PRAGMATISM, PRAGMATIC ETHICS, AND RECONSTRUCTED PHILOSOPHY:
Some Metaphilosophical Considerations


«There is absolutely nothing new in the pragmatic method», says William James (1). «Socrates was an adept at it. Aristotle used it methodically. Locke, Berkeley, and Hume made momentous contributions to truth by its means». The only difference that James can see between these forerunners of pragmatism, and the pragmatists of the current day — is that the former used the pragmatic method only in fragments, while the latter have witnessed its final general formulations, and the beginnings of its universal destiny.

Probably what James means is that pragmatists «follow the argument withersoever it leads them», like Socrates, and eschew extramundane and ideal «heavenly essences», like Aristotle, and restrict their investigations to knowable, empirical facts and phenomena, as Locke, Berkeley, and Hume purported to do. We may conclude from this that pragmatism has systematized methods which in former philosophers were the result of genius or inspiration.

But, as every pragmatist would insist, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Is pragmatism the pudding it claims to be? That is, is it the modern, perfected formula of a primitive dish, of a primitive reci-

pe? Does it have the true ingredients? Or is it just another Siren calling out to philosophers on passing ships, « we were meant for each other »?

Immanuel Kant seems to be the father of the word, « Pragmatism », since he was the first one who interpreted « pragmatic » as differing from « practical », and as signifying « practical, as related to conduct, or as related to the causation and conservation of human happiness ». Peirce, the father of the theory, pragmatism, having « learned philosophy out of Kant », noted the german word, pragmatisch, as expressing relation to some definite human purpose, and thought it more apt than praktisch, which was used by Kant in a non-experimental connotation.

Pragmatism, as formulated by Peirce, was to undergo some changes under the deft skill of William James and John Dewey. These were not altogether radical changes. « James "Radical Empiricism" », writes Peirce (2), « substantially answered to (my) definition of pragmatism, albeit with a certain difference in the point of view ». But there was a difference, — consisting mainly in the fact that the word, « pragmatism » had been extended and generalized, by other writers, to include too many things. Peirce was very conscientious about terminology, and held that

« no study can become scientific (in the sense of a universal, consistent, orderly science), until it provides itself with a suitable technical nomenclature, whose every term has a single definite meaning universally accepted among students of the subject... » (3).

Therefore Peirce was « forced » to « announce the birth of the word "pragmaticism" » which, in addition to other good qualities, would have the decided advantage of being « ugly enough to be safe from kidnappers » (4). True to prophecy, there have been no spectacular attempts to kidnap the word. But it is also doubtful whether many benefits have accrued from its creation, except for benefits relating to exactness of terminology.

If we could be so bold as to classify and differentiate the three preeminent pragmatists, Peirce, James, and Dewey, we might proceed thusly: Peirce we would allow to be what he claimed to be, « a scholastic realist of a somewhat extreme stripe... » (5). He had a great admiration for such men as John Duns Scotus, whose dedication to their work, and impersonal, scientific interest in truth, were ideals of his own. But we must note that Peirce is an « extreme stripe ». He was certainly no scholastic as regards theory of meanings, ethics, logic, etc. The essence of scholasticism has been — so the scholastics claim —

(3) Ib., p. 253.
(4) Ib., p. 255.
(5) Pragmatism in Retrospect: A Last Formulation, in Phil. of Pragmatism, p. 274. However, Peirce is against « ontological » metaphysics in scholasticism.
that it has «looked for the golden mean between extremes in all the problems it strove to solve» (6). Of course, one might claim that pragmatism is a golden mean. But then we might ask, «between rationalism and what?». If pragmatism is a true representative of empiricism, or if it is the «radical empiricism» which pleased James — it would seem to be more of a progressive extreme than a conservative mean. But we involve ourselves here in semantics, as to the meaning of «mean», etc.

If Peirce is a realist, James is a nominalist. Not that he is interested in refuting the existence of «universal genera», etc. But still, «the general» has little meaning or importance for him and here he differs from Peirce. James insists that concepts must be related to particulars to be true. He tries to propagate and develop British Empiricism in his thought. He agreed with Berkeley in not accepting abstract ideas like «substance». He found a fellow-anti-intellectualist, also, in Hume, who in an extreme gesture of empiricism had taken away the possibility of a mind-substance. James would take such ideas further forward in his treatment of the problems of mind, consciousness, etc.

Dewey is also an empiricist, but — no doubt as a result of an early exposure to Hegel's dialectical organicism (7) — is distinguished for emphasizing a Darwinian and transactional approach. He was a radical in advocating the reconstruction of philosophy from its roots — bending it totally towards the standards of science. Peirce seems to have advocated a similar notion, but reform, for Peirce, does not involve such a complete reconstruction from scratch. Dewey was influenced as much by anthropology and biology, as James was influenced by psychology, and Peirce by physics and mathematics. In his psychology, Dewey is definitely for a behavioristic, — as opposed to a faculty-type, of formulation.

It might be profitable to compare the varying approaches to and interpretations given to, pragmatism, by the pragmatists.

From the point of view of clarity, Peirce considers pragmatism to be the «third degree of clarity». The first degree, according to him, is the system of Descartes, in which, after systematically doubting, we would come to those ideas which would be the indubitable bases of knowledge. This system would require every structure of inference to rest on foundations that must have been intuitively obvious. But, Peirce objects, Descartes does not give us any clear idea about how to distinguish subjective from objective clearness (8). Leibniz gives us


(7) In Dewey's estimation, the most important insight which he derived from Hegel was the view of the continuity of apparently disparate elements, in and through their conflict. See Jane Dewey, «Biography of John Dewey», in SCILPP, The Philosophy of John Dewey, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1939, p. 18.

the second degree of clarity, in declaring that the first principles of
science are reducible to two classes, namely, those from sufficient rea-
son, and those not able to be denied without self-contradiction. But
this, says, Peirce, is just like the old doctrine about the importance
of definitions: It makes of thought an overly piecemeal thing, made
up of isolated clear conceptions. But thought, Peirce claims, is like to
the relations between the notes of music (9). The musical notes are our
individual sense perceptions, and discursive thought is like a thread,
a congruent airy medium, of successive notes. And so he proposes a
third, and highest degree of clarity, expressed in the following rule:

«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» (10).

And thus, according to this «third degree of clarity», it is sense-
less to say of something, «I know its effects, but I know not what it is» (11). When you know the effects of anything, you really know it.
To know the effects of something, is to get the clearest possible idea of
that thing. He uses the theological dispute over «transubstantiation»
in the Eucharist, as a pointed example, here (12). «To talk of something
as having all the sensible characters of wine, yet being in reality
(Christ’s) blood, is senseless jargon». The reason for this is that the
effects of the Eucharist are seen to be the effects of wine. (Peirce does
not consider the problem of what the conclusion would be, in case
various claims, asserting that sensible and practical effects took place
beyond the power of the bread and wine, were true).

Pragmatism, besides being a third degree of clarity, is, according
to Peirce, also the fourth method for fixing belief (13): The first me-
thod is the method of tenacity, which is based on desire and feeling,
and secures peace of mind for people who are afraid of arguments
contrary to their own beliefs, and «go through life, systematically
keeping out of view all that might cause a change in (their) opi-
nions» (14). The trouble with this method, is that sooner or later,
these people are going to find out that others disbelieve the same
thing, perhaps with just as good a reason. And so this gives rise to the

(9) Ib., p. 27.
(10) Ib., p. 31; as an operational principle, this defines the meaning of a
concept in terms of future possible experiences — Ayer calls this a «physi-
calistic interpretation of the verification principle» (AYER, The Origins of Prag-
matism, Freeman, San Francisco 1968, p. 45).
(11) Ib., p. 32.
(13) A «belief» in Peirce is in a certain sense synonymous with a truth.
If I believe something, I believe it to be true; if I take something to be true
I believe it. In Peirce’s estimation, «the distinction between what is true and
what we believe to be true is one to which we cannot ourselves give any prac-

The coincidence of belief with truth, however, is largely subjective, and it
is the purpose of making them objectively coterminous that Peirce devises
the «fourth method» for fixing belief.
second method, a social method, of fixing belief. The Method of authority, as this method is called, has, Peirce insists (15), « been practised in Rome from the days of Numa Pompilius to those of Pius Nynus » (16). By this method, those in authority, in order to secure peace and security from contrary opinions, exercise a rigid censorship over opinions, often killing those holding contrary opinions, making it a matter of conscience to hold what must be held, etc. But under this system, says Peirce, the individual is sooner or later going to see that there is a large portion of the world which is not under such « intellectual slavery ». And the unrest which results, gives rise to the third method, the a-priori method: This is the road down which Descartes, Kant, Hegel, et al, have trod. In it, appeal is constantly made to unconvincing « necessary propositions » (17), to principles which « of their very nature » appear to conform to reason (18). « Everyone's intuitive view of the truth is basically right », the system's proponents will say. But, Peirce objects, what if my view is that a-priori philosophers have continually made history by their ridiculous opinions?

At any rate, this method is impugned by the very inconsistencies arising within it, as also by everyday matters-of-fact, which turn out to be at odds with a-priori presuppositions, and which cannot fail to escape men's notice (19).

The method of tenacity gives great peace and resoluteness, and probably is a factor in the lives of many great men. The method of authority gives unity and harmony to men. The a-priori method gives internally-consistent conclusions. But no one of these methods gives facts. And facts are what Peirce wants. And so, as a final and sufficient answer to man's desire for facts, he proposes the method of science. This is the method which simply admits the Real, and proceeds to adapt all its means to it. This method, says Peirce, is the only one which really allows for right and wrong, and which admits the basic logical tenet that a rule of reasoning may be applied rightly or wrongly. Thus, this method does not depend on whim, or on personal position, or on agreeableness to instinct — but rather on the very exigencies of Reality. And so it is, concludes Peirce, that many men adopt the scientific method as a bride, and — while not looking down with disdain on other women (methods) — still honor, profess, and have necessary predilection for their own (20).

Pragmatism therefore, according to Peirce's evaluation of it, is a scientific method, is the experimental method of science as applied to the ascertainment of the meanings of words and concepts (21). It is

(16) The two examples here are presumably chosen to illustrate that either physical force or moral pressure is sufficient to implement the method of authority.
(18) *Ib.*, p. 15.
(21) *Pragmatism in Retrospect: A Last Formulation*, p. 27.
merely another additional application of the biblical maxim, « By their fruits ye shall know them ». In itself, however, warns Peirce, it « is no attempt to determine any truth of things » (22). It is only a « method of ascertaining the meanings of hard words and of abstract concepts ». And, with this definition in mind, Peirce concludes that William James’ idea of Pragmatism is divergent from his own, in the following respect:

« William James defines Pragmatism as the doctrine that the whole "meaning" of a concept expresses itself either in the shape of conduct to be recommended or of experience to be expected ». James seems to say that the meanings of all ideas are explicable properly in terms of resulting experiences or effects. But « I », asserts Peirce, « understand pragmatism to be a method of ascertaining the meanings, not of all ideas, but only of what I call "intellectual concepts" » (23).

Peirce here illustrates his quasi-metaphysical bent.

It is to be noted that, in the pragmatic method, as understood by Peirce, the full meaning of any concept is to be found in its effectual connections with human conduct. According to his theory, « a conception, that is, the rational purport of a word or other expression, lies exclusively in its conceivable bearing upon the conduct of life ». This « Pragmatic principle » has, says H. F. Barnes (24), been interpreted in two different ways: Some have interpreted it pragmatically, i.e. contending that the whole meaning of an idea was in its effects regarding conduct, etc. Others have interpreted it experientially, saying that Peirce was interpreting all ideas in terms of sense experiences produced. However, as to the former interpretation, Peirce stated that his pragmatic « third degree of clarity » was nothing but the finale of a symphony (25). « The final upshot of thinking is volition » (26), which itself is not a part of thought. As to the latter interpretation, Peirce stated quite clearly that he was holding for real conceptions, not just for transitory percepts. Peirce’s theory was definitely meant to be a fundamentally conceptual theory. And thus we are forced to have either a conceptual pragmatic interpretation, or a conceptual experiential interpretation. According to the former, all concepts are simply to be conceived as having bearings on human habits, i.e., as impelling a person toward action. According to the latter, every concept must be conceived, for clearness’ sake, as having practical experiential effects; but the actual production of this or that effect is not a test of the final validity of the concept.

William James, as we have seen (27), was no such conceptualist.

(22) Ib., p. 271.
(23) Ib., p. 272. N.B.: Peirce seems to leave it undetermined, however, as to just where the line between intellectual and non-intellectual concepts is to be drawn.
(26) Ib., p. 29.
(27) Cf. supra, n. 23.
The meanings of all ideas, according to him, could be ascertained through application of the pragmatic method to the ideas in question. And not only is pragmatism a method of interpretation, says James: It is also a genetic theory of truth.

James' idea of truth stands in contrast to realist and dogmatist positions. Truth has often been defined as «agreement with reality». James allows this definition.

But he asks, «what is agreement?» and «what is reality?». To «agree» with reality «can only mean to be guided either straight up to it or into its surroundings, or to be put into such working touch with it as to handle either it or something connected with it better than if we disagreed» (28).

As may be seen, the pragmatist's view of «agreement» is consciously meant to be less absolute, less «static», than that of the intellectualists. And by «realities», a pragmatist means «either concrete facts, or abstract kinds of things, and relations perceived intuitively between them... (and) the whole body of other truths already in our possession» (29). «Reality» is thus used by James in a very broad sense. It includes stable things, ideas, and all possible relations between things or ideas. The serious idealist would, however, like to give a privileged place in reality to ideas or ideal relations. But the realist, too, would take exception to James' definition, on the grounds that it is «begging the question» — how can ideas be representations, copies or pictures of reality, and at the same time be reality?

As we might expect, James' conception of truth, does not allow truth to be eternal, stable, and in itself certain — but rather is equivalent to «verifiability».

«True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those that we cannot» (30).

Truth happens to an idea. The very word, veri-fication, as James interprets it, implies that truth is «made, not born». Truth has a «leading value», and «in the end and eventually, all true processes must lead to the face of directly verifying sensible experiences somewhere...» (31). Thus put, truth seems to be something definitely in futurum. However, we must not conclude that every single thing must be de facto verified. For all practical purposes, it is enough if there is a «live» possibility of verification, and «indirectly or only potentially verifying processes may thus be true as well as full verification».

(29) Ib., pp. 165, 166.
(30) Ib., p. 160.
(31) Ib., p. 167; James' notion of the leading value of truth would place truth aptly into Peirce's category of «thirdness», the continuity or flow of experience which leads us to continually anticipate or make predictions about what is to follow in a succeeding moment. See J. Fitzgerald, Peirce's Argument for Thirdness, in «The New Scholasticism» XLV, [1971], pp. 412 ff.
processes" (32). Finally, it must be noted that Matter of Fact truths are verified by agreeing with their effects, or possible effects; while abstract relations of the mind, on the other hand, are verified by consistency among themselves, and by being found thus in practice (33).

Aside from being a theory of truth, James holds Pragmatism to be a theory of meaning and a kind of attitude or orientation. Pragmatism is a method by which we

« try (in each case) to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences » (34) and it is « the attitude of looking away from first things, principles, "categories", supposed necessities; and of looking towards last things, fruits, consequences, facts » (35).

William James here seems to agree with Peirce in a general way. But James also goes on to emphasize « the word pragmatism has come to be used in a still wider sense » (36). And he gives statement to that wider use, by allowing the following formula: namely, that

« ideas (which themselves are but parts of our experience) become true just in so far as they help us get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience, to summarize them and (thus) get about among them by conceptual short-cuts... » (37).

This reminds one of Peirce's analogy with the musical symphony — with the exception that, for the « notes », James seems to understand « concepts », with truth value; while Peirce seemed to mean the notes to be individual sense perceptions. Peirce made the distinction that thought is a mediate consciousness of the relations, etc. of the string of sense perceptions. James' analysis, if put into the framework of this musical analogy, would, on the contrary, seem to indicate that the individual notes (ideas) themselves carry on the musical melody, by a sort of natural impetus and tendency for relation with other « notes ».

John Dewey characterized himself as agreeing with James in the main. But, says Dewey, there has been much confusion in that « Mr. James » has tried to make pragmatism conformable to many variant schools of thought concerning it, and to the different ways in which it can be applied. And so he proposes to look into the writings of James, and actually separate and distinguish the different ways in which pragmatism can be applied (38): Pragmatism as James interprets it applied a) to objects, b) to Ideas, c) to Truths (or values).

(32) Ib., p. 104.
(33) Ib., pp. 161, 164, 165.
(35) Ib., p. 146.
(36) Ib., p. 146.
(37) Ib., p. 147.
(38) Essays in Experimental Logic (Chicago 1916); cf. the essay, What Pragmatism Means by Practical, pp. 314 ff.
Pragmatism interprets the meaning of objects in terms of their conceived effects, and in terms of the reactions they are apt to produce in us. It interprets ideas as intentional, as bearing on facts; as working hypotheses meant to be tried out and verified in the order of things, as active instruments in putting to work a further coherent chain of things and ideas. Values are conceived as, one of them having some effects in contrast to the effects (the) other would have; as having different worths, good or bad (if their worths did not differ, they would be indifferent, and « nil », in so far forth).

And so, according to Dewey’s distinctions, the word « practical » can be predicated either a) of an object producing a certain state of mind in us, or b) of an idea tending to produce dynamic changes, or c) of an end, or way of life, etc., considered as producing desirable effects (if it produces any at all), or effects distinguishable from the effects of other ends (39).

Likewise, the word « truth » can, in accordance with these distinctions, signify either a) « true meaning », or b) « the crucial contexts of experience » (especially experience best related to the subject-matter), or c) « an accomplished (preferred) value ». Of these three probable meanings, Dewey thinks that the first-mentioned is the « truest » connotation of « true ».

It would be useful, here, to try to distinguish some of the varied aspects of pragmatism, in as clear and concise a way as possible:

1) In considering Pragmatism as a theory of meaning, let us adopt Peirce’s explanation (40): First of all, the pragmatic maxim applies to all descriptive signs, or names. It does not apply to logical words, like « and », « not », etc. Matters-of-fact are the most important « materials » for culling meanings. There are then three things necessary for determining meanings, says Peirce: 1) a sign; 2) an object; 3) an « interpretant ». The meaning of a sign is determined by means of the interpretant, which is a statement about the publicly observable properties, which are or should be substituted for the beginning statement or word (41). The final verifier of the interpretant itself, is the collective observable results, all of which should be capable of being made public.

2) The pragmatic view of truth can perhaps be best expressed by a sort of equation which William James gives (42): « Truth » is to thinking as « right » is to acting. « The true... is only the expedient in the way of our thinking, just as ”the right” is only the expedient in the way of our behaving ». Therefore in the flux of human thought and

(39) This latter distinction is the kind of a moral distinction applied by James in his discussion of the will to believe (cf. infra this paper).
(41) The source of the « interpretive » statement is an unconscious habit, tendency to behavior, or way of acting. See The Pragmatic Movement in American Philosophy, by CHARLES MORRIS (Braziller, New York 1970), pp. 23-25. The interpretant itself is a sign, used to clarify sign.
(42) Pragmatism’s Conception of Truth, p. 170.
experience, truth is whatever «expedites» this flux, whatever helps carry it forth, whatever lends continuity and continuance to it. John Dewey is in general agreement with this notion of truth, and posits two necessary conditions for truth: 1) It must be consistent with previous acquired truth; 2) It must be consistent with newly acquired facts (43). Dewey later spoke only of « warranted assertions », not truth.

3) In his article, The Essentials of Pragmatism, Peirce insinuates an analogy between ethical and logical criteria (44): The state of fixed belief or perfect knowledge seems to be any given instance where there is no means to check your belief, no possibility for you to control it. Likewise, the state of a perfected habit or a fixed character of action seems to present a situation in which self-control is out of the question and simply not possible. « Logical self-control is a perfect mirror of ethical self-control ». From this, we may conclude that an action can be assessed in terms of laudability or reproachfulness only if it has no fixed, habitual character. For, as Peirce says, « where no self-control is possible, there will be no self-reproach ». In other words, we look here, not so much to various actions themselves, as to the subjective grasp and channeling of them. And actions are to be channelled, it must be remembered — not towards obeisance to some absolute moral code — but rather « towards last things, fruits, consequences, facts », as James put it (45). I think therefore that, as an ethical theory, pragmatism could be described as a system of choosing actions on the basis of their continuity with other actions, while yet judging them by the sort of continuum which at any present moment they seem to tend to produce. Such a procedure enables the pragmatist to answer the only question which he deems important or pertinent: « What would it be better for me to believe? ».

It might be said that these three aspects of pragmatic theory, are all in consonance with Peirce’s general aim of applying the method of science to all aspects of life. The scientific method, as Peirce says (46), consists in simply and with determination admitting « The Real », and then adopting our procedures to it. And then, following James and Dewey, the distinctions into pragmatic « meaning », « truth », and « morality », would merely arise from the contingency of whether « The Real », at a given moment, happened to be something knowable, or something verifiable, or something do-able (or willable).

Pragmatism as a theory of meaning, and even as a theory of truth, does not seem to be overly radical. That is to say, many modern philosophers after Descartes have advocated that an exclusively scientific method be applied to the realm of knowledge. But even in Dewey’s time no such method had been successfully devised and validated and applied in ethics. And that is why Dewey’s final formulation of a plan

(43) What Pragmatism Means by Practical, cf. Sect. II.
(45) Essays in Pragmatism, p. 146.
for applying the methods of science to what is specifically human (47) — was considered new, novel, and (in the « realm of theories ») radical. At any rate, if it be true that « philosophy grows out of, and in intention is connected with, human affairs » (48), then the ethical applications of the pragmatic or scientific method are the most weighty, and deserve our most careful attention (49). So it is the ethical applications that we will specifically attempt to evaluate in this paper.

Pragmatic morality, as formulated by Dewey in his Reconstruction in Philosophy (50), is pugnacious, and tends to attack both traditional beliefs, and traditional norms of morality. For convenience, we will consider first the problem of belief, then ethical norms and moral problems.

It is the present-day task of philosophy, states John Dewey (51), to « exercise resolute wisdom in developing a system of belief-attitudes, a philosophy, framed on the basis of the resources now at our command ». During the early history of science, there took place what might be called « the warfare of religion and science ».

The result of this warfare was a compromise: religion would now be restricted to spheres of « being », and ideas; science would be limited to preordained physical and physiological spheres (52). The regulation of ontological and ideological beliefs was once the domain of ecclesiastics and biased metaphysicians; but now, in our own scientific era, according to Dewey, is the « acceptable time » for the entrance of scientists into that domain from which they have been traditionally excluded. Outmoded bodies of belief are to be revamped by philosophers by means of the scientific method — « a method of inquiry so inclusive in range and so penetrating, so pervasive and so universal, as to provide the pattern and model which permits, invites, and even demands the kind of formulation that falls within the function of philosophy » (53).

Non-intellectual factors have considerable influence on belief, according to James and Dewey (54). Our belief that there is truth is ordinarily a passionate affirmation of desire. It is a normal, not a pathological thing, for our desires to make intrusions into our beliefs. And, James says,

(48) Ib., p. XI.
(49) Of all the pragmatists, Dewey is the one who seemed most aware of the implications of pragmatism for human behavior, and for the development of a theory of human values. Morris characterizes Dewey as the « axiologist of the pragmatic movement » — cf. The Pragmatic Movement in American Philosophy, by Charles Morris, op. cit., pp. 81 ff.
(50) q.v., Intro.
(51) Ib., p. XXXIV.
(52) Ib., cf. pp. XX, XXI.
(53) Ib., p. XXIX.
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"our passional nature not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds «.

There is always a risk of losing or mistaking the truth. In the last reckoning, says James, all options are made on the basis of whether they are "live" options, forced options, options momentous for us, etc. But even if we say, "I will not decide, but leave the question open," — that itself is a passional decision. And so it is that, when considering the question of ultimate beliefs, and beliefs upon which hinge the whole meaning of life — James says that, in relation to such beliefs, we are like men on a mountain pass, caught in a snow-storm's flurries... Not to act is death; to choose the wrong path is death; there is just the bare possibility of choosing the right path, and saving our lives (55). — It must be our passional nature that bids us either to decide to decide, or to decide to take some steps, or to decide not to decide.

Dewey, being a Darwinian, looks upon reason as something little-by-little developed in the course of life. And — much in line with Darwin's doctrine of "natural selection" — he proposes that culture should be so reconstructed as to function in creating better people, people with better reactions, people who would mass into a great civilization, which civilization would be the outcome of the application of the essential ingredient which formed all great civilizations — namely, conflict and competition.

The position that beliefs cannot be absolute and non-experimental, is supported by both James and Dewey (56). The reaction against the time-honored mind-body, belief-fact distinction — is aptly illustrated in James' Does Consciousness Exist? (57), where he finally defines "consciousness" as "merely the logical correlative of "content" in an experience of which the peculiarity is that fact comes to light in it, that an awareness of content takes place ". Consciousness, in this sense, is nothing separate from perceived contents, but is only — it would be difficult to make any radical differentiation here — content seen in a slightly different light. The general point of all this seems to be that cognition is inseparable from the cognized objects, and is in fact only the same thing from another aspect; and that knowledge is not an ivory-tower process.

But the question of whether our passional or our intellectual nature is uppermost and predominant, seems to be similar to the old Thomistic problem of whether the intellect is prior in presenting options to the will, or the will prior in moving the intellect to consider options; or the familiar problem about the relative priority of chicken and egg. It is to be noted, here, that James seems to imply, where

(55) Cf. The Will to Believe; Essays in Pragmatism, p. 108.
(56) Peirce, however seems to be at variance with all interpretations of intellection which are basically passional, volitional, or logico-positivistic, even if they are experimental and "pragmatic ".
he treats of belief, that there can be cases where our passionate nature leads us to make a volitional choice in lieu of any precognition (even though there may have been some preliminary attempts at cognition). But I think it is a good question to ask, at this point, whether our volition could ever of itself make the choice of a belief, i.e. on non-intellectual grounds, undirected by reason.

«Belief» has been a much-bandied-about word in the history of philosophy. The ancients meant it in the sense of «taking something on the word of another», or with insufficient personal ratiocination. With the coming of Christianity, the term was extended to the notion of «supernatural faith», by which we were enabled to accept some truth on the word of God. With the advent of Protestant Christianity, «belief» was also used in the sense of «fiducial faith» — or a confidence in having been «saved» through the merits of Christ. The British empiricists made belief to be concomitant to especially vivid ideas, or to special feelings. Kant relegated an enormous part of «Metaphysics» to the domain of belief, i.e. the noumenal world. Many modern sceptics have also toyed with the distinction between knowledge and belief, and have remapped the boundaries of knowledge — ending up with the inevitable problems as to whether one can believe in knowledge or have knowledge of beliefs.

Charles Peirce mentions the case of the followers of the Old Man of the Mountain, who used to rush to death at his command, because they believed that this would insure eternal felicity. Peirce comments, «had they doubted this, they would not have acted as they did. So it is with every belief, according to its degree» (58). Is this really the case? When people act, are they always acting on beliefs? Can we not ever say of some person, «he is acting contrary to beliefs». This whole question is analogous to Berkeley’s tirade, where he says that atheism is prevalent everywhere, because everywhere people are acting as if there were no God. It is, of course, possible to act contrary to a belief. A pragmatist, for example, may believe that anything is good if it has good effects, i.e. benefits mankind, and still believe, using Peirce’s example,

that «the superhuman courage which contemplation (of the Truth behind appearances) has conferred upon priests who go to pass their lives with lepers and refuse all offers of rescue is mere silly fanaticism» (59).

But what appears in the case of this pragmatist to be an «acting contrary to beliefs» could be easily explained by an objective pragmatist as an instance of acting on one belief which, because of our «passional nature» and its often unconscious passional commitments, supercedes beliefs consciously held or given priority.

However, it must be admitted that conduct is one of the best indications of belief, and that any belief that is not carried out in action is clearly a «dormant» belief. It is probably also beyond doubt that

(59) Ibid., p. 377.
people very often shape their beliefs to coincide with their habits of conduct — whether these habits be laudable or reprehensible.

Does pragmatism lead to a sort of « actionism », in which man’s whole purpose in life seems to be the doing of things, the fabricating of *fabricas*, the active transaction carried on with one’s environment? This is the tenor of the criticism brought against it by many critics: Pragmatism begs the question, they say, by telling us to direct our lives in accord with « getting things done » — and yet does not seem to care too much about (specifically) what sort of things are done. But Peirce, for one, does not seem to sympathize with such an attitude: « To say that we live for the mere sake of Action as action », he writes, « would be to say that there is no such thing as rational purport » (60). In other words, if such an attitude of « actionism » resulted from Peirce’s theory, Peirce would consider this result to be the defeat of his purpose. Dewey also agrees that action is not for action’s sake, but for the sake of « consummation ».

The pragmatic or scientific system of morals is represented as differing strongly from all preceding systems: As Dewey says, « These schools [the older schools] have agreed in the assumption that there is a single fixed and final good » (61). The general motivation behind pragmatism lies in the assumption that it is foolish to strive towards final goals — especially goals of an abstract nature. In a scientific system of morals, « a purpose is held only as a working hypothesis until results confirm its rightness » (62). And if, for example, in a given case health is indicated as a supreme good to be attained, then « (health) is no means to something else. It is a final and intrinsic value » (63). In such a system, too, given that all « absolute » goals are abrogated, it follows that « no individual or group (e.g. savages) will be judged by whether they come up to or fall short of some fixed result, but by the direction in which they are moving » (64).

In Dewey’s *Ethics*, he states that the chief classical theories of ethics can be distinguished thusly: 1) Those that emphasize ends, and real (as opposed to « apparent ») goods; 2) those that emphasize passion-less adherence to duty and law (cf. Kant *et al*); 3) Those that emphasize virtue and vice, in terms of the approbation, or punishment with which these qualities are confronted (65).

Pragmatism is sometimes broadly described as a utilitarian system of ethics. However, pragmatists do not seem to agree with any such classification:

« Utilitarianism never questioned the idea of a fixed, final and supreme end », writes Dewey.... (It merely) inserted pleasure and the greatest possible aggregate of pleasures in the position of the fixed end » (66).

(60) Cf. *ib.*, p. 263.
(61) *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, p. 162.
(62) *ib.*, p. 175.
(63) *ib*.
(64) *ib.*, p. 176.
Pragmatism, to be sure, certainly seems to differ from utilitarianism (of the style of Bentham, etc.), in giving specific emphasis to immediate progressive consequences of all human actions. However, is it not a fact that pleasure or the opposite of pleasure — pain — is a necessarily concomitant consequence of every human action? Still, even if this were admitted, a pragmatist would probably not admit that this is the type of consequence or effect he primarily has in mind. What does a pragmatist have in mind? This seems to be answerable in one word, growth. « The end is no longer (in a pragmatic system of ethics) a terminus or limit to be reached. Growth itself is the only moral "end" » (67). And happiness is not quite the Aristotelian conception of « happiness » i.e., a value in life which is worthy to be sought for its own sake, an unquestioned end of action which has self-evident validity.

« (Happiness) is an active process, not a passive outcome... It includes the overcoming of obstacles, the elimination of sources of defect and evil » (68).

Upon hearing such a definition, inappropriate questions might come into our mind, like « could a man living a sloven and peaceful solitary life on a remote rural homestead be a pragmatist? ». Or, « could an individual paralyzed for life be a pragmatist? ». Pragmatism at first glimpse connotes to our minds an image of manful accomplishment, of quick resourcefulness, if not of nervous bustle. Perhaps that is why it has (truly or falsely) been associated in people's minds with either a beneficent or a ruthless Capitalism, or with the American national image of resourcefulness, initiative and practicability. But a real pragmatist would be the first to disavow such things as unwarranted charges. He would object that pragmatism is no glorification of activity, but the mere application of scientific methods to the conduct of human affairs; that pragmatism does not foster frequent feverish choices, but rather illustrates the « how » of making choices when they come up. The pragmatist emphasizes the fact that man is « homo faber ». The opposition to pragmatism comes from those schools which regard man as a rational, reflective, or religious animal (and also from schools which regard man as primarily romantic or sensationalistic or idealistic or rebellious).

Dewey in the Introduction to his Reconstruction (69), states that modern science is getting the upper hand in the strife with the ideals and moral norms of outdated institutions, and that in the modern world secularization is quickly becoming the keynote. And the vocation of science now, he says, lies precisely in « discovering how to give the factors of this secularization the shape, content, and the authority nominally assigned to morals, but not now exercised in fact by those

(67) Ib., p. 177.
(68) Ib., pp. 179, 180. It should be noted, however, that Dewey does agree with Aristotle in conceiving happiness as an « activity », rather than a passive state.
(69) Ib., p. XXXIII.
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morals that have come down to us from a pre-scientific age ». Dewey's envisioned Utopia, is a place where all idealistic and remote ends have been banished from nature, with the result that man and society go forward in a matter-of-fact environment at gradual and progressive pace, with empirical discovery and scientifically-checked hypotheses directing citizens and their culture. It is in such a society, in a secularistic, non-superstitious, non-inhibited atmosphere, that « purposes » will become truly established as « factors in human minds capable of reshaping existence » (70). Is a purely materialistic society meant here? What is the status of religious systems in such a society? Dewey wants religious systems to « tow the mark » along with all the others.

« The future of religion », he proposes, « is connected with the possibility of developing a faith in the possibilities of human experience and human relationships that will create a vital sense of the solidarity of human interests and inspire action to make that sense a reality » (71).

It is only by such a procedure that dogmatic and ritualistic religious institutions will become « useful allies of a conception of life that is in harmony with knowledge and social needs » (72).

Is this vision to end up as so many other utopian ideas have ended? That is hard to say. « Utopia » of course etymologically means « nowhere ». But pragmatists would have to deny that their vision could be a dream, since pragmatism envisions only experientially possible tasks and eschews all non-realizable ideals. Dewey's ideas about the scientific reconstruction of society, however, seem to be optimistic to an extreme. They certainly leave no room for such religious notions as the intrinsic depravity of man or original sin. And the application of scientific methods in the domain of ethics sometimes seems to require a guileless subject, if not something like Adam before the fall. Because of this, the conjectured scientific display of new purposes for man can end up as an optimistic, ivory-turreted, altruistic, idealistic nostrum: For example, in Dewey's Ethics, various reasons are offered, to induce families to have children:

« ...Our younger generations are made of the same stuff as that which has been shown through the ages in the service of social ends... We find ourselves here entering upon opportunities made possible by ages of struggle, by ... the labor of countless "unknown soldiers" of the common good. We feel it a privilege as well as an obligation to "carry on". If we have bodies — and with the growing progress of hygiene and medicine, health is becoming more and more part of our morality as well as of our pleasure — one of the ways in which we may make our contribution is through bringing new life into being, and giving to our children the best in our power ». [In the university library copy in which I read these words, I find the spontaneous written reaction of some (no doubt) anti-scientific student: « Oh, goody! »].

(70) Cf. Reconstruction in Philosophy, Ch. III, p. 70.
(72) Ib.
The pragmatic method, however, is not any elaborately developed ethical system, in itself. It is just a general rule, perhaps analogous to the Christian maxim which is supposed to be the maxim to which all other Christian moral tenets are reducible: «Love God, self, and neighbor». Could pragmatism, being applied extensively, develop into any systematized and publicly acknowledged rules? The answer to this depends on whether a society develops which is interested in acting in unison in pursuing scientifically formulated ethical hypotheses based on collective past experiences and geared to societal objectives just as concrete as technological objectives. But it seems probable that at least something like a private system of morality will emerge from pragmatism; that is, a system comprising all of an individual's relevant past experiences, generalizations made about his success in certain endeavors, investigations and new methods conceived, etc.

Is pragmatical ethics provincial? That is, can we say, «the Germans are earthy idealists, the French are romantic existentialists, and the Americans are individualistic pragmatists?». Is pragmatism something that would generally have appeal only to Americans and eccentric foreigners, just as Maoism holds an appeal only for Chinenmen and radicals elsewhere? One can think of many native cultures that would seem offhand to have an «a priori» bias against a pragmatic ethics.

A Bolshevik, writer, M. Dynnik, charges that «(reactionary pragmatism), preaching the idea of "harmony" between the exploiters and the exploited, bedeviling the consciousness of the masses with a business psychology, paving the way for clericalism... strives to penetrate among the working classes in order to corrupt them spiritually and subject them to the influence of bourgeois ideology». Such a reaction seems to represent the typical connection of pragmatism with capitalism. When Nikita Khrushchov warned once in a television interview, that «we (socialists) will bury you». — he undoubtedly had in mind a special funeral pyre for the pragmatic philosophy, too. Is there some necessary connection between pragmatism and capitalism? Perhaps capitalism might be described as a species, an offshoot, of pragmatic method. It is certain that Dewey, at least, conceives of pragmatism as a faithful ally of the American way of life. «When (democracy's) ideals are reenforced by those of scientific method and experimental intelligence», says Dewey, «it cannot be that it is incapable of evoking discipline, ardor, and organization» (73).

Pragmatism, especially as Dewey shows it in all its far-reaching facets, seems to turn away man from «last ends» such as future happiness, immortality, and God. Mortimer Adler charges that

(73) CHARLES MORRIS (op. cit., p. 5) mentions «the acceptance of the ideals of American democracy» as one of the four unproblematic features of pragmatism in general. It is «unproblematic» insofar as it supplies a context for the questions raised in pragmatism, but is not in itself subjected to question. Other unproblematic features are: 1) science and the scientific method; 2) empiricism; and 3) biological evolution.
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« (fascism and pragmatism) are both the last fruitions of modern man's exclusive trust in science and his gradual disavowal of whatever lies beyond the field of science as irrational prejudice, as opinion emotionally held ».

He raises a good question: Why has the word « science » which etymologically means, simply, « knowledge », been confined by pragmatists and others to a certain type of knowledge, namely, experimental knowledge? If « science » (meaning experimental science), is considered to be the only valid form of verification, it will certainly, irrevocably follow that entities like God and the soul and the end of human life can never be known. It would even follow that an entity (like a human person) could not be experimentally proved. What follows, however, from a complete scepticism about God? Is it true, as Ivan, the atheistic brother in Dostoyevsky's The Brothers Karamzov, affirms, that « since there is no God, there is no law, there is no right and wrong, there are no crimes? ». Probably not, but then any conception of law and right, in lieu of a Creator, would have to be formulated as a tentative guiding principle enacted by oneself or society or the State, for the common good. If all men are not « endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights », it is necessary that rights be formulated by man, always tentatively.

In Charles Peirce's view of pragmatism, a rather paradoxical notion about the relation of God and science is propounded (74):

« The question whether there really is such a being (as God) is the question whether all physical science is merely the figment — arbitrary figment — of the students of nature, and whether the one (main) lesson of... all who from any point of view have had their ways of conduct determined by meditation upon the physico-psychical universe, be only their arbitrary notion or the Truth behind the appearances... ».

Peirce here leans to the position that acceptance of external physical reality involves admission of a supreme Mind, and that Socrates, Confucius, etc. were not doing anything contrary to experience in affirming a supreme Reality or Truth. Peirce, I think, is able to argue this way, due to the way in which he interprets « experience »: « By experience », he says, « must be understood the entire mental product » (75).

Depending on what facts or entities the pragmatist is willing to include under the umbrella of « experience », the incontrovertible gist of the pragmatic view is that the work of reevaluating and reshaping human endeavor is something that needs be done forthwith, before changes are brought about by war, overpopulation, etc. Pragmatism differs from other (ethical) systems, regarding what method should be used. Can the scientific method really be applied to spheres such as morality? We use one method for fixing our car, another method for

(74) Peirce, The Concept of God; Philosophy of Peirce, p. 376.
(75) Ib., p. 377.
figuring out an arithmetic problem, another method for giving a speech.

Should we not use some unique method for directing human moral conduct? Perhaps the answer to this question would determine whether one could accept pragmatic theory or not.

William James begins one of his lectures on pragmatism (76), with a quotation from Gilbert Chesterton:

"There are some people — and I am one of them — who think what the most practical and important thing about a man is still his view of the universe. We think that for a landlady considering a lodger it is important to know his income, but still more important to know his philosophy. We think that for a general about to fight an enemy it is important to know the enemy's numbers, but still more important to know his philosophy... ."

If one had to choose a leader who would be empowered to shape the world's future, would the fact that a particular candidate was a pragmatist be considered an asset or even a decisive factor? This is at least the kind of question that would arise if pragmatic theory were itself subjected to the pragmatic criterion.

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