in September 1917; and rejected the

⁴ William Jennings Bryan to Woodrow Wilson, 3 June 1915, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, ed. Arthur S. Link, et al., 69 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966-1994), 33:323. *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* will henceforth be abbreviated *PWW*.

Bolshevik invitation to participate in peace talks with the Germans at Brest-Litovsk.⁵ Whether one sees Wilson's belligerency as strategically sound or as needlessly prolonging the war, it did not in either case accord with the pragmatist ethic of practicing deliberative 'common council' in politics, no matter how eloquently Wilson invoked the idea in his speeches (48). In sharp contrast to actually acting on a belief in the possibility of a new world order of engagement and cooperation, Wilson's German policy much more so followed the logic that total war required a total victory, including the extinction of the enemy's political system.

Throntveit also does not discuss the fact that Wilson's German policy aimed at more than overthrowing Germany's autocracy. It targeted the psyche of the German people as well, since Wilson believed they were complicit in their government's crimes. Ordinary Germans seemed excited by their government's conquests, Wilson observed in June 1917, and their elected Reichstag endorsed the Kaiser's aggression against Russia. This lust for conquest meant that the rise of democracy alone would not be enough to make Germany a responsible member of the new international society Wilson wanted to create. The Germans also needed to suffer a painful defeat so as to purge them of their affinity for aggression. "There would be, there," the president speculated, "a guarantee much more serious . . . than all the declarations which could be obtained from Germany and written into the peace treaty." A policy based in part upon deterrence through punishment was hardly pragmatic; British leaders—statesmen wedded to the norms of the existing international system—had viewed the German problem essentially the same way since 1914. Other pragmatists, revealingly, thought Wilson's approach to Germany self-defeating. "What terms of peace have you in mind that would suffice to teach Germany that aggression does not pay," George Santayana asked Wilson's supporters at the *New Republic*, "while not inflicting any wound . . . which would rankle and call for revenge?" Even if Germany did democratize at the point of America's guns, the antiwar journalist Randolph Bourne doubted it would be a peaceful state. On the contrary, "A Germany forced to be democratic under the tutelage of a watchful and victorious Entente would . . . be a constant menace to the peace of Europe."⁶

The capstone to Throntveit's argument about the pragmatic character of Wilson's diplomacy is his treatment of the League of Nations. The Covenant of the League, according to Throntveit, created "a deliberate, remarkably equalitarian international polity, requiring significant concessions of sovereignty from members in order to facilitate cooperative change" (10). On the one hand, despite a "general rule of unanimous decisions," the Covenant established a robust collective security regime. Article 10 committed members "to resist unilateral force as a mechanism of change;" Article 16, which stated that states violating the Covenant's conflict resolution procedures would face sanctions, constituted a "strong guarantee of collective defense" (15,

⁵ Ross A. Kennedy, *The Will to Believe: Woodrow Wilson, World War I, and America's Strategy for Peace and Security* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2009), 128-145; Rex A. Wade, *The Russian Search for Peace: February-October 1917* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), 62, 78, 107-110, 116; David Stevenson, *The First World War and International Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 158-161, 168, 170; David R. Woodward, *Trial by Friendship: Anglo-American Relations, 1917-1918* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 99-103; John L. Snell, "Wilson's Peace Program and German Socialism, January-March 1918," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 38:2 (September 1951), 208; W.B. Fowler, *British-American Relations, 1917-1918: The Role of Sir William Wiseman* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 93.

⁶ Wilson, Santayana, and Bourne quoted Kennedy, *Will to Believe*, 137, 61, 174. On British views of the German problem, see V.H. Rothwell, *British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy, 1914-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 3, 18-19, 24, 53.

276). At the same time, reflecting Wilson's pragmatic outlook, the League was "a flexible, amendable, evolving forum for international discussion and adaptation to the flux of international relations" (255). The League's Assembly, Throntveit emphasizes, had the "power to propose changes to existing treaties" under Article 19 (276). This provision, along with one allowing for its future amendment (Article 26), gave the Covenant an "elastic" character, making it "a realistic accommodation to the limits of practical foresight and the value of continued experiment" (278).

Throntveit's discussion of the Covenant elides crucial details in its provisions, which undercuts his argument. Under Article 10, League members pledged to protect each other against aggression, but the Council, which consisted primarily of the United States and the Allies, could only "advise upon the means by which this obligation shall be fulfilled," and it could do so only by unanimous vote.⁷ In other words, Article 10 stated what appeared to be a sweeping guarantee of collective security but then immediately negated that pledge with its language on how it would be upheld. Throntveit's discussion of Article 10 mirrors its paradoxical character as he claims that it imposed "military obligations" upon League members but also "did not make Americans foot soldiers of empire," meaning that America's sovereign control of its military decision-making remained intact (279, 15). In this portrayal of the Covenant as a radical attack upon unlimited national sovereignty, Throntveit insists, just as Wilson in 1919, that Article 10 imposed a "moral commitment" upon League members to uphold its security pledge, without clarifying the obligations the article imposed.

The Covenant's language weakened the credibility of its collective security arrangements in other ways. Under Article 15, parties to a dispute could still fight each other even after the Council or Assembly ruled against one of them; the only thing League members agreed to do was not go to war against the party complying with the League's judgment. Article 15 also excluded from the League's authority matters "solely within the domestic jurisdiction" of a member, but it did not specify whether the determination of this issue was subject to a unanimous or majority vote, nor did it explicitly exclude parties to the dispute from voting, as it did in other sections. This meant that an international dispute over something like a state's immigration policy might fall outside the League's authority even though the dispute could easily erupt in war. Article 16, the sanctions provision, had no voting procedure at all. To David Hunter Miller, one of Wilson's key advisors on the Covenant, this omission left it "vague and uncertain" how the League would determine if sanctions should be implemented in cases of aggression.⁸ Finally, Article 21, which stated that the Covenant did not affect the 'validity' of the Monroe Doctrine, implied that disputes in the Western Hemisphere were outside the League's authority. To be sure, Wilson had asked for this provision only because of domestic political pressure. But whatever its origins, Article 21 was in the Covenant and Wilson gave inconsistent explanations about what it meant, leaving it an open question whether or not the League's collective security provisions applied to the Americas.

Throntveit overstates the League's ability to adapt to changing circumstances and to revise mistakes made in the peace settlement. Article 19, which gave the Assembly the power to "advise" the reconsideration of treaties dangerous to the world's peace, had no voting procedure included in its text. The Covenant's general unanimity rule therefore governed the article, which meant that a single League member could veto such

⁷ "The Covenant of the League of Nations," 28 April 1919, *PWW* 58:191. All references to the articles of the Covenant in the following paragraphs are from this source, 58:188-198.

⁸ Miller quoted in Kennedy, *Will to Believe*, 189.

“advice.” Article 26 likewise required the unanimous consent of Council members plus a majority vote of the Assembly before any amendments to the Covenant could be ratified. The Covenant, then, was not nearly as “flexible” as Throntveit suggests: its voting rules made it highly unlikely that the League could alter existing treaties or revise the Covenant’s provisions.

At bottom, Throntveit’s account of Wilson’s “pragmatist internationalism” misses the essence and the significance of the president’s statesmanship during World War I (13). Wilson certainly sounded like a pragmatist in his major diplomatic pronouncements, he wanted to create a more cooperative international system, and he undoubtedly thought, like many of his pragmatist progressive supporters, that belief in the possibility of a new world order was a crucial precondition for creating it. But his actual policies to achieve his goals were not very pragmatic. In practice, he behaved in many ways like a traditional statesman. He sided with the belligerents he saw as less threatening to the United States in the neutrality period, went to war to preserve American prestige and diplomatic credibility, and then prosecuted that war to the fullest extent necessary to defeat and punish an enemy he feared and loathed. His project for international reform, the League of Nations, however much Wilson spun it as a “living thing” capable of radically transforming the existing international system, contained so many loopholes in its provisions that it barely infringed upon the national sovereignty of its members (278). Here too Wilson’s pragmatism was more apparent than real.

The incongruity between Wilson’s rhetoric and his policies—the hypocrisy that animated Wilsonianism far more than pragmatism did—had serious consequences for international relations. Led to believe that Wilson would negotiate with them if they democratized their government, the Germans were enraged when Wilson instead excluded them from the peace conference and drew up a peace treaty weakening and punishing them. They immediately resolved to resist all of the treaty’s terms. Germany’s democratic parties also suffered a loss of nearly 50 percent of their support in elections in 1920, as they were blamed for Germany’s defeat and the humiliation of the treaty.⁹ Wilson’s hypocrisy was not the only reason for this development, but it certainly contributed to it. As for the goal of international reform, by writing a Covenant with sweeping-sounding but loophole-filled commitments to collective security, Wilson shattered the consensus in the United States to join some kind of consultative international organization. Throntveit blames mistaken “interpretations” of Wilson’s peace program and the President’s political missteps for this outcome (244, 257-259, 288). But it is more accurate to ascribe it to Wilson’s habit of saying one thing while doing another. The result, unfortunately, was to squander the opportunity produced by the war to prod Americans into embracing greater involvement in international security affairs.

⁹ Klaus Epstein, *Matthias Erzberger and the Dilemma of German Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 325; A.J. Nicholls, *Weimar and the Rise of Hitler* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 61-62, 72-73.

Review by John A. Thompson, University of Cambridge

This rich, intensively researched and beautifully written book is essentially a study of President Woodrow Wilson's internationalism. It advances a number of claims. The most original one, alluded to in the subtitle, is that Wilson's thinking about politics was shaped by the philosophical approach advocated by William James and John Dewey, and generally known as Pragmatism. In particular, Trygve Throntveit suggests that Wilson's conception of the League of Nations reflected James's ideal of an 'ethical republic.' But *Power without Victory* contains several other challenges to conventional wisdom. Throntveit argues that Wilson's vision for the postwar international order has commonly been misunderstood. Wilson was far from an unqualified advocate of national self-determination and "did not seek to stamp American-style democracy on other peoples." Rather, his goal was "the gradual development of a genuinely global system of governance to maintain justice and facilitate peaceful change." After World War I, most ordinary Americans supported this program; its defeat was brought about by unrepresentative Senators who were aided by "Wilson's acts of self-sabotage" (5). The consequent absence of the United States was crucial to the failure of the League of Nations to maintain international peace and order in the 1930s. The League's history therefore should not be read as confirming the realist axiom "that the world's states form an inescapably anarchical system in which they usually act to enhance their relative material power, and always should" (302-3). In reality, "Wilson's pragmatist League was never tested" (17).

As this wording signals, Throntveit's central thesis is that Wilson's policymaking reflected the influence of Pragmatism. In the first substantive chapter, he provides a brief account of William James's thought, and particularly of James's concept of an "ethical republic." (Throntveit has explored this aspect of James's thought more fully in an earlier book.¹) He seeks to demonstrate James's influence on Wilson in two ways. To some extent, he attempts to show a direct personal influence. He suggests that Wilson may have read some of James's work as a graduate student at Johns Hopkins, when he took classes with G. Stanley Hall, who had been James's pupil. He observes that at Princeton several of Wilson's faculty colleagues were engaging with James's thought, and also that the two men encountered each other in person several times. Both wrote for the same periodicals. Most significant in Throntveit's view is what he sees as clear evidence in Wilson's writing and speaking in the 1890s and early 1900s that he had been influenced by James.

Yet Throntveit admits that Wilson never acknowledged James's influence or considered himself 'a Pragmatist.' His main line of argument is that Wilson was influenced by progressive thinkers who themselves were influenced by James. As examples of such thinkers, he instances Dewey, social worker Jane Addams, lawyers Louis Brandeis and Felix Frankfurter, sociological economist Thorstein Veblen, African-American author and activist W.E.B. Du Bois, essayist and critic Randolph S. Bourne, and the three principal editors of the *New Republic*, Herbert Croly, Walter Lippmann, and Walter Weyl. Of these, the influence on Wilson's thinking of Brandeis has long been recognized—though it is a nice illustration of Throntveit's impressive archival research that he is able to point out that Wilson's copy of *Scientific Management and Railroads* (1911) was "dog-eared and underscored" (77). But while Brandeis's influence on Wilson's thinking with regard to trust regulation is undoubted, Throntveit does not suggest that Brandeis had much input into Wilson's foreign policy. With respect to this aspect of Wilson's decision-making, it is chiefly on the role of the *New Republic* and its editors that his argument relies. It is their writings and contacts with the administration that

¹ Trygve Throntveit, *William James and the Quest for an Ethical Republic* (New York: Palgrave, 2014).

he has mostly in mind when he writes that “at multiple critical moments these pragmatist progressives directly shaped Wilson’s policies” (8).

A good case can be made that the thought of Croly and Lippmann was influenced by Pragmatism, and Dewey was himself a regular contributor to the *New Republic*. More open to question is the degree to which the *New Republic* and its editors influenced Wilson. Throntveit establishes that the President was a regular reader of the journal, and that clipped (and marked) copies of some of its editorials can be found in his papers. He also documents the direct personal contact, particularly that of Lippmann. A little of this was with Wilson himself but more often the connection was through intermediaries, particularly Colonel Edward M. House and Secretary of War Newton D. Baker. Through these channels, Lippmann began in 1916 to send memoranda to the President, a practice that Wilson encouraged by expressing appreciation. “Lippmann is not only thoughtful, but just and suggestive,” he wrote Baker after receiving Lippmann’s advice on how he should respond to Pope Benedict XV’s peace appeal in August 1917 (238). By this time, following America’s entry into the war, Lippmann had entered the administration and was serving as Baker’s assistant. Later that year, he became general secretary of the ‘Inquiry’ organized by House and in that capacity was the principal author of the memorandum that provided the basis of the Fourteen Points. A year later, he wrote most of the gloss on the Fourteen Points that House used as he negotiated the pre-armistice agreement with the allies.

There was clearly a connection and a relationship here but it only existed for a limited period of time, albeit a crucial one. Following its launch in November 1914, the *New Republic* was sharply critical of Wilson, including his handling of American neutrality. Throntveit treats this early phase of American neutrality less fully and sure-footedly than the later one, and he does not provide a clear analysis of the character of the divergence between the positions of the journal and the President at this time. It was only after Wilson called for greater military preparedness in late 1915 and made his historic public commitment to participation in a postwar league of nations in May 1916 that Croly and Lippmann came to support him—with increasing enthusiasm. But there is no reason to think that it was their advocacy that had led Wilson to take these steps. His change of position is much more plausibly seen as a response to the way the *Lusitania* sinking in the summer of 1915 had raised the prospect of American belligerency. Moreover, the *New Republic* also changed its position. As it became closer to Wilson, it began to distance itself more from the allies. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that from the end of 1916 until the Paris peace conference, Croly and Lippmann acted as informal advisers to the President in his efforts to achieve a liberal peace underwritten by an international organization. In the spring of 1919, the relationship ended as they decided that the Treaty of Versailles was a betrayal of Wilson’s promises and that the League of Nations would commit the United States to upholding an unjust settlement. The *New Republic* then urged the Senate to reject the treaty—Lippmann going so far as to reveal covertly to Wilson’s Republican opponents the President’s early knowledge of the Allied secret treaties (283-285). In sum, there is no doubt that Wilson took the *New Republic* and its editors seriously, but this was surely because he saw them as important and exceptionally thoughtful representatives of that wider swathe of progressive opinion with which he identified and on which he depended for support. As other historians have shown, that opinion spanned a broad front of interests and perspectives, and especially with regard to the League of Nations was not exclusively American.²

² See, for example, Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

Without going extensively over ground that has been covered by other Wilson scholars (whose work is fully acknowledged), Throntveit insightfully discusses sources of Wilson's organic conception of the League of Nations in his earlier thought—his commitment to achieving consensus through the method of deliberative 'common counsel' as well as his Burkean aversion to abstract blueprints and legalistic approaches to political questions. Throntveit rightly stresses that it was the subordination of national prerogatives and rivalries to the authority of an international body that was the heart of the President's conception of the postwar order, and that it was not he but the Petrograd Soviet who introduced the slogan of 'national self-determination' into world politics in 1917. He also points out that the British Prime Minister David Lloyd George endorsed the phrase more promptly and with less qualification than Wilson did. During 1918, however, Wilson gradually came to support 'national aspirations' more widely and wholeheartedly (interestingly, as Croly did too, it seems). To Throntveit, this "willingness to ride the global wave of support for a disintegrative principle in which he did not believe, rather than frankly defend the integrative policy he meant to pursue, was symptomatic of a growing contempt for the pragmatic methods his theoretical commitment to common counsel implied" (259).

This judgment is one of a number of indications that it is Wilson's concept of internationalism, rather than the president himself, that Throntveit wants to rehabilitate. He is unsparingly critical of the repression of dissent during the war, particularly the censorship exercised through denying mailing privileges to radical journals, which like other recent historians (notably Thomas J. Knock) he sees as alienating people whose support Wilson would need in his postwar fight for the league of nations. He finds the President's stance on this issue "simply baffling," observing that he "seemed more afraid of offending his postmaster general (who repeatedly threatened resignation) than turning the liberal press against the war" (232, 235). But it may be a general rule that historians who find phenomena "baffling" need to re-examine their premises. In this case, it would be the assumption (which is widely shared by those who write about Wilson) that his actions were governed by his personal views rather than political considerations (with respect to which Postmaster-General Albert S. Bursleson was extremely important).

Throntveit himself provides a good illustration of the extent to which Wilson's attitudes were affected by political considerations in his excellent short discussion of Wilson's attitude to African Americans. Here again, the research is extremely thorough, even including a reference to a marginal note Wilson made on his copy of James Bryce's *The American Commonwealth* (1888)³ (90, 339). Throntveit's analysis of Wilson's attitudes is also much more insightful and balanced than most discussions of the subject. While sharing the prevalent assumptions of 'negro' backwardness, Wilson was not a vicious racist, and basically gave little thought or attention to race relations, which was not one of the subjects that really interested him. As a progressive who was also an educated gentleman, Wilson gained the support of W.E.B. Du Bois, William Monroe Trotter and other African-American leaders in the election of 1912, and he initially made some gestures toward addressing the problems of black Americans. But following the enforcement of segregation in several departments of his southern-dominated administration and the publicity around the White House showing of *Birth of a Nation*, such leaders turned against Wilson, and "the apparently irretrievable loss of African American support" caused him to lose the slight interest he had shown in improving race relations" (98-99).

On Wilson's unsuccessful fight to secure Senate approval of the treaty and the League, Throntveit's position is somewhat ambiguous. He sympathizes with Wilson's insistence that some compromise of national

³ James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth*, 3 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1888).

sovereignty was essential if the League was to be effective, but he also emphasizes that in the end it was only Wilson's unyielding refusal to accept the Lodge reservations that prevented the treaty receiving the required two-thirds majority (279, 286-289). The question of the terms on which, and the spirit in which, the United States might have become a member of the League of Nations also bears on Throntveit's wider claims about the extent of popular support for doing so, and the likelihood that American participation would have enabled the League to fulfill Wilson's hopes for it. With regard to the former, the evidence Throntveit presents of the range of newspapers and organizations of all kinds that expressed support for joining the League does not negate the impression from the debate itself and the course and outcome of the 1920 election that resistance to assuming any potentially costly commitment was widespread and deep.

It is a natural response to such a bold and challenging book to seek to question some of its claims but one needs to acknowledge also that many others are very persuasively sustained. Throntveit's depth of research and independence of mind are evident throughout and they enable him to provide fresh and insightful analysis of several issues and episodes. The treatment of Wilson's attitude to race is one example of this, but another is the account of the skill and subtlety with which Wilson chaired the League of Nations commission in Paris. Skepticism about the degree and significance of William James's influence on Wilson should not lead scholars and students to overlook the many other ways in which this book makes an important contribution to our understanding of Wilson and his internationalist vision.

Author's Response by Trygve Throntveit, University of Minnesota

Before responding to Professors Ross Kennedy, Adriane Lentz-Smith, and John Thompson, I want to thank them for the time and attention they devoted to my book. I also want to thank Tom Maddux and Diane Labrosse for putting this roundtable together. Readers of the preceding pages will understand that conscience rather than custom compels my gratitude and admiration for the work of all involved.

Exchanges such as these remind me of one of my favorite James quotations: “The greatest empiricists among us are only empiricists on reflection: when left to their instincts, they dogmatize like infallible popes.”¹ To substitute ‘historians’ for ‘empiricists’ is to explain entire historiographies. James’s dictum is far less applicable to this group than to many others whose exchanges I have read or witnessed over the years. Still, I think some of the criticisms levied at *Power without Victory* in the three reviews exemplify a sort of intellectual inertia that affects many of us in the historical profession—including not only these able critics, but me, too. Let me explain by addressing each of my critics in order of most to least symptomatic of our shared affliction.

Ross Kennedy offers the harshest and most sustained critique of my argument and analysis. Despite its detail, it evinces a misunderstanding of pragmatism, as well as a naïve demand for consistency from historical agents, that makes it as unpersuasive to me as my argument is to him.² To be a pragmatist, as explained throughout the book, is not to claim (and certainly not to acquire) some infallible capacity to make in every case the decision that history—or even immediate consequences—will vindicate. It is rather to adopt an attitude of epistemic humility and a practice of experimental adaptation in the face of complex, changing circumstances. In short, it is to accept one’s fallibility, not to transcend it. Nor does pragmatism, despite the centrality of deliberation to its meaning and practice, imply infinite discussion and postponement of action. Thus (for example), whether or not President Woodrow Wilson should have pushed harder for the Woman’s Peace Party’s “continuous mediation” plan (and ignoring, as Kennedy does, the fact that both sides in the conflict repeatedly rebuffed his offers along those lines), it is simply wrong to suggest that proposing a conference is inherently more pragmatic than, say, insisting on the cessation of submarine warfare. In these early stages of Wilson’s wartime diplomacy, it was his effort to imagine and carefully weigh the likely consequences of various courses of action that, I argue, embodied his pragmatism. His rejection of a purely pacifistic or politically and economically inert definition of neutrality is a separate issue.

But let us take up that issue. The litany of offenses against neutrality that Kennedy ascribes to Wilson boils down to the complaint that Wilson did not maintain strict or even optimal neutrality—an achievement which I never claimed for him, and which, to my knowledge, Wilson never claimed for himself. Kennedy has

¹ William James, *The Will to Believe, and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1897), 13-14.

² The misunderstanding of pragmatism was perhaps foreshadowed in Kennedy’s otherwise well-researched and well-crafted account of American international thought in the Wilson era, *The Will to Believe: Woodrow Wilson, World War I, and America’s Strategy for Peace and Security* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2009). Despite taking its title from James’s most famous essay, the book contains not one reference to the philosopher, and presents Wilson’s campaign for the League of Nations as a species of wishful thinking rather than an informed choice among uncertain alternatives.

helpfully brought to my attention many instances in which Wilson's judgment might be questioned by thinking people who took and take his own pronouncements seriously, and I wish my narrative—driven necessarily, but hardly unfailingly, by my argument—had benefited from them during the writing stage. In short, I am perfectly willing to accept that here and at many points in my narrative, the inertia of my argument has swept aside certain counterexamples. And yet, by pointing out such counterexamples, Kennedy in fact corroborates my account of Wilson during the period of American neutrality: the story of a statesman learning, on the fly, and through many trials and errors, how to respond to a world in which the purely theoretical neutrality found in period textbooks and expounded by contemporary (and later) critics was—and remains—an illusion. As I state on multiple occasions in the book, Wilson *knew* what Kennedy presents as a revelation: namely, that his government was *not* perfectly neutral toward the belligerents. It *could not* be. Forbearing the British blockade would disadvantage the Central Powers, while forcing Britain to abandon or weaken it (if that were even feasible) would disadvantage the Allies. Nor, as President of the United States, could Wilson simply ponder this paradox until an elegant answer presented itself. To respond was both his constitutional responsibility and a political necessity. In Wilson's view, insisting that German submarine commanders alert their non-military targets before blowing them up made more political (and moral) sense than demanding that Britain stop its efforts to protect home waters and to starve the war's main aggressor into submission. That view is obviously fair game for the critic. But it is not evidence of inconsistent pragmatism.

Of course, Wilson *was* an inconsistent pragmatist, as I note throughout the book. But the examples Kennedy draws from Wilson's wartime diplomacy and postwar peacemaking are perhaps the least compelling he could have chosen. Yes, Wilson's policy was aimed at overthrowing the German autocracy, which he thought had started the conflict in order to maintain its legitimacy; but to state that Wilson "did everything possible to sabotage talks with the Germans" from midsummer 1917 is to ignore the German government's three-year history of vacillating and deceitful responses to Wilson's mediation efforts. And yes, it follows that Wilson thought it necessary to convince the German people that their government's aggression would, then and in future, elicit punishment; thus they must work to build a state that neither glorified nor depended on conquest. A historian is free to conclude that the emphasis on overthrow or the degree of punishment inflicted was excessive. But that same historian is, in my view, obliged to note that Germany's fate was a question Wilson struggled with greatly and approached with far more charity than his Allied counterparts. These considerations Kennedy ignores.

As for the pragmatist character of the League Covenant, here I must admit that I, like Wilson, choose to believe in one possible course of history rather than another, neither of which can ever be proven the more likely. As any student of institutions knows, the initial design is critical, but just as critical is the way that agents interpret, embellish, alter, and execute that design. I think the design was both more pragmatist and more practicable than Kennedy does, but we will never know, because the League *was expressly designed to include the United States*. Kennedy's analysis of the Covenant text ignores this crucial fact.

To take just one example: It is true that the specific obligations under Article 10, by which League members pledged to protect one another against aggression, were ambiguous. But let us play out two hypothetical scenarios of an early postwar League, both assuming that the United States had joined. In the first, a nation that is not a member of the League Council commits an act of aggression against a member state. Is it really so unlikely that the Council, comprising the United States and its erstwhile allies—all deeply indebted to the nation that had spearheaded the League's creation—would fail to advise sanctions on the aggressor? The common argument that the Council was structurally incapable of action relies on historical examples of a League that *did not include* the United States, and whose members therefore a) could not agree on essential

strategic priorities and b) could not impose effective economic sanctions due to an aggressor's ability to trade with Americans. In the second hypothetical scenario it is a Council member who is the aggressor or is a near party to the conflict in question. In this case, the Council member would be prohibited from voting on the issue. None of this is to say that responding to aggression would have been *easy*. An automatic mechanism leaving no room for thoughtful analysis and difficult discussion was never the aim—at least not for Wilson. My argument is simply that the Covenant left far more room than most historians recognize for the United States to promote norms and set interpretive standards that strengthened both its deliberative character and its executive capacities.

Kennedy's analysis also assumes a standard of consistency in diplomatic outcomes that, to my mind, defies political reality. Granting, for the sake of argument, that the ambiguity of the Covenant was excessive and the power of the Council inadequate, this hardly proves Wilson's failure to apply pragmatist principles. Was it not Henry Cabot Lodge and his faction in the U.S. Senate who demanded, in February 1919, that Wilson, against his better judgment, support unanimity as the League's general voting rule? Did not the same faction insist on a "domestic jurisdiction" clause? And the clause affirming the validity of the Monroe Doctrine? Indeed, one could argue that the latter clause was perfectly consistent with global governance, and the former marked a major advance in its development. Article 21 made no mention of the Roosevelt Corollary; thus only President James Monroe's assertion of U.S. obligation to support and protect republican institutions from external meddling was explicitly affirmed. Meanwhile, Article 15 left the determination of domestic jurisdiction to the Council rather than the member state—which is to say, it subordinated parochial conceptions and claims of national authority to international scrutiny and judgment.

In short, Kennedy argues, as he did in his book *The Will to Believe*, that Wilson was a poor diplomatist, whose thinking was muddled at best and wrongheaded at worst. By contrast, I decided long ago that Wilson was essentially an effective diplomatist who learned, over time, to structure his thinking around principles that he applied with some major successes and that might be of use today. Our respective worlds have thus collided; perhaps other scholars can pick up the best pieces of both.

In contrast to Kennedy, John Thompson recapitulates my narrative and argument concisely, accurately, and graciously, despite our disagreements over the influence of pragmatism on Wilson's internationalist vision and over that vision's viability. Having failed to convey my purpose to dozens of seminars and workshops, I am particularly gratified by his recognition that "it is Wilson's concept of internationalism, rather than the president himself," that my book attempts "to rehabilitate." Relatedly, Professor Thompson makes an important point that I fear some H-Diplo readers might miss, as it has little directly to do with Wilson's foreign policy but much to do with my effort to merge intellectual and political methods of historical practice. Discussing my treatment of press censorship during wartime, he suggests I might have spent too much energy on finding an intellectual explanation for Wilson's deference to his overzealous Postmaster General, Albert Sidney Burleson, rather than exploring the political influence Burleson held over Wilson.

Here, I think, my intellectual inertia misguided me. Burleson was, indeed, Wilson's main conduit to Southern Democrats in Congress, and Southern Democrats were critical to the success of any policy, domestic or foreign, he wanted to pursue. And yet, given my effort to demonstrate the generally pragmatist rather than ideological or cynical character of Wilson's politics, what struck me was not the possibility of a vulgarly political explanation but the absence of any defensibly pragmatist justification for his complicity in censorship. Consequently, I missed an opportunity to explore how historians—or for that matter, citizens—should evaluate historical agents who attempt to translate ethics into practice in complex and fluid

environments. Certainly, individual moments of decision can and often should loom large in such evaluations. But even if one determines that some such moment defines some agent's (or agents') historical relevance, one must interpret that moment with reference to the whole pattern of actions and circumstances preceding and surrounding it. To do that for Wilson, with particular reference to his ideas and their consequences, was my purpose in writing the book.

In light of that purpose, I must register my objections to Professor Thompson's two main criticisms of my book. First, Thompson questions the influence of the *New Republic* pragmatists on Wilson. He is right that Croly and Lippmann were critical of Wilson's early neutrality policies, and that they became supportive only after Wilson endorsed military preparedness and a league of nations. But Thompson is on shaky ground when suggesting the sinking of the *Lusitania* somehow revealed to Wilson the virtues of a league. The possibility of war—certainly. But a league? What's the connection? It seems far more plausible to look at what Wilson was reading, who Wilson was talking to, and what his responses reveal in the months leading up to his first public endorsement of a league if one is searching for explanations of that policy. In any case, the main point of my overall argument is not that pragmatists introduced the league idea to Wilson, but that pragmatism—as articulated and applied to current affairs by students of William James—influenced the *kind* of league Wilson eventually promoted and tried to construct.

Second, I must admit that I am nearly at a loss in responding to the statement that “the evidence that Throntveit presents of the range of newspapers and organizations of all kinds that expressed support for the League of Nations does not negate the impression from the debate itself and the outcome of the 1920 election that resistance to assuming any potentially costly commitment was widespread and deep.” Why is “evidence” insufficient to overturn “impression” in historical analysis, and what alternative do we have? Thompson seems to be saying that we simply *know* that the League was unpopular, and should not be fooled by appearances—however numerous and diverse—to the contrary. I confess that my own commitment to certain pragmatist principles of analysis renders this appeal to prior opinion irrelevant in my view.

The least dogmatic among us, Lentz-Smith, has also provide the most original critique. As a result, my reactions are still marinating and thus I have comparatively little to say in response. To be sure, many interlocutors have pointed to Wilson's personal racism as a challenge to my argument, and identified it as the more appropriate prism through which his career must be viewed. None, however, has articulated the case for interpreting Wilson through the prism of structural racism as compellingly as Lentz-Smith has done. It is clear even from her brief remarks that the pervasiveness and persistence of white supremacy in a putatively liberal society is a problem to which she has given particularly careful and extensive thought, and equally clear that that train of thought runs along different tracks than those I followed in my book. That said, I completely agree that if white supremacy is defined as an entire order of legal, political, and social institutions, whose white (and largely male) beneficiaries are complicit in its existence to whatever extent they fail to resist it, then Wilson was a white supremacist. Nevertheless, what unsettles me about this argument is its relative shift of emphasis from agency to structure. Despite my trope, Wilson's general ‘blindness’ to the experience of people of color was not total. At least some of the time, however steeped he was in a white supremacist culture, he knew that his decisions affecting people of color were inconsistent with his professed ideals. In short, my determination to reconcile his pragmatism and his racism, and the frustrating impossibility of doing so, drove me not to the structure but straight to the sinner. Whether that was the right course to take is a question that I now expect to be thinking about for quite some time.

Indeed, I want again to thank all three of my critics for stimulating my thinking in this roundtable. I fear that my dogmatizing has been utterly papal at points in my responses. Still, I hope it has not been so egregious as to obscure my appreciation for this exchange of perspectives and the work that Professors Kennedy, Thompson, and Lentz-Smith devoted to it. For historical thinking is hard work. I can only hope that readers of *Power without Victory* find at least some of the work that went into it valuable to their own labors.