

Pragmatism and Realism

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relations must reproduce in some way the most significant relations in the world where the user of language must seek to prosper. Now whatever the verbal symbols may be, an attitude is expressed in a sentence, the qualification of a substantive by a verb and although I have no particular evidence upon which to argue the point, it does seem to me well worth some inquiry to ascertain whether or not the relation of substantive to verb may not reproduce a relation analogous to that between what I have called immediacy and causality. There can be no doubt that philosophy has hitherto sought to describe the world too exclusively in terms of the substantive aspect. It is at least permissible to urge the importance of the verb.

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## DISCUSSION

### PRAGMATISM AND REALISM

PROFESSOR MONTAGUE'S interesting and characteristically lucid series of papers on this topic is, I hope, to be continued. In those which have thus far appeared certain considerations pertinent to the subdivisions of the topic already dealt with have, as it seems to me, been overlooked. These considerations I think it worth while to point out, in the hope that Professor Montague may take occasion to revert to them in some subsequent instalment of the series. The determination of the historic affinities and logical implications of a doctrine so influential, and so characteristic of our time, as pragmatism, has, at the least of it, great historical interest to those who desire to understand, logically and psychologically, the complex and curious interplay of intellectual motives from which the ruling tendencies of the time result. There is, to be sure, in a sense, no such thing as pragmatism; that doctrine is not a well-defined substantive entity, a logical brick that can be passed from hand to hand, microscopically analyzed, and broken into pieces, all without essential alteration or loss of identity. Few of the historic schemes of doctrine for which we happen to have names are things of that sort; and for that reason, most of the innumerable controversies of the past over the question whether one -ism or -ity is compatible with another, have been unedifying examples of circular reasoning. Whether, for example, Christianity is compatible with pantheism—a subject that has been much debated—depends, obviously, entirely upon your definition of Christianity; but the term “Christianity” as the name of a collection of historic phenomena—the opinions or tendencies of persons called Christians—has at all times embraced a great number and diversity of elements. It is

possible to take any one of these that you please, declare it to be "essential" or "fundamental," and then proceed to prove anything you please upon the question at issue. But there is no objective reason for considering one more essential as a characteristic of the historic complex termed Christianity than any other, unless it can be historically shown to be either (a) the sole, or (b) the most emphasized, teaching of the actual originator of the movement, or, at least, (c) a teaching never previously expressed or emphasized, a novel contribution to the world's stock of ideas. So, too, pragmatism is a historic complex of mixed philosophical motives and tendencies. There is danger, on the one hand, that in discussing its affinities with other doctrines one pick out arbitrarily some one element of the complex, or a few elements, and by analyzing the implications of these prove the pragmatist to be a realist, or a solipsist, or a positivist, or an anarchist, or an ontological Mormon, or what you will. On the other hand, it would be equally an error to assume at the outset that there is no one pragmatism *par excellence*, no trait of the group of doctrines going under the name and usually combined in the same minds, which is so peculiar and exceptional historically as to deserve better than any other to be regarded as distinctive and essential. Only, it remains to find, in the specific instance, the criterion of such essentiality and to discover the feature of the doctrine in which it is realized. To these ends it is requisite, first, to make a complete enumeration of all the more important ideas or logical motives emphasized in the actual utterances of persons willing to call themselves pragmatists; second, to see whether any one of these motives separately, *or the fact of their combination*, is, historically speaking, a relatively novel and distinctive contribution of this particular movement to our collection of more or less coherent and intelligible types of doctrine upon philosophical issues. Unless these precautions are taken, discussion upon the affinity of pragmatism for some other -ism will not really deal with any "objective" or historical thing called pragmatism, but only with the compatibility *inter se* of certain propositions arbitrarily drawn up by the person who starts the discussion.<sup>1</sup>

Now, Professor Montague's argument may, I think, be objected to on the grounds (1) that it hardly sufficiently recognizes one de-

<sup>1</sup> Pragmatism as a term bandied about in philosophical discussion ought *not* to mean merely the total complex of doctrines that chance to be joined together in the minds of persons—or in the mind of the first person—denominated pragmatists. If we are to use this type of term, and are to avoid muddle, we must, I should insist, on the one hand give it some historical reference to some real stream of tendency; yet we should, on the other hand, subject that tendency to both logical analysis and historical comparison, in order to pick out what is original and distinctive in it, *if, indeed, there be any such distinctive factor.*

cidely important and much-emphasized motive in the teaching of the pragmatists; (2) that it overlooks the fact that there is something novel and unique in pragmatism and that this unique characteristic consists chiefly in the *transformation* of the instrumentalism, of which he speaks in his second article, through its conjunction with the neglected factor—so that the instrumentalism of the pragmatist is not mere instrumentalism, but an instrumentalism of a special coloring.

1. One of the things that the pragmatism of James is, certainly, is a modern expression of the motive which, in certain other expressions, is known as nominalism or positivism. In his original volume of lectures on the subject, James showed very plainly that he was in the line of the great nominalistic tradition of English thought, a successor of William Ockham, of Hobbes, of Locke and Hume and Berkeley. The problems of philosophy, even the aspirations of religion, were to be simplified, by confining thought to its proper objects of reference, by explaining to the mind the real limits of the meaning of every proposition it could frame. And the secret of this simplification was to lie in reducing all meaning and all verifiable truth to a "pointing" to "particulars in concrete experience." Enumerate those particulars and you have the whole meaning of any proposition; discover the smoothness and satisfactoriness of the transition from the particular concrete experience constituting the judging moment to the subsequent concrete experience to which it pointed, and you have verified truth. The doctrine was, indeed, in a sense the last and completing word of the whole secular movement of nominalistic empiricism; where the medieval nominalists had applied the demand for the reduction of the meaning of abstractions to concrete and empirically verifiable particulars, chiefly to the miscellaneous hypostases of Platonic realism; where Hume had applied the same demand to the notion of cause, and Berkeley to that of material substance; James applied it, in a still more fundamental manner, to the notion of truth itself. The truth was to be reduced to truths; and each truth must be statable in its "cash value." "Truth" was to be the name, not of a mysterious essence, nor of an abstract quality, nor of a bare relation; it was precisely a kind of experience, having in each case a time and place and individual *quale* in the flux of experience. The typical nominalistic motive—the simplifying, clarifying, *denkökonomisch* motive; the typical nominalistic method—the definition of universals as collective names for particular items in experience; the typical nominalistic result—the rejection as negligible, if not demonstrably unreal, of all entities incapable of being brought within the compass of concrete experience—these are all conspicuously present in the most authoritative exposition of the

pragmatic doctrine. Professor Montague seems to me to have scarcely noted sufficiently the rôle of this familiar and ancient motive in the new movement.

Now, nominalistic empiricism in epistemology has always made for idealism in metaphysics. Idealism, though it is a good deal more, is primarily the application of the law of parsimony to ontology. It refuses to multiply entities beyond necessity; and it finds no necessity for adding anything to their immediate, empirical face-value. That a tendency of thought in which the nominalistic temper is so marked should be thought naturally to incline to realism is surprising; that any part of it should be held necessarily to imply realism indicates a paradox on the part either of the holder of the doctrine, or of the critic who finds such an implication latent in it.

2. It is true, however, that pragmatism also means instrumentalism. But its instrumentalism, it seems to me clear, should be construed in the light of its nominalism, of its demand for the reduction of all meanings to concrete particulars of experience stated in their most "economical" terms. Professor Montague has taken pragmatism too atomistically. What has been called pragmatism is, as I have maintained, a medley of diverse logical motives. Some of these I believe to be actually incompatible with one another. Most of them have on occasion been put forward separately and disconnectedly by pragmatist writers. Yet it can not be denied that several of them are capable of being harmonized. And when we are interpreting pragmatism we ought to take as many of its elements together as logic permits, and let the elements thus synthetized modify and interpret each other. We may thus be able to see in at least some phases of pragmatism a more or less novel doctrine, even though its constituent parts be not novel. It would be a new compound in intellectual chemistry.

Instrumentalism certainly—as "the courageous application of Darwinism to the life of reason"—is, in its most general definition, by no means a novel doctrine. The substance of it is to be found in the evolutionary empiricism of Spencer: thought is an incident of organic adjustment to environment, and its categories are the result of successful and biologically advantageous adjustments. In Spencer this doctrine appears in a realistic form and with an intellectualistic temper, very much after the fashion sketched out by Professor Montague on pages 486-7, 489-90; such a form and temper are thus not uncongenial to instrumentalism, in the extremely broad sense there given it. But pragmatism is not simply a re-editing of the evolutionary empiricism of Spencer and Fiske and of a host of Darwinizing epistemologists. Its distinctiveness consists precisely in the fact that it combines instrumentalism and the method of nominalism.

It does not take the doctrine that knowledge is an instrument as meaning that it is a copying or duplicating instrument, designed to receive an impress or decalogue of an "environment" there independently. Pragmatism appears to propose a simpler, more economical, more rigorously empirical, and concretely verifiable, way of construing the instrumental relation.

It remains, indeed, to ask whether these two motives, instrumentalism and nominalism, are truly harmonious. Professor Montague thinks not (pp. 486-7). But in this I think one must say that he merely exhibits that double vision characteristic of the realist by temperament and connatural predestination—without really presenting to those of a more nominalistic turn of mind convincing reasons for thus beholding the entire universe as twins. Certainly he begs a good deal of the question, marching to his realistic conclusions very calmly without casting a glance by the way at the most characteristic arguments and cherished distinctions of the pragmatist. For the pragmatist—whether he eventually profess realism or not—quite explicitly defines his more *denkökonomisch* way of interpreting the instrumental function of knowledge. He recognizes, indeed, that a serviceable instrument must somehow fit into something other than itself; instrumentalism always implies *some* sort of correspondence. But this correspondence, the pragmatist points out—if I have ever at all understood him—need not be a correspondence of something in conscious experience with something independent of conscious experience; it need only consist of a system of cross-references within the unbroken context of experience itself, between temporally sundered moments of the flux of existence. If one thing more than another is the *bête noire* of nearly all of those called pragmatists, I had always supposed it to be the copy-theory of the judgment. It is, in fact, as much on instrumentalist as on nominalist grounds, as I understand it, that the pragmatist has objected to that theory. It does not serve any useful purpose whatever for an idea to match either a simultaneously-existent, or an eternal, object; what is pragmatically important is that this moment's thought should forecast, or advantageously lead into, some future moment's experience. In short, pragmatism substitutes inter-temporal for trans-subjective reference, in its interpretation of the criteria alike of "serviceableness" and of "objective validity." This does not seem to me an altogether true or adequate view; but it seems to me a definite and intelligible one; and in so far as instrumentalism is a part of the group of doctrines that have been designated at various times as pragmatism, it seems to me to be this particular, this nominalistic, variety that is so far novel, distinctive, and important as to deserve to have the designation applied to it. This

kind of instrumentalism I personally believe to be idealistic in its logical tendency; but, since the defense of that view would require further argument, I will in the present discussion not go so far; I will say only that it does not either necessarily or naturally make for realism. It leads *either* to idealism or to a *tertium quid*, a view in which the traditional subject-object dualism, which constitutes the starting-point of the ordinary controversy between realist and idealist, is abrogated and transcended. Into an examination of the relational theory of consciousness I do not want here to enter. I am content, therefore, to leave it as a pragmatic alternative to idealism, maintaining only that, at any rate, if it is in any degree a new or distinctive theory, it must be distinct from dualistic realism of the ordinary sort; while if it is not distinct therefrom, it is incompatible with, the nominalistic instrumentalism of the pragmatist. In any case, Professor Montague's realism (*e. g.*, p. 487) seems as frankly dualistic as any ever was, and as fully committed to the copy or duplication theory of knowledge. This, I should agree, is the one perfectly intelligible and clearly definable realism, the only one rightly to be so called. And it is such realism that I understand to be here in question. In view, then, of what has been said above of the characteristic *nuance* of pragmatic instrumentalism, and in view of Professor Montague's failure even to essay to show that that *nuance* results from an inconceivable combination of ideas, I can not see that he has proved that "an instrumentalist *must* be a realist." I even apprehend that it would be difficult for any one to prove (though I know the task has been attempted) that the pragmatist *may* be a realist. He ought to be either an idealist, or what for the present I can only call an anti-dualistic *x*.

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## REVIEWS AND ABSTRACTS OF LITERATURE

*Social Education*. COLIN A. SCOTT. Boston: Ginn & Co. 1908. Pp. xi + 298.

No essay in education since Dewey's "The School and Society" has won recognition so immediate and so marked as this volume of Dr. Scott's, and none, I think, has so well deserved it. The book enjoyed, to be sure, certain advantages at the outset. Nowadays the adjective "social" is in most fields a shibboleth; and in the field of education Dr. Scott voices a definite movement, which has already produced a quarterly, a congress, and a club—a movement, he declares, "destined to stimulate the deepest, the most progressive, and the most characteristic elements in American education." To be thus timely and thus heralded, however, is happily