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THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

PSYCHOLOGY AND SCIENTIFIC METHODS

THE THIRTEEN PRAGMATISMS. I.

IN the present year of grace 1908 the term "pragmatism"—if not the doctrine—celebrates its tenth birthday. Before the controversy over the mode of philosophy designated by it enters upon a second decade, it is perhaps not too much to ask that contemporary philosophers should agree to attach some single and stable meaning to the term. There appears to be as yet no sufficiently clear and general recognition, among contributors to that controversy, of the fact that the pragmatist is not merely three, but many gentlemen at once. Some recent papers by Perry in this JOURNAL set, as it seems to me, the right example, in discriminating a number of separate pragmatistic propositions and discussing each of them by itself. But perhaps even these papers do not insist so emphatically as it is worth while to do upon the utter disconnection and even incongruity that subsists between a number of these propositions; and there are one or two important ambiguities of meaning in certain of the pragmatists' formulas which do not seem to find a place in Perry's careful enumeration. A complete enumeration of the metamorphoses of so protean an entity is, indeed, perhaps too much to expect; but even after we leave out of the count certain casual expressions of pragmatist writers which they probably would not wish taken too seriously, and also certain mere commonplaces from which scarcely any contemporary philosopher would dissent, there remain at least thirteen pragmatisms: a baker's dozen of contentions which are separate not merely in the sense of being discriminable, but in the sense of being logically independent, so that you may without inconsistency accept any one and reject all the others, or refute one and leave the philosophical standing of the others unimpugned. All of these have generally or frequently been labeled with the one name, and defended or attacked as if they constituted a single system of thought—sometimes even as if they were severally interchangeable. This multiplicity of meanings in pragmatism is partly explicit and partly implicit; that is to say, it is partly due to the conjunction by the representatives of pragmatism of contentions which they themselves express by separate formulas; and it is partly

due to unrecognized ambiguities of meaning or duplicities of implication latent in one or another of these formulas.

It is to the latter source of divergency in the meaning of the pragmatist doctrines—to the profound equivocality of some of them—that I desire in this paper more particularly to call attention. But I shall try to put down all the logically independent doctrines of importance that seem to have been improperly reduced to unity in current discussions; and I shall try to exhibit the fact of their reciprocal independence in as clear a light as possible. To contribute to the determination of the truth or falsity of any one of these doctrines is no part of the business of the present discussion; for I venture to think that the question of truth has sometimes been not very profitably dealt with during the past ten years, in the absence of a sufficiently considerate prior clearing up of the question of meaning. The pragmatist school itself seems, thus far, more distinguished for originality, inventiveness, and a keen vision for the motes in the eye of the intellectualist, than for patience in making distinctions or the habit of self-analysis. And its critics, on the other hand, have occasionally made haste to take the utmost advantage of this unassorted commingling of doctrinal sheep and doctrinal goats in the ample fold of pragmatic theory, and have made the apparently caprine character of some members of the flock a warrant for the wholesale condemnation of the entire multitude. In view of this situation, nothing seems more called for than an attempt at clear differentiation of the separate pragmatist assertions and tendencies. There is, indeed, some danger that the enumeration of these variations may become an appallingly seductive new game for philosophers; one may even apprehend a risk that editors of philosophical journals may be tempted to seek a wider popular appeal by offering prizes to the *bona fide* subscribers who can count the greatest number of pragmatisms. Certainly it is probable that the following list could be extended. But I hope that it will be found to include all the genuinely independent contentions that are most frequently illicitly identified, and all the ambiguities of meaning that are so central and important as to call for serious consideration from both the defenders and the critics of the several opinions to which the one name has been applied.

1. Primarily, it is obvious, pragmatism—the pragmatism of Peirce, and of James's Berkeley address—was merely a doctrine concerning the meaning of propositions, concerning the way in which the really significant issue in any controversy could be determined. It maintained that the meaning of any proposition whatever is reducible to the future consequences in experience to which that proposition points, consequences which those who accept the

proposition *ipso facto* anticipate as experiences that somebody is subsequently to have. Now, a theory about the meaning of propositions is not the same thing as a theory about the criterion of truth in propositions; a formula which professes to tell you how to ascertain precisely what a given assertion really signifies does not thereby profess to tell you whether or not that assertion is true. James, at least, in his recent book and elsewhere, has clearly noted this distinction between pragmatism as a theory of meaning and pragmatism as a theory of truth; Schiller does not appear to do so, since he identifies the "principle of Peirce" with a view concerning the mark that "establishes the *real* truth and validity" of a proposition.¹ But I do not think that even James has sufficiently insisted upon the logical disconnectedness of the two theories. Indeed, the whole topic of the relation of meaning and truth might advantageously receive more extended discussion than it has yet had. It may at first sight seem that a close logical relation can be made out between the two, in at least one direction. To know what a proposition exactly means may appear to involve a knowledge of just where to look for the evidence of its truth and for the test by which its claim to truth can be brought to proof. If a judgment *means* merely certain future experiences, it might appear that its truth could be known only through—and, therefore, only at the time of—the occurrence of the predicted experiences. But I can not see that this really follows. The assertion "God exists and mere materialism is false" may possibly mean only the anticipation of a cosmic future different in specific ways from that which the acceptance of the contrary proposition would lead one to expect; but the criterion of the truth of the assertion need not be correspondingly future. Its truth may conceivably be known *now*, through a mystical intuition or by a "necessity of thought"; or (and this is apparently good pragmatist doctrine about knowledge) it may be a proposition that we are obliged and entitled proleptically to accept as a true postulate, because it satisfies a present (not a future) need. The experiences whose occurrence constitutes the meaning of the judgment may have one date; the apprehension of the judgment's validity, or legitimacy as a belief, may have quite another. According to one of the pragmatist theories of truth, a proposition is known as true (in the only sense of "true" which that theory regards as intelligible) at the moment at which it effectually operates to put an end to a felt inner discord or to open a way through a practical *impasse*; but the matter to which the proposition refers not only may be, but normally will be, subsequent to that moment of acceptance and

¹"The Definition of Pragmatism and Humanism" in "Studies in Humanism," 1907, p. 5.

mental relief. A "plan of action" presumably relates to the future; but the determination of its "truth," or whatever kind of acceptability is pragmatically to pass for such, can not be postponed until the future to which it relates has been "verified" by becoming past; else all our "true" plans of action would, paradoxically, be retrospective, and we should have to say that the pragmatic man never is, but always is about to have been, blest with knowledge. If, then, the legitimacy of a belief is, upon pragmatist principles, to be known at one moment, while the experiences which it "means" may run on into later moments, it appears to follow that the fullest knowledge of the belief's meaning may throw no light whatever upon the question of its legitimacy. That—until the belief has (presumably) *lost* all meaning by coming to refer purely to past experiences—still remains, from the standpoint of pragmatism as a theory of meaning, a separate and unsettled question; it is impossible to infer that the pragmatist theory of validity is any more correct than another. The acceptance of either one of these theories, equally known as "pragmatism," leaves you an entirely open option with respect to the acceptance of the other.

2. This pragmatic theory of meaning, as used by James, who has been its principal expounder and defender, seems designed to function chiefly as a quieter of controversy, a means for banishing from the philosophic lists those contestants between whose theories there appears, when this criterion is applied, to be no meaningful opposition, in whose differences there lies no issue that "makes a difference." In this application, however, the criterion clearly exhibits a radical ambiguity. The "effects of a practical kind" which our conception of an object must (we are told) involve, the "future consequences in concrete experience, whether active or passive," to which all significant propositions must point, may consist in either: (a) future experiences which the proposition (expressly or implicitly) predicts as about to occur, *no matter whether it be believed true or not*; or (b) future experiences which will occur *only upon condition that the proposition be believed*. The consequences of the *truth* of a proposition (in the sense of its correct pre-representation of a subsequent experience to which its terms logically refer), and the consequences of *belief* in a proposition, have been habitually confused in the discussion of the pragmatic theory of meaning. Taken in the one sense, the theory is equivalent to the assertion that only definitely predictive propositions—those which, by their proper import, foretell the appearance of specific sensations or situations in the "concrete" experience of some temporal consciousness—have real meaning. Taken in the other sense, the theory does not require that propositions *refer* to the future at all; it is

enough that, by being carried along into the future as beliefs in somebody's mind, they be capable of giving to that mind emotional or other experiences in some degree different from those which it would have in the absence of the beliefs. No two doctrines could be "pragmatically" more dissimilar than the pragmatic theory of meaning when construed in the first sense, and the same theory when construed in the second sense. If the formula includes only "future experiences" of the class (*a*), it has the effect of very narrowly limiting the range of meaningful judgments, and of excluding from the field of legitimate consideration a large number of issues in which a great part of mankind seems to have taken a lively interest; and it must assuredly be regarded as a highly paradoxical contention. But if it includes also future consequences of class (*b*), it is no paradox at all, but the mildest of truisms; for it then is so blandly catholic, tolerant and inclusive a doctrine that it can deny real meaning to no proposition whatever which any human being has ever cared enough about to believe. In James's "Pragmatism" his criterion is applied to specific questions sometimes in one sense and sometimes in the other; and the results are correspondingly divergent. Using his formula in the first sense, he argues, for example, that the only "real" difference between a theistic and a materialistic view of the universe is that the former entitles us to predict a future in human experience that contains certain desirable elements for the expectation of which materialism gives no warrant. In other words, the whole "meaning" of theism is declared to be reducible to the anticipation of a specific cosmic or personal future; and the only genuine issue between it and the opposing doctrine lies in the question of the legitimacy of this anticipation. "If no future detail of experience or conduct is to be deduced from our hypothesis, the debate between materialism and theism becomes quite idle and insignificant." Supposing matter capable of giving us just the same world of experience as a God would give us, "wherein should we suffer loss if we dropped God as an hypothesis and made the matter alone responsible? Where would any special deadness, or crassness, come in? And how, experience being what is once for all, would God's presence in it make it any more living or richer?"² "Treated as it often is" (*i. e.*, treated non-pragmatically), "this question becomes little more than a conflict between esthetic preferences," between different ways of talking about, imaging, or explaining the ancestry of, precisely the one, identical, actual world of past, present, and future experiences; and such differences in esthetic preferences are treated by James as "abstract" things that really make no difference. In the spirit of this chapter of James's book

² "Pragmatism," Lecture III., *passim*.

—which is the spirit of the Enlightenment at its narrowest, most utilitarian, least imaginative—one might go on to eliminate from consideration, as pragmatically meaningless, a large part of the issues over which metaphysicians and theologians have divided; one might show that (apart from the having of the beliefs themselves, which from the present point of view does not count) it makes no difference whether you believe or reject most of the dogmas of theology or the hypotheses of speculative philosophy. For these largely refer to alleged permanent, unvarying factors of reality, from which no specific contents of experience (beyond, once more, the experiences directly arising from the recognition of the presence of those factors) can be clearly deduced. The trinitarian presumably does not necessarily anticipate “concrete future experiences” different from those anticipated by the unitarian; nor need the pantheist expect the cosmos to behave in a manner other than that expected by the pluralistic theist. Later in James’s book, however, we find his criterion taken in the opposite sense; for example, while the author observes of the monistic doctrine of the absolute that “you can not redescend into the world of particulars by the absolute’s aid or deduce any necessary consequences of detail important for your life from your idea of his nature,” just this non-predictive doctrine is credited with genuine pragmatic meaning, because “emotional and spiritual” consequences flow from the belief in it (pp. 273–4). And in *this* spirit, all beliefs with which human emotions have in any degree become entangled would have to be regarded by the pragmatist as *ipso facto* meaningful and serious. It would not even be necessary that the beliefs should, in the ordinary logical sense, have any intelligible import at all. There are some who feel pretty sure that those who adhere, for instance, to the nihilistic monism of the Vedanta, or to the Athanasian doctrine of the Trinity, never really *conceive together* the elements of the propositions that they affirm; but no one can deny that, out of the maintenance of the posture of belief towards these propositions, believers derive highly distinctive and vivid experiences, which they could scarcely have in any other way. And for all such beliefs our pragmatist—who, but a moment ago, seemed so narrow and ferocious an *Aufgeklärter*—would now be compelled to find a place among the significant issues.

The pragmatic theory of meaning thus breaks up into two possible doctrines that are not merely different, but incongruous. We seem to be justified in calling upon the pragmatist to make an election between them. If I may, for a moment, go beyond the province chosen for this paper, I venture to predict that neither choice will be found welcome; for I suspect that all the charm and impressiveness of the theory arises out of the confusion of its alternative inter-

pretations. It gets its appearance of novelty, and of practical serviceableness in the settlement of controversies, from its one meaning; and it gets its plausibility entirely from the other. But (when the distinction is made) in the sense in which the theory might be logically functional, it seems hardly likely to appear plausible; and in the sense in which it is plausible, it appears destitute of any applicability or function in the distinguishing of "real" from meaningless issues.

3. But the pragmatic theory of meaning in its first sense—with its characteristic emphasis upon the ultimately predictive import of all judgments—leads to a theory concerning the way in which judgments are verified; in other words, to a theory about the meaning of truth. If all judgments must refer to specific future experiences, their verification consists in the getting of the experiences which they foretold. They are true, in short, if their prediction is realized; and they can, strictly speaking, be known to be true only through that realization, and concurrently with the occurrence of the series of experiences predicted. James presents this doctrine with an apparent exception in favor of "necessary truths"; which, since they coerce the mind as soon as they are clearly presented to it, are (he seems to admit) verified "on the spot," without waiting for the presentation in experience of all empirical phenomena that may be referred to by them. But even this exception is not recognized entirely unequivocally; and in any case, for the great mass of our judgments, their truth consists in the correspondence of the anticipations properly evoked by them with subsequent items of experience; and the verification of their truth comes only when the whole series of such items which they foreshadowed has been completely experienced. "All true processes must lead to the face of directly verifying experiences *somewhere*, which somebody's ideas have copied." "Truth *happens* to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events. Its verity *is*, in fact, an event, a process: the process, namely, of its verifying itself, its *verification*."³

Now, I have already tried to show that such a theory of truth is neither identical with, nor properly deducible from, the original pragmatic theory of meaning—in either of its senses. I wish now to make more fully clear the precise import of this theory of truth, and to show its contrast with another type of theory of truth which also and, I think, more properly figures as pragmatism. Observe that the words quoted give us a theory of truth which is obviously not at the same time functionally serviceable as a theory of knowledge—which seems a strange trait in a pragmatist theory. According to this phase of pragmatism, judgments are not true till they

³ "Pragmatism," pp. 215, 201.

become true; and when they have become true they have no importance (and, as I have suggested, they even ought to be said, on pragmatist principles, to have no meaning), for their reference is to the dead past. Our intellect is condemned, according to this doctrine, to subsist wholly by a system of deferred payments; it gets no cash down; and it is also a rule of this kind of finance that when the payments are finally made, they are always made in outlawed currency. Now, of course, what we practically want, and, indeed, must have, from a theory of knowledge is some means of telling what predictions are to be accepted as sound *while they are still predictions*. Hindsight is doubtless a good deal more accurate than foresight; but it is less useful. No one is likely to deny that a valid proposition (in so far, at least, as it is predictive at all) must "lead us finally to the face of some directly verifying experience"; but I can conceive no observation which it can be more unprofitable to dwell upon than this one. If this were all that a pragmatic epistemology had to tell us, it would assuredly be giving us a stone where we had asked for bread.

But, of course, there is a form—or more than one form—of pragmatic epistemology that offers to meet the real needs of the situation in which the problem of knowledge arises—that seeks to tell us what predictive judgments ought, and what ought not, to be believed, before the "*verification*" of those judgments in actually possessed experience makes the question concerning their truth as irrelevant and redundant a thing as a coroner's inquest on a corpse is—to the corpse. And these pragmatist theories about the criterion of truth—*i. e.*, about the marks of the relative validity of propositions—which attempt to be really functional ought to be completely distinguished from this sterile doctrine which insists that the only true proposition is a dead proposition.

These theories, however, and others, must be considered in a subsequent instalment of this *histoire des variations*.

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PSYCHOLOGY AS SCIENCE OF SELF

I. IS THE SELF BODY OR HAS IT BODY?

THE main results so far reached by this discussion are the following: I have defined psychology in a provisional way as science of consciousness and have pointed out that, as thus regarded, it may more definitely be conceived (1) as science of ideas or contents, often