

PRAGMATISM

A Guide for the Perplexed

Robert B. Talisse and Scott F. Aikin



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A GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED**

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CHAPTER 1

THE ORIGINS OF PRAGMATISM

PRELIMINARIES

What Is This Book About?

The terms *pragmatism*, *pragmatic*, and *pragmatist* are commonly used to denote a commitment to success in practical affairs, to ‘getting things done’. Pragmatists are driven not by principle, but by the desire to achieve their ends. Hence pragmatists have little interest in abstraction, idealization, nitpicking argument, or *theory* of any sort; they have no time for these because they are fixed on practical tasks. A *pragmatist* is hence a bargainer, a negotiator, a *doer*, rather than a seeker of truth, a wonderer, or a *thinker*. We might say, then, that *pragmatism* is the opposite of philosophy.

This is a philosophy book, and the pragmatism with which we are concerned is not the pragmatism of common parlance. Pragmatism in the sense which concerns us is the name for something distinctively philosophical. But what? Is pragmatism a *school* of philosophy organized around a single doctrine in the way that we might say that, for example, *Stoicism* is a school? Not quite. Although there are doctrinal similarities and channels of influence among all pragmatist philosophers, the differences among them make it difficult to see them as constituting a school. Is pragmatism a philosophical *theory*? Not exactly. It is difficult to point to a single philosophical claim to which all pragmatists subscribe. Is it a historical trend or movement within the history of philosophy? Although pragmatism arose out of specific conditions in the United States at the close of the nineteenth century and is a distinctively *American* philosophy, it is not bound to any particular cultural or historical milieu. So what is this book about?

Even the most preliminary attempt to say what pragmatism is raises considerable difficulties. Even if we confine ourselves to those contemporary philosophers who use the term to describe their views, we find a cacophony of distinct and often opposed doctrines, ranging from the hard-nosed naturalism of W. V. O. Quine to the playful and frustrating postmodernism of Richard Rorty, the economic reductionism of Richard Posner, and the prophetic social activism of Cornel West.

As this brief list suggests, philosophers who embrace the term pragmatism disagree over central and substantive philosophical matters. They also disagree about *what pragmatism is*. Some say that pragmatism is a thesis about meaning, reference, communication, or language itself. Others claim that pragmatism is an epistemological proposal, an account of knowledge, belief, justification, inquiry, or truth. Some hold it is a metaphysical perspective, a view about reality, nature, what there is, what we should say there is, or what we should say about what natural science says there is. Still others deny that pragmatism is a philosophical account of anything in particular. Among these philosophers, some say pragmatism is a *method* of doing philosophy. Others claim it is a *stance* one might take toward traditional philosophical problems. According to some, pragmatism is an *attitude* one takes toward philosophy itself. Some have held that pragmatism is a kind of intellectual *therapy*, an antidote to the human compulsion to obsess over the traditional questions of philosophy.

In light of all of this, it seems that maybe the only thing to do is to agree with Richard Rorty, who observed that pragmatism is ‘a vague, ambiguous, and overworked word’ (1982: 160). But accepting Rorty’s obviously correct assessment of the situation gets us no closer to an answer to our original question: What is this book about?

Pragmatism as a Living Philosophy

It is especially fitting that this book bears the subtitle *A Guide for the Perplexed*. Perplexity concerning the nature of pragmatism will persist throughout this book, and we shall not attempt to dispel it; that is, we shall not in these pages attempt to sort out the question of what pragmatism is. Where necessary, we shall refer to it as a *philosophy*, in full acknowledgment of the ambiguity of that term.

One might be tempted to see our inability to precisely circumscribe our topic as a kind of philosophical failure on the part of the

pragmatists themselves. One might think that the fact that we cannot set out from a clear definition of pragmatism indicates that pragmatist philosophy is *itself* unclear and imprecise. To be sure, pragmatists are not immune to unclear and imprecise thinking. But no philosopher enjoys such immunity. The lack of a precise definition of pragmatism does not derive from some excess of imprecision on the part of pragmatist philosophers; rather, it is a product of the fact that, relatively speaking, pragmatism is a *new* phenomenon on the philosophical scene. It has been just over 100 years since the term was first used in print in a philosophical context. In the history of philosophy, a century is hardly enough time for a philosophy to calcify into a unified intellectual program. Accordingly, we would be hard pressed to state with precision the meaning of any of the terms used to designate the philosophies that arose in the twentieth century: terms such as *existentialism* and *phenomenology* and *analytic philosophy* admit of similar ambiguity. We can point to figures, texts, and arguments that more or less *characterize* each of these, but we cannot say more than this. Perhaps in another century's time we will be able to more precisely delimit the meaning of *pragmatism*, in the way in which we now can talk about *absolute idealism*, *British empiricism*, and *Cartesian rationalism* as distinctive philosophical programs. But for now, the ambiguity cannot be eliminated.

This state of affairs is not lamentable. The resistance of pragmatism to precise definition is a mark of its vitality, an indication that it is a *living philosophy* rather than a historical relic. This means that questions concerning its principal contentions, major themes, and central arguments are still *open questions*, questions that pragmatists are still working through. Pragmatism, whatever it is, is still working itself out, still trying to figure out what it is.

Our aim in this book is to survey a wide range of philosophical positions that have been characterized as pragmatist. We present these various versions of pragmatism as responses to leading questions of philosophy. Accordingly, we will survey the leading pragmatist options in metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and political philosophy, while giving special attention to the topics of truth and environmental ethics. Our objective throughout is to present each pragmatist position in its best light; however, we are also concerned to show how each must confront hard cases and powerful objections from its philosophical competitors. In these pages pragmatism will emerge as a collection of more or less loosely connected philosophical themes,

arguments, and commitments; we will show that while each version of pragmatism has its distinctive insights and virtues, none can claim to be the last word on the philosophical problems to which it is addressed.

Hence we shall find that not only is the nature of pragmatism an open question, but there is also an open question about whether any version of pragmatism is philosophically viable. This is not to say that pragmatism is a philosophical dead end. That pragmatism has not been vindicated does not mean that it has been vanquished. Instead, it means that, like all living philosophies, the ultimate fate of pragmatism is yet to be determined. To use the language of the pragmatist William James, we will see that pragmatism is a *live option* in philosophy, but certainly not the only option. Such is the mark of a living philosophy: its ultimate fortune is yet an open question, something that could be determined only within the processes of ongoing philosophical argument.

Our Approach

Our discussion will proceed by way of an examination of the philosophical problems to which pragmatists have applied themselves. In each case we try to present the most powerful version of the arguments offered by various pragmatists in favor of their positions. But we also give considerable attention to the objections and challenges posed by the opponents of pragmatism; in fact, we typically conclude our discussions by giving the critic the last word. To be sure, we do this not in order to suggest that pragmatism has been defeated. Rather we aim to indicate to our reader where there is still work for the pragmatist to do. In some places, we will be quite sharp. This is for two reasons. First, we think pragmatist views can be improved, and feeling the pinch of a philosophical difficulty with one's arguments is the best spur to do the requisite work. We ourselves work on the problems we pose here, and we do so precisely because we see pragmatism as engaged with difficult philosophical issues. The second reason why we pose the criticisms so starkly is that we think pragmatists can be better, too. There is a regrettable narrative dominant in the pragmatist tradition which holds that although there once were philosophical problems of the sort traditional philosophers struggled with, such problems no longer exist because pragmatism

has dissolved them. According to this narrative, those not working in the pragmatist idiom have simply missed the boat. But nonpragmatist philosophers often have answers to and criticisms of pragmatist views. Further, many pragmatist insights have been integrated into mainstream philosophical programs well beyond those considered pragmatist. In short, pragmatists are members of an intellectual community, not just of fellow pragmatists, but of philosophers whose concerns, objections, and questions merit response. The heat with which we pose our challenges is proportioned to how urgent we take the need for a response to be.

It should be acknowledged from the outset that our approach in this book runs counter to the way of presenting pragmatism that has become standard. Most commentators on the history of pragmatism present some version of the following story: Pragmatism was initiated in the late 1800s by Charles Sanders Peirce, flourished in the United States throughout the first half of the twentieth century through the work of William James and John Dewey, fell into disfavor or obscurity following World War II due to the influence of a rival philosophical orientation often called *analytic philosophy*, and was revived in the 1980s mainly by Richard Rorty.

We think that this story is in many respects misleading. In the first place, it overlooks the fact that many of the developments that it associates with the analytic style of philosophizing that rose to prominence in the years following World War II are self-professedly descendants of the ideas and arguments found in the work of the founding pragmatists, namely, Peirce, James, and Dewey. As we will see in the coming chapters, pragmatist insights and arguments are alive and well in the 'analytic' philosophies that the standard story casts as pragmatism's philosophical nemesis.

Second, the standard story invites the idea that the so-called revival of pragmatism is primarily a *retrieval* of the canonical expressions of pragmatism in the work of Peirce, James, and Dewey. Accordingly, a sizeable portion of the recent work on pragmatism is devoted to policing the philosophical purposes to which the ideas of the founding pragmatists are put. Hence Richard Rorty, the philosopher uniformly acknowledged among those who promote this story to be the main force behind the revival of pragmatism, is more frequently chastised for his alleged misreading of Dewey than engaged with at the level of his philosophical commitments. One gets the sense that

those invested in the claim that pragmatism has been revived are more interested in *preserving* the philosophical ideas of the founders than in making fresh philosophical advances or having new philosophical thoughts. But any revival of pragmatism (assuming for the moment that there was one) worth attending to surely must amount to more than a revival of interest in the *historical* figures most commonly associated with pragmatism. Recall that the narrative claims that Rorty instigated a *philosophical* revival of pragmatism, a renewed interest in the claims and arguments associated with pragmatism, not merely an invitation to scholastic veneration of the founding pragmatists.

Third, and most importantly, the standard story tends to underplay – or in extreme cases, flatly deny – the degree to which the original pragmatists were philosophically divided over core issues. That is, the story tends to present pragmatism as a unified philosophical school, organized around the succession of headmasters, each of whom simply carried further the thought of his predecessor. Thus, H. S. Thayer writes,

In a word, pragmatism is a method of philosophizing often identified as a theory of meaning first stated by Charles Peirce in the 1870's; revived primarily as a theory of truth in 1898 by William James; and further developed, expanded, and disseminated by John Dewey. (1981: 5)

On Thayer's view, pragmatism is essentially the philosophical project of working out Peirce's theory of meaning. Accordingly, the story of pragmatism, as told by Thayer, is the story of developing and disseminating Peirce's views.

But the true story is not this simple. As we'll see in the next section, the founding pragmatists disagreed sharply about the scope and application of Peirce's theory of meaning; these disagreements gave rise to striking philosophical differences among them. Indeed, the differences were so stark that Peirce was led in 1905 to renounce the term pragmatism and rechristen his philosophy *pragmaticism*, a word he hoped would be 'ugly enough to be safe from kidnappers' (CP, 5.415).¹ Our account of the history of pragmatism must not rely too heavily upon there being a *doctrinal* unity among the founding pragmatists. But this is precisely what the standard narrative encourages.

John Smith has offered a more nuanced reading of the career of pragmatism, one that recognizes the doctrinal differences to which we have alluded. Smith writes,

The individual differences marking the thought of the classical pragmatist philosophers are undeniable: Peirce's orientation is logical and metaphysical, James follows the path of psychology and personal experience, [and] Dewey stresses the biological and functional structures in individual life and society. (1999: 3)

Smith then picks up the theme of doctrinal unity, writing that '[t]hese differences, however, must not be allowed to obscure the powerful presence of a basic outlook that all shared and identified as pragmatism' (1999: 3). He characterizes this 'basic outlook' as follows

This outlook stands for some doctrines about the nature of things, but it also includes a way of thinking, a spirit of adventure, and above all, the belief that ideas make a difference in the world and are not merely to be contemplated but must be set to work guiding what we think and do. (1999: 3)

To be sure, Smith's view is certainly closer to the mark than Thayer's. However, if Smith is correct to say that the shared basic outlook of all pragmatists is constituted 'above all' by the view that ideas make a difference in the world and 'must be set to work in guiding what we think and do', then pragmatism is in no way novel or original or even *distinguishable* from other philosophical movements. To see this, consider that figures in the history of philosophy otherwise as opposed as Aristotle, Rousseau, Bentham, and Marx all share this basic outlook with the pragmatists. Moreover, other movements in twentieth-century philosophy that are often viewed as decidedly antipragmatist – such as logical positivism and critical theory – also describe themselves as committed to the view that 'ideas must be set to work guiding what we think and do'. So whereas Thayer's view suffers the vice of understating disagreement, Smith's tends to surrender the claim that the classical pragmatists were offering a *distinctive* philosophical approach.

Despite these defects, most treatments of the history of pragmatism proceed along Thayer–Smith lines. Accordingly, many books introducing pragmatism begin with Peirce, and follow out, in historical

order, the progression to James, Dewey, and eventually Rorty and his contemporaries. We have already indicated the ways in which our approach rejects this model. Nonetheless, even though our discussion throughout will be problems based rather than historical, *something* must be said about the first pragmatists in order to put the following chapters in context.

CONTESTATION OVER PRAGMATISM

How Many Pragmatisms?

Roughly a century ago, A. O. Lovejoy set out to ‘discriminate all the more important doctrines going under the name of pragmatism’ (1908: 13). Taking William James’s 1898 essay on ‘Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results’ as marking the inauguration of pragmatism as a completed doctrine, Lovejoy reasoned that pragmatism’s second decade should begin with an earnest effort to ‘attach some single and stable meaning’ to the term (1908: 1). Through a careful analysis of key articulations of pragmatism, Lovejoy identified 13 logically distinct and independent theses, each claiming to constitute the core of the pragmatist doctrine. Since these 13 did not make a consistent set, Lovejoy proposed that each ostensibly pragmatist thesis ‘should manifestly be given a name of its own’, for this would be the only way to avoid ‘confusion in future discussion’ (1908: 28). Lovejoy confessed that he had neither ‘the necessary ingenuity’ nor ‘the ambition’ to propose ‘a nomenclature so extensive’ (1908: 29).

It is reasonable to suspect that the number of pragmatisms in currency today far exceeds 13. To our knowledge, no one has yet taken up Lovejoy’s project of distinguishing and naming each distinct variety, and we will not attempt to do so here. But we do want to pick up on our claim from the previous section that pragmatism has always been a site of contestation, and that the founding pragmatists were often at odds with each other concerning central philosophical questions. In the following, we take a brief tour through the distinct pragmatisms of Peirce, James, and Dewey. By examining the main contours of their respective pragmatisms, we will be able to see clearly the ways in which they differ.

How James Kidnapped Peirce

It is natural to follow Lovejoy in taking William James's 'Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results', to mark the inauguration of pragmatism as a philosophy. In that essay, James explicitly takes himself to be launching a new movement; he claims to be an intellectual trailblazer offering 'the most likely direction in which *to start* upon the trail of truth', indicating that in his judgment the true task of philosophy had not yet been attempted (WWJ, 347; our emphasis).² Oddly, by the time we hit the essay's fifth paragraph, we are referred by James back 20 years to an 1878 article by Charles Sanders Peirce titled 'How to Make Our Ideas Clear'. James claims that, in that essay, Peirce first expressed 'the principle of pragmatism' (WWJ, 348). However, in his own treatment of Peirce's principle, James confesses that pragmatism 'should be expressed more broadly than Mr. Peirce expresses it' (WWJ, 348). Apparently, this broadening did not suit Peirce. In 1905, he wrote of James's 'Philosophical Conceptions' paper that it 'pushed' the pragmatic maxim 'to such extremes as to give us pause' (CP, 5.4). As we mentioned earlier, in another 1905 paper, Peirce expressed his dissatisfaction with 'what other pragmatists have written'; he rebaptized his philosophy *pragmaticism*, a term he thought so 'ugly' that no one would want to kidnap it (CP, 5.415). In this section, we present an account of what Peirce found unsatisfactory in James's expression of pragmatism.

In 'How to Make Our Ideas Clear', Peirce formulates the view of meaning that is the core of his pragmatism and that provides the touchstone for many subsequent varieties of pragmatism. Peirce writes,

To develop [a thought's] meaning, we have simply to determine what habits it produces, for what a thing means is simply what habits it involves. (CP, 5.400)

By 'habit' Peirce means a standard course of action undertaken in response to specific conditions. For any thought, then, one may extract its complete meaning by drawing out the proposals for action that it suggests. This thesis has come to be known as the *pragmatic maxim*. Peirce expresses the idea thus:

Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then our

conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object. (CP, 5.402)

According to Peirce's maxim, we discern the meaning of a proposition³ by formulating a conditional of the following form,

If one were to perform action A, one would observe result B.

To use Peirce's own example, if one says of some object, X, that it is *hard*, one means that it would not be scratched by many other objects (CP, 5.403); that is, 'X is *hard*' means 'If one were to rub X against many other objects, X would not be scratched'. Similarly, the proposition, 'X is *heavy*' means that 'If X were left without support, X would fall' (CP, 5.403).⁴

Peirce hence connects meaning to 'what is tangible and conceivably practical' (CP, 5.400); on his view, the meaning of a proposition is essentially a proposal, or a prediction, regarding the functioning of its object within our experience. Indeed, Peirce held that such proposals were *exhaustive* of a proposition's meaning:

If one can identify accurately all the conceivable phenomena which the affirmation or denial of a concept could imply, one will have therein a complete definition of the concept, *and there is absolutely nothing more in it.* (CP, 5.412)

Importantly, insofar as the pragmatic maxim provides an *exhaustive* analysis of a proposition's meaning, it also provides a criterion for meaninglessness. The maxim entails that any proposition that cannot be cashed out in terms of the observable effects of acting with its object is *ipso facto* meaningless. Accordingly, Peirce thought that many of the traditional positions in philosophy, especially metaphysics, were literally meaningless. For example, he argues that the Thomistic doctrine of transubstantiation, which holds that during Mass a priest actually changes the substance of bread and wine into flesh and blood without changing any of their attributes, is 'senseless jargon' (CP, 5.401). In fact, Peirce saw pragmatism as 'merely method of ascertaining the meanings of hard words and abstract concepts' (CP, 5.464). He held that this a method 'will serve to show that almost every proposition of ontological metaphysics is either meaningless gibberish . . . or else downright absurd' (CP, 5.423). That is, according

to Peirce, pragmatism was essentially an antimetaphysical strategy, a way of dismissing the ‘make-believes’ (CP, 5.416) of previous philosophizing and of keeping open the road of proper inquiry.⁵ Peirce thought that once the road of inquiry is swept clear of ‘meaningless gibberish’, all that would remain is ‘a series of problems capable of investigation by the observational methods of the true sciences’ (CP, 5.423).

To be sure, pragmatism was not the whole of Peirce’s philosophy. Peirce’s philosophical work spans nearly every major topic and issue within the discipline, from logic and (scientific) metaphysics to theology, cosmology, semiotics, and aesthetics. Yet pragmatism was the *beginning* or the *core* of Peirce’s philosophy; it was the method by which he thought philosophy could break from its error-ridden past.

James saw things differently. In ‘Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results’, James employs Peirce’s pragmatic maxim, which he expresses as follows:

If there were any part of a thought that made no difference in the thought’s practical consequences, then that part would be no proper element of the thought’s significance. (WWJ, 349)

James continues,

The effective meaning of any philosophical proposition can always be brought down to some particular consequence in our future practical experience. (WWJ, 349)

In these statements, James broadens Peirce’s maxim in a way that is subtle but consequential. Like Peirce, James appeals to a proposition’s ‘practical consequences’ to determine its meaning. We begin to see the divergence between James and Peirce, however, by examining the way in which James construes the notion of a practical consequence. Whereas Peirce limits the notion of a practical consequence to that which is ‘tangible and conceivably practical’ (CP, 5.400), James designs his pragmatism to include within a given proposition’s pragmatic meaning the psychological effects of *believing* it. In short, James broadened Peirce’s maxim by *psychologizing* it.

The psychological character of James’s pragmatism is evident in his discussion of the debate between materialists and spiritualists. Noting that debate does *not* concern a difference in sensation or

observation (a feature that would render the debate meaningless on Peirce's view), James claims that the dispute is one that concerns psychological *temperament* only. Thus, on James's view, materialism pragmatically means:

In the vast driftings of the cosmic weather, tho many a jeweled shore appears, and many an enchanted cloud-bank floats away, long lingering ere it be dissolved – even as our world now lingers, for our joy – yet when these transient products are gone, nothing absolutely nothing remains, to represent those particular qualities, those elements of preciousness which that may have enshrined. (WWJ, 354)

Summarizing the materialist position less poetically, James claims that materialism pragmatically means that 'the lower and not the higher forces are the eternal forces' (WWJ, 354).

Contrast this characterization with James's analysis of the pragmatic meaning of the spiritualist position:

A world with a God in it to say the last word, may indeed burn up or freeze, but we then think of Him as still mindful of the old ideals and sure to bring them elsewhere to fruition; so that, where He is, tragedy is only provisional and partial, and shipwreck and dissolution not the final things. (WWJ, 354)

James concedes that the spiritualist position is 'inferior' in 'clearness' to the materialist position; however, he contends that spiritualism nonetheless has a 'practical superiority' over materialism in that it 'guarantees that an ideal order . . . shall be preserved' (WWJ, 354).

James encapsulates the debate between materialists and spiritualists as follows:

Here, then, in these different emotional and practical appeals, in there adjustments of our concrete attitudes of hope and expectation, and all the delicate consequences which their differences entail, lie the real meanings of materialism and spiritualism – not in hair-splitting abstractions about matter's inner essence, or about the metaphysical attributes of God. Materialism means simply the denial that the moral order is eternal, and the cutting off of

ultimate hopes; [spiritualism] means the affirmation of an eternal moral order and the letting loose of hope. (WWJ, 354)

James contends that since the ‘need for an eternal moral order is one of the deepest needs in our breast’ (WWJ, 354), the metaphysical dispute between materialists and spiritualists is easily settled in favor of the latter position. From the perspective of the Jamesian pragmatist, then, the ‘true objection’ to materialism is that it does not provide a ‘permanent warrant for our more ideal interests’; it is not a ‘fulfiller of our remotest hopes’; it results in ‘utter final wreck and tragedy’ (WWJ, 354).

Although the contrast between Peirce’s and James’s understandings of the pragmatic maxim should be clear, let us consider briefly an example of an issue treated by both Peirce and James in which they propose opposing pragmatic analyses.

In *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (WWJ, 362–472), James takes up the question of transubstantiation. We have already noted that Peirce held that the doctrine was to be discarded as ‘meaningless gibberish’ (CP, 5.423). However, James contends that the issue of transubstantiation involves ‘the only pragmatic application of the substance-idea’ (WWJ, 392), the only instance in which the concept of substance has any pragmatic meaning. According to James, if we dismiss the doctrine of transubstantiation, we reject the psychologically potent idea that in the Mass we ‘feed upon the very substance of divinity’ (WWJ, 392). According to James, the doctrine of transubstantiation is hardly ‘meaningless gibberish’; it is a doctrine of ‘tremendous effect’ (WWJ, 392).

We may capture the difference between Peirce’s and James’s understandings of the pragmatic maxim in the following way. Peirce held that in order to grasp the meaning of a proposition, one must understand what experiences to expect *were that proposition true*. By contrast, James held that part of the meaning of a proposition (and the full meaning of certain propositions) is constituted by the psychological effects of *believing* it to be true. As we have seen, James, unlike Peirce, is willing to treat as meaningful certain metaphysical propositions that, even if true, would entail no definite implications for observation; in such cases, James contends that the meaning of the proposition consists completely in the psychological implications of *adopting* or *believing* it. Thus, on James’s analysis, the ostensibly

metaphysical claims about the ultimate nature of reality represented in the competing positions of materialism and spiritualism *say nothing* about the ultimate nature of reality; they instead represent two competing psychological comportments toward the world, namely, hopelessness and hope, respectively.

To put the contrast in more general terms, Peirce saw pragmatism as a way of ridding philosophy of traditional metaphysics by showing that most metaphysical propositions are meaningless. Peirce thought that once the pragmatic maxim had cleared the decks of nonsense and philosophical red herrings, philosophy could be set upon a new and more scientific track. James, however, took pragmatism to be ‘primarily a method of *settling* metaphysical disputes that might otherwise be interminable’ (WWJ, 377; our emphasis), by first casting the opposing positions as making different psychological appeals, and then selecting the appeal that satisfies best one’s psychological needs. Thus, whereas for Peirce pragmatism was simply a logical rule for doing philosophy, for James, pragmatism was *itself* a philosophy.

This conclusion regarding James will strike some as dubious. James claims in *Pragmatism* that pragmatism is ‘a method only’ that ‘does not stand for any special results’ (WWJ, 379); he explicitly claims that his pragmatism ‘has no dogmas, and no doctrines’ (WWJ, 380). He then likens his pragmatism to a ‘corridor in a hotel’ that houses a broad diversity of intellectual projects and processes. Of this intellectual corridor, James writes,

Innumerable chambers open out of it. In one you may find a man writing an atheistic volume; in the next some one on his knees praying for faith and strength; in a third a chemist investigating a body’s properties. In a fourth a system of idealistic metaphysics is being excogitated; in a fifth, the impossibility of metaphysics is being shown. But they all own the corridor, and all must pass through it if they want a practicable way of getting into or out of their respective rooms. (WWJ, 380)

But James’s image of pragmatism as a philosophically neutral space in which all intellectual projects have a home and within which all come into contact with the rest cannot be correct. In the very same lecture, James himself admits that pragmatism is also a theory of truth (WWJ, 381). The details of James’s controversial theory of

truth cannot be engaged in this chapter, but note that James's view of truth is *opposed* to traditional correspondence and coherence views; consequently, Jamesian pragmatism *does* stand for the result that those alternate theories are in error. More importantly, the bulk of *Pragmatism* is devoted to showing the pragmatic superiority of certain philosophical positions over others. For example, as we have seen above, James thinks that pragmatism is committed to spiritualism over materialism. He devotes the entire third chapter of *Pragmatism* to showing how certain 'metaphysical problems' look when 'pragmatically considered'. As it turns out, James's pragmatism entails a particular view of material substance (WWJ, 392), of personal identity (WWJ, 393), of free will (WWJ, 403), of reality (WWJ, 451), and of religion (WWJ, 466). It is opposed to the 'materialistic bias as ordinary empiricism labors under' (WWJ, 381), to rationalism (WWJ, 439), to determinism (WWJ, 402), and to monism (WWJ, 411).

Despite his claims to the contrary and his metaphor of the corridor, James's pragmatism *does* stand for certain 'special results' (WWJ, 379). How could it be otherwise? If pragmatism is to serve as a method for 'resolving metaphysical disputes that might otherwise be interminable' (WWJ, 377), it simply *must* entail certain doctrines; for if it did not, pragmatism would not resolve any disputes.

Hence we may say that James 'broadened' Peirce's conception in two distinct but related ways. First, James broadened the application of Peirce's maxim by including among the 'practical consequences' of a proposition the *psychological* effects of *believing* it. Second, James broadened what we might call the *domain* of pragmatism, the range of philosophical topics with regard to which pragmatism itself directly entails a position. To be a Jamesian pragmatist is to endorse a wide range of philosophical claims; it is to accept a collection of specific resolutions to standard metaphysical problems. By contrast, Peirce rejects the idea that pragmatism *itself* entails any positive philosophical commitments beyond the pragmatic maxim and its corresponding criterion of meaninglessness. Since, for Peirce, the pragmatic maxim calls us simply to specify the observable effects that would follow were a proposition true, pragmatism does not settle any disputes; rather, it clarifies *what is at issue* in any given dispute, thereby helping us to identify what experiment or action to undertake in order to resolve it. As Peirce himself wrote in a letter to James, 'Pragmatism solves no real problem. It only shows that the supposed problems are not real problems' (CP, 8.25).

Dewey's Response to James

Before moving on to discuss in some detail the respects in which Peirce and Dewey differed over the nature of pragmatism, it is worth dwelling for a moment on the fact that, like Peirce, Dewey also expressed dissatisfaction with James's pragmatism.

At key junctures in his *Pragmatism*, James makes enthusiastic reference to Dewey's work (WWJ, 382; 388; 442). James also laments the fact that Dewey's critics misinterpret him. James reports that Dewey holds the view that 'truth is what gives satisfaction'; James then complains that Dewey is treated by uncharitable critics 'as one who believes in calling everything true which, if it were true, would be pleasant' (WWJ, 442). However, in a 1908 review essay of James's *Pragmatism* titled 'What Pragmatism Means by "Practical"', Dewey criticizes James for misappropriating his work. Dewey writes,

Since Mr. James has referred to me as saying 'truth is what gives satisfaction', I may remark (apart from the fact that I do not think I ever said that truth is what *gives* satisfaction) that I have never identified any satisfaction with the truth of an idea, save *that* satisfaction which arises when the idea as working hypothesis or tentative method is applied to prior existences in such a way as to fulfill what it intends. (MW4: 109; italics in the original)⁶

Furthermore, Dewey implicitly rejects James's characterization of pragmatism as 'primarily a method of settling metaphysical disputes that might otherwise be interminable' (WWJ, 377). According to Dewey, James's entire strategy presumes the *prima facie* validity of standing metaphysical disputes. Against this, Dewey claims,

For myself, I have no hesitation in saying that it seems unpragmatic for pragmatism to content itself with finding out the value of a conception whose own inherent significance pragmatism has not first determined. (MW4: 107)

According to Dewey, pragmatism is primarily a critical tool for assessing the value of certain traditional philosophical problems. Dewey judged many of the standard philosophical disputes to be pseudoproblematic; he argued that the very terms and categories they presupposed were objectionable and ought to be dismissed. According to Dewey, we 'do not solve' the standard philosophical

problems, ‘we get over them’ (MW4: 14); that is, Dewey held that pragmatists should not attempt to ‘settle metaphysical disputes that might otherwise be interminable’, they should *dispose* of them.

In this way, Dewey follows Peirce in seeing pragmatism not as an *answer* to traditional philosophical problems, but as a method for inoculating ourselves against certain recurring blind alleys in philosophy. However, Dewey, like James, saw pragmatism in more expansive terms than Peirce did; for Dewey, as for James, pragmatism was not merely a method of discerning the meaning of words and propositions, but an entire philosophical system.

Peirce and Dewey: Two Concepts of Inquiry

At first blush, the pragmatisms of Dewey and Peirce seem closely allied. This in large part is due to the fact that both Peirce and Dewey, unlike James, place the concept of *inquiry* (what both would call ‘logic’) at the center of their pragmatism. Dewey himself was keen to establish the lineage. Like James, Dewey claims to be deeply indebted to Peirce; he describes Peirce as ‘the man who more than any other single person is the begetter in philosophy of an attitude and outlook distinctively American’ (LW15: 273), and elsewhere credits Peirce with having devised ‘the best definition of *truth* from the logical standpoint which is known to me’ (LW12: 343; italic in the original). However, although Peirce published a favorable review of one of Dewey’s early books on logical theory (CP, 8.188f.), in personal correspondence to Dewey he rejected Dewey’s view, claiming that it was ‘too loose’ and comprised of ‘slipshod arguments’.

The companion essay to Peirce’s 1878 ‘How to Make Our Ideas Clear’ is his 1877 article, ‘The Fixation of Belief’.⁷ There, Peirce introduces the doubt-belief model of inquiry that is picked up by Dewey.⁸ In this section, we want to draw attention to some crucial contrasts between the theories of inquiry offered by Peirce and Dewey. These contrasts will support the conclusion that, like James before him, Dewey promoted a version of pragmatism that is broader than Peircean pragmatism.

Inquiry, according to Peirce, is the ‘struggle’ to attain a state of ‘belief’ from a prior state of ‘doubt’ (CP, 5.374). ‘Belief’, on the Peircean model, is a state which ‘guides[s] our desires and shape[s] our actions’ (CP, 5.371); it is ‘a calm and satisfactory state which we do not wish to avoid’ (CP, 5.372) which provides a ‘more or less sure

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