

## CHAPTER ONE

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### *Setting the Stage*

#### *Synopsis*

*(1) It is instructive to begin with a brief tour of pragmatism's long and checkered history, which extends back to classical antiquity. (2) As such an historical survey indicates, pragmatism is not a specific doctrine but a diversified and many-sided approach to philosophical issues. Its characteristically practicalistic perspective has been applied to the theory of language, to epistemological truth criteriology, to ontological issues in the metaphysics of truth and reality, as well as to moral and political issues. (3) Pragmatism's prismatically many-sided nature means that the real question for philosophical deliberation is not "Is pragmatism plausible?" but rather "Can really plausible versions of pragmatism be articulated?"*

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## 1. The Historical Background

Bertrand Russell once suggested that Karl Marx should be regarded as a prime exponent of pragmatism, remarking on “its close similarity to . . . [the doctrine] of Karl Marx as stated in his *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845) and afterwards embodied in the theory of dialectical materialism.”<sup>1</sup> Russell then quoted Marx’s famous passage ending with “The truth, i.e., the reality and power, of thought must be demonstrated in practice. Philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways, but the real task is to *alter* it.” And he went on to observe that “Allowing for a certain difference of phraseology this doctrine is essentially indistinguishable from [pragmatist] instrumentalism” (p. 144). However, this view is based on a serious misunderstanding. With Marx, theorizing as such does not matter, the only thing that counts is productive action; in effect he wants to *replace* theorizing with action. But sensible pragmatists do not want to dispense with theory and substitute action in its place. Rather, they propose to retain theorizing and merely *evaluate* it in terms of its effectiveness in the guidance of action. Such an approach does not so much glorify action as prioritize it as a standard of appraisal.

The characteristic tactic of the philosophical movement that has come to be designated as pragmatism was to pivot legitimation on success by adopting efficacy in application and implementation as the salient criterion of adequacy. And a thoroughgoing pragmatic philosophy will take this stance all across the board, alike in intellectual as in practical contexts, in matters of logic and language (theory of communication) of ontology (theory of the real), of episte-

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1. Bertrand Russell, “Dewey’s New Logic,” in *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. P. Schilpp (New York: Jordan Publishing Co., 1939), pp. 143–56; see p. 144.

mology (theory of knowledge), of axiology (value theory), and even ethics and politics (the theory of right conduct of individuals and groups).

In exploring this terrain of ideas, it is useful to begin with a preliminary look at the historical background.

### *Ancient Skepticism and Empiricism*

The original pragmatists were its pioneers among the Academic Sceptics in classical antiquity. To be sure, they did not use the term itself, but this doesn't mean much; people spoke grammatically long before the idea of grammar as such was ever thought of, and the same sort of thing is true of philosophers who thought pragmatically. Viewing all claims to knowledge with distrust, the ancient sceptics fervently opposed self-authenticating evident certainties—the “cataleptic perceptions” (*kataleptikê phantasia*) of the Stoics. They rejected any possibility of achieving authentic knowledge (*epistêmê*) regarding the real truth of things, and taught that we must make do with plausible beliefs (*to pithanon*) in its place, acceptances that forego claims to unqualified correctness but are merely adequate to the needs of practice. Thus, according to Arcesilaus, the *reasonable* beliefs (*to eulogon*) that we achieve through testing our experiential impressions and natural belief inclinations against each other in a systemic way constitute our only available basis for reliable information, and suffice to provide a basis for rational action. And this sort of plausibility geared to the guidance of effective action—affording practical adequacy rather than theoretical certitude—is as much as we can actually manage to realize in this world. The illusion of theoretically adequate knowledge must accordingly be subordinated to the realities of mere practical adequacy. Theory must yield pride of place to practice as regards the

standards of belief. So reasoned the proto-pragmatists among the Academic Sceptics.<sup>2</sup>

In particular, the Empiricist wing of the sceptical school taught that our cognitive life affords a realm of appearances (*phainomena*) that provide no secure basis for making judgment about the actualities (*hypokeimena*) of things. These phenomena suffice to guide action—what appears to be honey generally tastes and nourishes like honey. And this practical adequacy amply accounts for their prominent role in our life and thought. But they do not and cannot inform us not about the actual condition of things, seeing that they only convey the “affection” their impressions have upon us—their effects on our sensory and cognitive apparatus. We thus learn about the world only on the basis of an experience whose instruction suffices to provide “a guide to life.” Whatever deeper reality does (or may) in actual fact underlie those appearances is something regarding which we can form no reliable judgment. We have to settle for the practicalities of ordinary life.

In this way, the ancient sceptics made the initial move towards a theory of knowledge geared to the standard of practical adequacy. And in doing this, they launched pragmatism on its way.

### *G. W. Leibniz (1646–1717)*

How are we human inquirers, lacking any sort of direct, intuitive insight into the real and actual nature of things, to come into the possession of general truths regarding matters of fact? In addressing this issue, Leibniz characterized the proper approach here as “the conjectural

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2. For details regarding the cognitive theory of the sceptics see Myles Burnyeat ed., *The Sceptical Tradition* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1983).

method *a priori*" which "proceeds by hypotheses, assuming certain causes, perhaps without proof [i.e., *direct* evidence], and then showing that the things which actually happen would follow from these assumptions."<sup>3</sup> It is conjectural because it reaches beyond the evidence rather than being confined to it. But it is certainly not arbitrary, since it is subject to a rational quality control—in particular that of practical adequacy.

The fact that this method relies crucially on conjectures whose full assertoric content lies beyond the reach of available experience means that it affords no entry into the domain of the *metaphysically* certain. But the method can indeed attain the "moral" or "practical" certainty that suffices for the guidance of affairs in everyday life:

Some hypotheses can satisfy so many phenomena, and so easily, that they can be taken for certain. Among other hypotheses, those are to be chosen which are the simpler; these are to be presented, in the interim, in place of the true causes. The conjectural method *a priori* proceeds by hypotheses, assuming certain causes, perhaps without proof, and showing that the things which this kind is like the key to a cryptograph, and the simpler it is, and the greater the number of events that can be explained by it, the more probable it is. But just as it is possible to write a letter intentionally so that it can be understood by means of several different keys, of which only one is the true one, so the same effect can have several causes. Hence no firm demonstration can be made from the success of hypotheses. Yet I shall not deny that the number of phenomena which are happily explained by a given hypothesis may be so great that it must be taken as morally certain. Indeed, hypotheses of these kind are sufficient for everyday use. Yet it is also useful to apply less perfect hypotheses as substitutes for truth until a better one occurs, that is, one which explains the same phenomena more happily or

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3. G. W. Leibniz: *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, ed. Leroy E. Loemker (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1956), p. 283.

more phenomena with equal felicity. There is no danger in this if we carefully distinguish the certain from the probable.<sup>4</sup>

The knowledge that our well-tested hypotheses affords does not lie on the categorical realm of the metaphysically certain but on the practical side of moral certainty.

The degree of probability that is attained through the conjectural method will hinge on the nature of the conjectural hypotheses at which the method arrives:

Yet it must be admitted that a hypothesis becomes the more probable as it is simpler to understand and wider in force and power, that is, the greater the number of phenomena that can be explained by it, and the fewer the further assumptions. It may even turn out that a certain hypothesis can be accepted as certain for nature [*pro physice certa*] if, namely, it completely satisfies all the phenomena which occur, as does the key to a cryptograph. Those hypotheses deserve the highest ranking (next to truth), however, by those aid predictions can be made, even about phenomena or observations, which have not been tested before, for a hypothesis of this kind can be applied, in practice, in place of truth.<sup>5</sup>

As Leibniz saw it, such effective certainty is tantamount to a probability of the very highest grade.

Leibniz' exposition of inquiry as based on a "conjectural method *a priori*" makes it clear that what is at issue here is in essence what subsequently became known as the hypothetico-deductive method of scientific method. And his account of this method and its *modus operandi* shows that *he sees its justifactory rationale as pragmatic and as preemi-*

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4. *Ibid.*, p. 283.

5. G. W. Leibniz, *Philosophische Schriften*, ed. C. I. Gerhardt, vol. I (Berlin: Wiedemann, 1875), pp. 195–196; Loemker, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, p. 188.

nently validated in the order of practical reason. The test of hypotheses is a matter of "satisfying the phenomena" by way of descriptive coordination as regards the past and effective prediction as regards the future. The crux here lies in the principle "by their fruits shall ye know them." The successful guidance of experience provides us with a practical, working equivalent of the actual truth of things. And so, at any rate, in these matters relating to the operative criteriology of the contingent generalizations of empirical science, Leibniz was also a pragmatist before the days of pragmatism as such.<sup>6</sup>

### *Utilitarianism*

The utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) proposed an ethic which appraises human projects and processes by the standard of "the greatest good of the greatest number." Even as "the proof of the pudding is in the eating," so the utilitarian test of the appropriateness of actions lies in seeing how their consequences impact upon the happiness of people-in-general. In this way, utilitarianism based its moral and social philosophy upon an altogether pragmatic approach.<sup>7</sup> And from early on, clearheaded students of philosophy recognized in pragmatism the epistemological counterpart of ethical utilitarianism. For where J. S. Mill saw ethical principles as properly validated through social utility in fostering the affective condition of people-in-general (the greatest good of the greatest number), there C. S. Peirce and his congeners came to regard

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6. For Leibniz's theory of scientific investigation see Nicholas Rescher, *The Philosophy of Leibniz* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967).

7. See J. C. C. Smart and B. A. O. Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

their pragmatic efficacy (i.e., utility) in the service of our purposes as validating our principles for securing trustworthy information about the world.<sup>8</sup> And so, as Émile Durkheim already maintained, pragmatism is closely akin to an epistemic utilitarianism: utilitarians classed as *right* that which proves beneficial to the community (“the greatest good of the greatest number”), pragmatists classed as *true* that which proves useful to the individual (i.e., useful through being effectively conducive to the realizations of his ends).<sup>9</sup>

### Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914)

The ruling idea of pragmatism is that decision, choice, and action have priority over thought, ideation, and belief in human affairs—that practice (*praxis*) here takes primacy over theory (*theoria*). Anticipated by the Academic Sceptics in antiquity, and reaffirmed by Renaissance thinkers like Francis Bacon, this idea reemerged into prominence in Cambridge, Mass. in the 1870s with a group of young Turk thinkers of whom C. S. Peirce proved to be the most profound. Peirce was inspired to call his position *pragmatism* by Kant’s use of the term *pragmatisch* for “expressing a relation to some definite human purpose.”<sup>10</sup> But Peirce had a very particular purpose primarily in view, namely, cognition.

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8. With William James, “it was but a step from utilitarian empiricism to pragmatism” according to Antonio Aliota, *The Idealistic Reaction Against Science* (London: Methuen, 1914), p. 165. (The book originally appeared in Rome in 1912 as *La reazione idealistica contra la scienza*.) Hans Vaihinger characterized pragmatism as “epistemological utilitarianism” (erkenntnistheoretischer Utilitarianismus), *Philosophie des Als ob* (Leipzig: F. Meiner, 1924; original ed. 1911).
  9. Émile Durkheim, *Pragmatism and Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 54. Translated from the original French, *Pragmatisme et sociologie* (Paris: Alcan, 1955).
  10. Charles S. Peirce, *Collected Papers*, eds. C. Hartshorne and P. Weiss, vol. V (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1934), sect. 5.412.



In the hands of this founding father, pragmatism had two principal components; one as regards meaning and one as regards truth. Peirce's meaning pragmatism encompasses a pragmatic view of the meaning of concepts and ideas. Take the concept of an "apple," for example. When we characterize something as such, we commit ourselves to treating it in a certain way—to handle it, store it, use it, discuss it, and so forth in the particular way appropriate to apples. And this is what it means to be an apple. It is all a matter of practical ramifications: To be what we call an "X" is to be treated Xly by us. The crux, so Peirce maintained, lay in the "pragmatic maxim": "To ascertain the meaning of an intellectual conception one should consider what practical consequences might conceivably result from the truth of that conception; and the sum of these consequences will constitute the entire meaning of the conception."<sup>11</sup> Meaning, in sum is, as meaning does. As Peirce put it in his classic essay on "How to Make our Ideas Clear" (1878): "there is no distinction of meaning so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference of practice."<sup>12</sup> Peirce insisted that the prime function of our beliefs regarding the world is to commit us to rules for action—to furnish guidance to our behavior in point of what to think, say and do—above all, to canalize our expectations in matters of observation and experiment in scientific contexts.<sup>13</sup>

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11. *Ibid.*, sect. 5.9. Note that Peirce here says "from the truth of that conception"—that is, from that conception's: actually being true—and not "from *believing* the truth of that conception." This difference is one point that separates him from William James.

12. *Ibid.*, vol. V: 248–71; see sect. 5.400.

13. In this essay, Peirce prescribed that clarity in the apprehension of ideas is to be determined by the "pragmatic maxim": "Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearing, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these efforts in the whole of our conception of the object" (*Collected Papers*, vol. V: sect. 5.402). As his subsequent discussion of the matter makes clear with increasing emphasis, Peirce means by "effects" the sci-

And much the same sort of story here told with respect to meaning holds also with respect to truth. Those theses are true whose implementation in practice “work out” by way of yielding success in matters of prediction and application. And, as Peirce saw it, the best route to this distinction is the scientific method whose rivals—evidence ignoring tenacity, pious adherence to authority, a priori speculation, and such like—simply cannot compare with it in point of producing trustworthy results.<sup>14</sup> True factual beliefs, ipso facto, are those that achieve efficacy through in guiding our expectations, beliefs, and actions in satisfying ways—where specifically cognitive satisfactions are at issue. And they must achieve this on a systemic basis.

With Peirce, what matters primarily for the substantiation of an inductively based claim is not simply that a successfully predicted fact issues from it, but rather that this fact could qualify as typical—that is, would be seen as representing “a haphazard specimen of all the predictions which might be based on the hypothesis and which constitutes its pivotal truth.”<sup>15</sup> It is the objective realities of statistical sampling theory that are pivotal for the rational validation at issue here. The role of chance, of probability theory and statistics—was prominent throughout Peirce’s theory of knowledge and of nature (as evidenced in his “tychism”). On the side of nature, he envisioned the historical emergence of increasingly stable laws and forms. On that of

entifically determinable consequences, and by “practical bearing” then implications for the scientific understanding and explanation of things—that is, for *scientific praxis*. He recoiled with aversion from William James’ tendency to take “effects” and “practical bearing” to relate to matters of psychology, religion, and the management of our ordinary life affairs. The issue is vividly and helpfully presented in H. O. Maunce, *The Two Pragmatisms* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977); see especially chapter 3, “Peirce: Pragmatism and William James.”

14. Peirce, *Collected Papers*, vol. V: sect. 5.377–87.

15. *Ibid.*, vol. VI: sect. 6.527.

knowledge, he envisioned the historical emergence of increasingly adequate knowledge within the ongoing communal process of scientific inquiry. (For Peirce even physical reality was subject to the Darwinian process of the evolutionary emergence of processes that contribute to nature's increasing assumption of enduring, self-perpetuating structures.)

Immanuel Kant had put on philosophy's agenda the question: How can the mind come into secure possession of an authentic truth about a reality that is altogether independent of its own activities? Accepting a negative answer here—it can't—Kant's followers in the school of German idealism held that some great cosmic force leads the mind towards a truth that is at once universal and of the mind's own contriving. But after Darwin scientifically minded philosophers—Peirce included—substituted for this mysterious cosmic force a process of natural development that at once produced and coordinated the operations of the human mind. Biological evolution provides the missing link between natural reality and human thought, seeing that humans—together with their thinking facilities—are surely the natural products of this evolutionary process. Our cognitive processes find their justification in the consideration that their evolutionary emergence is bound to proceed in a manner that reflects their efficacy.

Peirce's pragmatic view of truth is thus comprehensively coordinated to effective implementation. But this must be understood against the background of certain preliminary explanations. For a "pragmatic theory of truth" is nowadays usually construed with reference to a criterion that assesses the claims to truth of a factual contention in terms of the *success* engendered by its acceptance (its conduciveness to the realization of some sort of "utility"). However, this construction takes an overly restricted view of the matter, for it interprets the pragmatic theory in its later, specifically Jamesian version, slighting the fact that

other pragmatists—and most significantly Peirce—have approached the matter quite differently. Peirce's criterion for assessing the truth of a factual thesis is not simply and immediately the factor of its applicative *success*, but the extent to which it manages to secure the ongoing *long run allegiance of a community committed to the methods that successfully implement the goals of science*. Truth, as Peirce saw it, consists in those contentions that are “fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate [scientifically].”<sup>16</sup> It is what the community of rational inquirers is destined to arrive at in the end—the ultimate consensus of informed opinion among investigators committed to the principles of science. And Peirce's position here is not simply a matter of epistemological optimism, of a Pollyannaish confidence that things are bound to come right in the end. Rather, what is at issue is an idealization of sorts. For by “the course of inquiry” Peirce came to understand not the actual, concrete, historical course of things (in the manner of the Hegelian thesis that *die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht*), but the hypothetical course of procedure in an idealized community of *fully rational* inquirers. To his mind, it is not mere inquiring as such but *properly conducted* inquiring that must eventually get at the truth of things. The crux is something conditional, namely, that there is an established methodology of investigation—the scientific method—which if persistently used in an ongoing community of rational inquirers must ultimately yield truth. And this circumstance is not without its metaphysical ramifications, since for Peirce the methodological resources of language, logic, and scientific inquiry served as an entryway into the domain of metaphysics.

Since the time of Peirce, pragmatism has taken three principal forms:

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16. Peirce, *Collected Papers*, vol. V: sect. 5.407.

- *semantical* pragmatism: the meaning of terms consists on their use.
- *epistemic* pragmatism: the successful implementation of beliefs (especially in matters of prediction and control over nature) is the proper criterion for their truth. (Sometimes construed as the contention that truth simply is (nothing else but) successful implementability.)
- *ontological* (or *metaphysical*) pragmatism: in the human realm, *praxis* (doing) has primacy over *theoria* (understanding) because all understanding must itself be the product of a doing: whatever we know (understand) is the product of inquiry, an activity of ours.

Peirce himself in effect espoused all three of these doctrines conjointly, but the last one proved particularly portentous for him. For since every human activity can always be refined, improved, extended, this means that our knowledge of the truth is always tentative and imperfect. And this line of thought led Peirce to a fallibilism that sees human knowledge as inevitably falling short of a secure grasp on the definitive truth of things. Only in the idealized long run can our pragmatically validated knowledge be equated with the truth as such.

In his attempt to de-mystify truth and bring it down to earth, Peirce was eager to connect the truth with what people (and, in particular, intelligently inquiring people—the community of scientific investigators—actually think about the matter). But, of course, he was not so heedless as to think that the truth is what the scientific community thinks, here and now. Realizing that the scientists of the day may have it all wrong, he proposed (in 1878) to shift the matter to the indefinitely remote future—the theoretical long run.

The more Peirce thought about this definition of truth as the revelations of the long run the more dissatisfied he became—and ultimately (around 1897) he gave up on this whole approach. The problem is that the natural course of observation—no matter how far extended—never extends

into “the long run.” *The long run lies outside our cognitive reach*, and the law of large numbers of the calculus of probability—in which Peirce initially invested great hope—really does not help us sufficiently since it only comes into play with repeatable events in countable occurrence spaces. There is, to be sure, the prospect of a shift from the actual future to the theoretical realm of possibility, for what does happen when we keep going to what would happen if we kept going “long enough.” But this takes us into the speculative region of a transobservationally suppositional reality with which Peirce—scientist and empiricist that he was—could not manage to be fully content. Modern theorists have, to be sure, suggested that truth should be construed as an idealization.<sup>17</sup> However, such a shift inevitably leads outside the secure observational / empirical region where earlier pragmatists felt themselves constrained to operate.

But such complexities aside, the fact remains that in matters of inquiry—of resolving issues of meaning and truth—Peirce hitched his wagon to the star of science. To be sure, this focus on science emphatically does not mean that he was a materialist or positivist of some descriptions, someone drawn to a “scientism” that rejects metaphysics and has no use for philosophical speculation. For Peirce unlike, say, John Dewey in some of his positivistic moods, science represented a methodology of inquiry and not an ideology of some sort. As Peirce saw it, it is the scientific method—not the scientific doctrine of the day—that is crucial for rational inquiry. And he rejected an ideology of the look-to-science-for-all-the-answers sort for the same reason

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17. Hilary Putnam, *Representation and Reality* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1988), p. 115. Putnam offers “idealized rational acceptability” as a characterization of truth. And the present author defends a view of “Truth as Ideal Coherence,” *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 38 [1985]:795–806.

that he rejected dogmatism of any sort, because it is itself ultimately unscientific.

And for similar reasons, traditional metaphysics as such was viewed with equal scepticism by Peirce, who held that “almost every proposition of [traditional] ontological metaphysics is either meaningless gibberish . . . or else absurd.”<sup>18</sup> However, Peircean pragmatism is not logical positivism: the test of pragmatic success is not just success in predicting observations. The success of principles in the organization of experience must also count. Highly abstract principles—of the conservation of energy, for example—can have pragmatic success not by way of producing new and unexpected observations but by way of “second-order” success, providing indispensably useful instruments for the *systematization* of our experiential-determined observations.

### *William James (1842–1910)*

William James maintained that philosophy and science must go hand in hand, seeing that philosophy aims at “the completest knowledge of the universe, [and so] must include the results of all the sciences,” and moreover “it must . . . complete the sciences, and must incorporate their methods.”<sup>19</sup> Success in squaring with experience—the standard of acceptability in science—will do service for philosophy as well. But while this was James’ preaching, his practice was quite different. (Consistency was never one of James’ strong points.) In particular, he aimed, not at a philosophy that completed science, but at one that transcended it so as to move off in rather different directions of its own. For science

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18. Peirce, *Collected Papers*, vol. V: sect. 5.423.

19. William James, *Some Problems of Philosophy* (New York and London: Longmans Green, 1912), pp. 25–27.

seeks a uniformity of opinion, while philosophy, so James thought, must embrace diversity.

James therefore adopted an approach distinctly different from that of Peirce. For, as he saw it, pragmatism's characteristic tactic is to construe truth in terms of a potentially diversified utility in whose light there is nothing fixed or monolithic about truth:

*The Truth*: what a perfect idol of the rationalistic mind! I read in an old letter—from a gifted friend who died too young—these words: “In everything, in science, art, morals, and religion, there *must* be one system that is right and *every* other wrong.” How characteristic of the enthusiasm of a certain stage of young! At twenty-one we rise to such a challenge and expect to find the system. It never occurs to most of us even later that the question “What is *the* Truth?” is no real question (being irrelevant to all conditions) and that the whole notion of *the* truth is an abstraction from the fact of truths in the plural.<sup>20</sup>

On this basis, James held that “‘The true’ is only the expedient in our way of thinking, just as the right is only the expedient in our way of behaving.”<sup>21</sup> He sought to replace “the truth” by a diversified plurality of truths.

For James, pragmatism was to be an instrument of change designed to revolutionize traditionally entrenched conceptions. It seeks to reject the construction of “high-fallutin” monolithic philosophical conceptions like truth, beauty, and justice, and to put utility, serviceability, efficiency, and effectiveness in their place. And pragmatic “success” is seen as a matter of getting things done in the setting of our everyday life affairs. As James put it, “ideas become true just insofar as they help us to get into satisfac-

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20. William James, *Pragmatism* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press), p. 115.

21. James, *Pragmatism*, p. 106.



tory relation with other parts of our experience,"<sup>22</sup> where those "other parts" reach beyond the range of theorizing, of inquiry and question-resolution. Turning away from matters of rational inquiry as such, James rejected the idea that there is a "pure," disinterestedly neutral and wholly impersonal realm of meaningful cognition. To his mind, concepts like "knowledge," "belief," "truth," "meaning," and the entire panoply of epistemological conceptions are factors operating in a human practice of opinion formation that serve the interests of not just of rational inquiry but of life in general. Factors standardly adjudged as nonepistemic therefore have a key role in belief validation for James.

James' turning opened the way to fragmenting truth into a plurality of contextualizations, seeing that any instrumental resource—be it theoretical or practical—may prove more effective in one sphere of application than in another. Bertrand Russell's charge that "It follows that [for James] truth is geographical"<sup>23</sup> is not wholly off the mark. After all, "pragmatic success" is bound to come down to efficacy in serving the purposes of this or that particular individuals operating within some limited functional range. And it thus becomes tempting for a success-oriented pragmatism to take a personalistic turning. With Peirce, the objectivity of rational inquiry was paramount; in science our results are robust since what works out for one person works out for another, because nature plays no favorites. With James, however, what counts is a matter of potentially

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22. James, *Pragmatism*, p. 34. A first approximation to a plausibly acceptable reformulation would make certain crucial additions, namely, ideas GENERALLY COME TO BE RECOGNIZED AS true just insofar as they are seen to stand in a harmonious relationship with other parts of our COGNITIVE experience. What such a recasting does is to make explicit the epistemic aspect of the situation, recognizing that truth as such is something rather different from its *recognition* as such.

23. Bertrand Russell, "William James' Conception of Truth," *Philosophical Essays* (London: Longmans Green, 1910), pp. 147–48.

idiosyncratic personal satisfactions. In his hands, pragmatism took on a personalistic and psychologistic orientation towards matters of affective and subjective satisfaction,<sup>24</sup> disassembling into a virtually endless proliferation of purposive contextualizations.

Continuing to adopt pragmatism's idea of truth as pivoting on the successful guidance of experience, he construed success not in terms of specifically epistemic efficiency in scientific matters of prediction and control but rather in terms of psychological satisfactions. The utility, efficiency, and success of ideas that interested him primarily lay rather in the range of everyday life and of religious beliefs than in the realm of scientific matters of fact. With James, the issue of personal aims and reactions becomes pivotal even for the constitution of "objective" knowledge: "the popular notion that 'Science' is forced on the mind *ab extra*, and that our interests have nothing to do with its construction, as ultimately absurd." After all, "Truth for us is simply a collective name for verification-processes. . . . Truth is *made*, just as health, wealth, and strength are made, in the course of experience."<sup>25</sup> And at times James came perilously close to a "wishful thinking" view of truth that conflated the narrower *evidential* reasons for the substance of a belief with the broader *prudential* reasons why its adoption could prove advantageous.

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24. Often but not always with certain factual statements what matters is, James suggests, "extraordinary fertility in consequences verifiable by sense"—that is successful prediction. James, *Pragmatism*, p. 91. The problem is that James is simply inconsistent on this point—for him "expediency is sometimes scientific success and sometimes personal satisfaction. On James' cavalier attitude towards consistency, see Richard M. Gale, *The Philosophy of William James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

25. James, *Pragmatism*, p. 104.

And so while Peirce construed those pragmatically pivotal “practical consequences” as being consequences that are observationally and experimentally determinable in a uniform way by any community of scientific investigators, James took them to relate to the bearing of beliefs on the affective condition of individuals. He had a theory of truth all right, but it was one that saw this as a matter of personalized satisfaction in a way that led to a diversified proliferation of many truths. The long and short of it is that James had to ride roughshod over traditional principles of evidence and logic—the law of bivalence included.

James therefore construed pragmatism very differently from Peirce, not as a doctrine that provides a fixed standard of adequacy, but as an invitation to pluralism—to a relativistic diversity of views that allowed not only for differences among individuals, but even differences within individuals as an embodiment of many selves with natural inclinations operating in diverse circumstances. Peirce’s pragmatism was indeed success-oriented—but the success it envisioned was that of the communally impersonal objectives of science, and emphatically not as with James, a matter of serving the personal needs of differently constituted human individuals in their varying subjective reactions to objective conditions.<sup>26</sup> Where Peirce looked to science as a venture in quest for impersonal uniformity, James looked to human life in its multiplex and variegated diversity.<sup>27</sup> Truth, for James, is not something a claim or thesis exhibits indifferently but something acquired in the context of a process of belief formation that itself pivots on desire satisfaction. (The

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26. James, *The Meaning of Truth*, p. 97. Thus, James complains that a critic is “taking the word ‘true’ irrelatively, whereas the pragmatist always means ‘true for him who experiences the working.’”

27. When he saw James writing things like “On pragmatic principles, if the hypothesis of God works satisfactorily in the widest sense of the word, it is ‘true,’” Peirce was horrified. He then proposed to rename his own position “pragmaticism” to set it apart from this sort of thing.

question of "Whose desire for what?" is one that we had best not press all that closely with James.)

From the first, critics such as Bertrand Russell and Arthur Lovejoy complained that pragmatism's "success" in implementation and "working" in application can involve very different sorts of things—namely, either *epistemic* success in the guidance of thought or *affective* success in the conduct of life. Thus, (to give Russell's example) religious beliefs—such as the coming of the Messiah or the reality of an afterlife—may well "work" in engendering individual self-confidence and social cohesion among the faithful, but yet fail to work as factual predictions.<sup>28</sup> And even early on, different pragmatists took different lines here. Now for Peirce, "success" and "working out" arose in cognitive and above all in *scientific* contexts and related to effective experiential prediction and control in *observational* matters. James, by contrast, understood "working" in the very different sense that the effects of believing something are good in relation to affective, emotional, and psychological issues.<sup>29</sup> This Jamesean line, of course, represents an approach very different from what Peirce initially had in view—and one whose bearing on the matter of actual truth is, if anything, rather tenuous. In fact even James himself ultimately came to recognize this—better late than never!—when he acknowledged that he had hitherto confused "consequences that ideas have per se and consequences of ideas *qua* believed by us."<sup>30</sup> After all, providing

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28. Bertrand Russell, "William James' Conception of Truth," *Philosophical Essays* (London: Longmans Green, 1910), p. 143. Moreover, Russell observed, "It is far easier . . . to settle the plain question of fact: Have the Popes always been infallible? than to settle the question of whether thinking them to be infallible is on the whole good" (p. 135).

29. James, *Pragmatism*, pp. 127–49.

30. Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, 2 vols. (Boston: Little Brown, 1935), p. 481. This objection goes back at least to A. O. Lovejoy's "The Thirteen Pragmatisms," *The Journal of Philosophy, Sociology, and Scientific Methods* (1908):1–39.