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SPECIAL ISSUE – JAMES, PEIRCE, AND PRAGMATISM  
Guest Editors: Paniel Reyes Cárdenas and Daniel R. Herbert

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JAMES, PEIRCE, AND PRAGMATISM:  
INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL ISSUE

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In view of Peirce's eventual rejection of 'pragmatism' as a label for his philosophy, and his preference for the deliberately less attractive 'pragmaticism,' it is often maintained that he and William James represent divergent pragmatist traditions.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Richard Rorty came to believe that Peirce falls outside the pragmatist tradition, providing it with little else than its name. For Rorty, Peirce remains too wedded to quasi-philosophical concerns inherited from the European tradition, and it is only with James and Dewey that the radical humanistic potential of American pragmatist philosophy is appreciated. Hence Peirce and James are often presented as differing in their respectively 'scientific' and 'humanistic' priorities. Whereas Peirce introduces his pragmatism as a methodological principle for facilitating the solution (or dissolution) of metaphysical problems, James's pragmatism is of far greater scope and is intended to address such concerns as the value and desirability of human existence. While Peirce's sympathisers object to a lack of logical rigor in James's writings and to an epistemic frivolity which has tarnished the reputation of pragmatist philosophy, those sympathetic to James complain of the narrow technical preoccupations that prevent Peirce from adequately addressing moral and existential concerns.

To sharply distinguish, however, between a 'scientific-objectivist' Peircean pragmaticism and a 'humanistic-subjectivist' Jamesian pragmatism is to risk overlooking the numerous commonalities between Peirce and James. Contrary to his reputation as a narrowly technical logician, Peirce did engage seriously and in depth with ethical matters and his later architectonic system makes logic systematically subordinate to ethics and aesthetics. James's scientific interests and his strong empiricist leanings should also cast doubt on the long-held suspicion that his philosophy gives license to undisciplined wishful thinking. What is more, Peirce and James are both explicitly dedicated to reconciling a commitment to modern scientific method with a profound religiosity. In addition, little is known of the important personal and intellectual conversations they sustained over many years, conversations that, according to the

testimony of each of them, affected and stimulated their thought, even in dramatic ways.

The editors of this special issue of *William James Studies* are therefore grateful for the opportunity to present a collection of recent essays covering a number of topics within the general field of the relations between Peirce's and James's respective philosophies. It is hoped that the various contributions shall highlight the opportunities for dialogue across the pragmatist tradition, without failing to respect the breadth and diversity of the movement. The contributions address topics in metaphysics, epistemology, the philosophies of science and religion, and the nature of truth—frequently identified as a crucial point of disagreement between Peirce's pragmatism and James's.

It is a particular objective of the special issue to highlight work on Peirce, James, and pragmatism from scholars based in Latin America. Both guest editors were present at the founding conference of the Sociedad Latinoamericana Peirce at the Universidad Popular Autónoma del Estado de Puebla in 2019 and co-edited the proceedings of that event in a collection entitled *The Reception of Peirce and Pragmatism in Latin America: A Trilingual Collection*.<sup>2</sup> That event and the continuing activities of the Sociedad are testament to the lively influence of Peircean and pragmatist ideas amongst scholars and writers throughout Latin America, and the guest editors are proud to be able to showcase in this special issue some new work from pragmatism scholars based at institutions in Brazil and Mexico. In recognition of the thriving community of pragmatism scholarship in the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking worlds, this issue of *William James Studies* includes, for the first time in the journal's history, a Spanish language contribution.

Peirce and James may justly be regarded as co-originators of the pragmatist tradition. Although James popularized philosophical pragmatism, he always credited Peirce as the founder of the 'pragmatist' movement. Indeed, James remained a loyal supporter of Peirce and a constant advocate of his work, endeavoring wherever possible to secure employment for his old friend, and when Peirce's difficult personality made this impossible, going to lengthy efforts

to provide what financial support he was able to offer. For Peirce was, unlike his good friend James, a most awkward and irritable character who, in spite of his deep philosophical commitment to the value of collaborative effort and intellectual cooperation, was an often unreliable colleague, given to impatience in his dealings with others and little disposed to adjust his often challenging writing style to accommodate the preferences of a wider audience.<sup>3</sup> At times, indeed, Peirce's writings—which are littered with mathematical equations, references to the history of philosophy and science, bizarre neologisms, and specialist terminology from a wide array of scientific disciplines—can seem almost willfully obscure. Those few works which he was successful in publishing during his lifetime are often intimidatingly dense in places, and contain lengthy digressions, and his voluminous unpublished writings are, quite predictably, even less accessible.

The reasons for Peirce's relative neglect during his own lifetime and for much of the twentieth century are therefore not difficult to discern. With the growing audience of enthusiasts which his work has found over more recent decades, however, it is becoming increasingly clear that his isolation during his lifetime from what ought to have been his community of intellectual collaborators, and his posthumous failure to reach anything approaching the audience of such fellow pragmatists as James and Dewey, was not only a personal tragedy for one who so vocally championed the communitarian dimension of the scientific enterprise, but a regrettable loss to the history of twentieth-century philosophy. When it is so often remarked that Peirce anticipated many of the most important developments in twentieth-century analytic philosophy, from his groundbreaking work in formal logic, to the proto-falsificationist elements of his philosophy of science, his quasi-functionalist approach to mental phenomena, and his profoundly original research in semiotics, one can hardly help but wonder whether so much of the dismissive treatment which pragmatist philosophy has received from the analytic tradition might have been avoided had more of its principal figures been as well-acquainted with Peirce's work as were James and Dewey.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, it was James who made perhaps the pithiest observation about Peirce's writing style—"flashes of brilliant light relieved against Cimmerian darkness."<sup>5</sup> Peirce's writing is often difficult, but it contains passages of such profound insight and originality that hardly anyone who holds the philosophical imagination in any esteem can come away from these passages without the sense of encountering a thinker of outstanding creativity and perspicacity. One's philosophical outlook seldom remains unaffected, moreover, by encounters such as these, and it is then difficult not to find oneself peering into that 'Cimmerian darkness' so off-putting to James, in the hope of catching further glimpses of light, or, most tantalizingly of all, some hidden trace of their underlying connection.

Though unlike his lifelong friend in so many ways, James is a testament to the impressive potential of Peirce's thought to act as a catalyst to philosophical creativity. James is, of course, far too much of an original thinker in his own right ever to occupy the role of uncritical adherent or mere expositor of someone else's ideas and he was, in any case, temperamentally indisposed towards Peirce's speculative and system-building ambitions. It would be grossly unfair—as some of Peirce's champions have done—to accuse James of simply misunderstanding Peirce and offering a discreditable namesake in place of the original form of pragmatism.<sup>6</sup> To one who so often stressed the importance of temperament in philosophy, it was entirely in keeping with his own philosophical commitments to interpret creatively what sources of philosophical inspiration he was able to find, in order to further an original project of his own, and, in any case, James is quite explicit about his differences with Peirce, the shortcomings he purports to identify in Peirce's brand of pragmatism, and how he intends to extend and improve its application.<sup>7</sup>

It is indeed an irony that James—ever the champion of the heroic individual against established conventions and institutions—was able to function far more effectively within an intellectual community than was his somewhat eccentric but community-idealizing friend. To relate James's 'individualism' and Peirce's 'communitarianism' to their respectively 'nominalist' and 'realist'



forms of pragmatism has become something of a commonplace in the literature comparing these two founding figures of the pragmatist movement.<sup>8</sup> One might reasonably ask, however, whether it was not James's very reverence for the irreducibly particular and the specificity of actual circumstance which accounts for his greater sensitivity to the subtleties of interpersonal dealings and his more successful grasp of the actual dynamics of different forms of social interaction of varying layers of complexity. James's lack of interest in formal methods of reasoning, and his preference for topics less remote from the concerns of everyday experience was often criticized by Peirce, but it is also the key to James's appeal and the reason that pragmatism's value as a possible insight into those profound human concerns which draw so many to philosophy in the first place have not remained in the 'Cimmerian darkness' of Peirce's writings, into which recent groups of Peirce scholars have gradually begun to shed some flickers of light. Certainly, much work remains to be done in reconstructing the philosophical system which it was always Peirce's aim to construct. In seeking to better understand the details of Peirce's system, however, one ought not to expect incompatibility with James's views at every step of the way, and much recent scholarship suggests quite the reverse.<sup>9</sup> It is hoped that the present special issue shall contribute to this ongoing effort to understand Peirce and James in light of, rather than in spite of, their respective forms of pragmatist philosophy.

The special issue opens with "Pragmatic Truth: A Task of Ours through an Unusual Comparison" by Cassiano Terra Rodrigues. Comparing Peirce and James in terms of their respective accounts of truth, Rodrigues discusses their relation to Newton da Costa's notion of quasi-truth. Rodrigues highlights, therefore, the contemporary relevance of Peirce and James as influences in ongoing philosophical research in Brazil. His essay addresses a number of longstanding issues in pragmatist accounts of truth, including objectivity, pluralism, relativism, and the human contribution to truth. While acknowledging well-recognized differences between Peirce and James with respect to a pragmatist conception of truth, Rodrigues identifies important points of

agreement as well, particularly concerning the human agent's active involvement in the relationship between truth and its object. Rodrigues's article demonstrates the vast breadth of the pragmatist tradition co-founded by Peirce and James, in assessing how a common pragmatic account of truth might be applied across such diverse subject matters as mathematical knowledge and the production of artistic phenomena. A key pragmatist theme which surfaces throughout Rodrigues's article, then, is the irreducible responsibility which agents must bear in the quest for truth—creatively pursuing an agenda of their own while remaining answerable to stubborn realities confronting them.

The guest editors are honored by the opportunity to present in this special issue Susan Haack's "The Differences that Make a Difference: James and Peirce on the Importance of Individuals." Originally published in the *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, Haack's essay addresses a recurring theme of this special issue by examining the importance of temperament in James's philosophical outlook and the temperamental differences between James and Peirce which underlay their respective approaches to pragmatist philosophy. Focusing on a topic of lasting interest to James, Haack discusses his and Peirce's various approaches to the understanding of 'the great man in history.' Haack's article shows once again the extraordinary breadth of pragmatist philosophy, and how Peirce's work and James's work illustrate cross-disciplinary approaches to issues of general human concern, drawing upon research in biology, the social sciences, and the humanities to illustrate a common cluster of problems from a variety of angles. This essay is also noteworthy for the manner in which it locates James's interest in the topic of history making individuals within the context of a nineteenth century intellectual climate informed by such figures as Darwin, Spencer, and Carlyle, each of whom influenced profoundly a Jamesian approach to individuals and human history.

Daniel Herbert's contribution to the present special issue compares Peirce and James in respect to their commitments regarding the rationality or, more generally, the permissibility of

passionally-motivated beliefs for which no sufficient evidence can be offered. Whereas James's anti-evidentialism is well known from his much-cited essay, "The Will to Believe," Peirce has often been interpreted as an advocate of the very kind of Cliffordian evidentialism which James rejects. This contribution argues that while Peirce's important 1877 essay, "The Fixation of Belief" can easily—when taken in isolation—lend itself to such an evidentialist reading, an appreciation of his broader position as indicated in such other writings as "The Doctrine of Chances," "The First Rule of Logic," and "On the Logic of Drawing History from Ancient Documents, Especially from Testimonies," suggests that his views are in fact closer to James than has often been recognized. In particular, and just as James maintains in his 1896 paper, the very belief that there is a truth of the matter about some contested question, and that this might be discovered by scientific methods is, for Peirce, the expression of a desire or hope which cannot be supported by evidence but rests on what James would call one's 'passional nature.'

In "Hábitos y Conocimiento. Las condiciones pragmáticas de un Modelo Científico," the fourth essay of the special issue, Julio Horta discusses Peirce's 'objectivist' and James's 'subjectivist' conceptions of belief and habit. Horta examines the important role of counter-factual conditionals in distinguishing the Peircean and Jamesian approaches to belief and habit, and argues that Peirce's account is better equipped to provide a satisfactory treatment of scientific models. According to Horta then, Peirce's pragmatism differs from James's in respect to its handling of the kinds of laws which are of interest to scientific inquiry.

Finally, in "William James and Charles Sanders Peirce on Experience and Perception: A Radical Exploration of the Universes of Experience," Paniel Reyes Cárdenas aims to show the fundamental accord in Peirce's and James's views on perception and experience. According to Cárdenas, both classical pragmatists discover the richness of experience, and, from the renewed value they see in experience, they construct a theory of perception. There are important nuances and differences between the two, in

Cárdenas’s view, but his claim is that their agreement is deeper than previously thought, and that such agreement can be understood, in a pragmatic fashion, in terms of how both of their accounts of perception converge in a richer theory of perception.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Peirce declares his rejection of ‘pragmatism’ as a label for his own position and his preference for the term ‘pragmaticism’ in “What Pragmatism Is”, published in *The Monist* (April, 1905). See also EP2.331–345.

<sup>2</sup> Cárdenas and Herbert.

<sup>3</sup> It is characteristic of the relationship between the two co-originators of the pragmatist tradition, that when James arranged in 1898 for his struggling friend to give a series of paid lectures at Cambridge, MA., Peirce was nonetheless resentful at his encouragement to speak on topics of popular interest, rather than the more technical issues in formal logic that were occupying Peirce's attention.

<sup>4</sup> F.P. Ramsey is a notable exception to this general trend, however. Cheryl Misak has done much to shed light on Ramsey's indebtedness to Peirce in such works as her *Frank Ramsey: A Sheer Excess of Powers*.

<sup>5</sup> James, *Pragmatism*, 10.

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, Apel.

<sup>7</sup> See especially his "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results" (1898), in James, *Essays in Philosophy*, 123–139.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, Atkins.

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, Woell.

# PRAGMATIC TRUTH:

A TASK OF OURS THROUGH AN UNUSUAL COMPARISON

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This paper is an attempt to make sense of James's conception of truth as a valid source of philosophical inspiration to Newton da Costa's paraconsistent notion of *pragmatic truth*, later called *quasi-truth*. Typically, da Costa's quasi-truth is more easily understood as an attempt to give a mathematical interpretation of Peirce's convergent theory of truth. However, da Costa publicly recognized his own preference for James's writings rather than for Peirce's. From this initial motive, the paper proceeds to the difference between Peirce's and James's brands of pragmatism. From this, I address Peirce's conception of inquiry as truth-oriented. Next, I pass to James's account of truth and purposiveness. I then move to what James intended to reject, noting one divergence concerning Peirce's proposal. I then criticize formal definitions of truth, which leads to considering what it means to verify truths and why James's theory of truth, in spite of being not particularly mathematical, can still retain value for exact or quasi-exact scientists. The last section is a sort of incitement grounded upon contemporary art directed at anyone who pursues and values truth over lies.



In 2012, at the 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Brazilian Association for Graduate Studies in Philosophy (ANPOF), in Curitiba-PR, I asked Professor Newton da Costa about the possible relationship of his ideas on truth with American pragmatism, particularly C. S. Peirce. As is known, da Costa has engaged with Peirce's theory of truth, not to make an exegesis of the latter's ideas, but treating them as a source of motivation for his own theory of pragmatic truth.<sup>1</sup> Within da Costa's body of work, this is not an isolated claim, being repeated always with a cautious note: even though the notion of pragmatic truth is not exegetic, it mainly stems from the ideas of Peirce, with James and Dewey being secondary. Parting from Peirce, inspired by him, but without merging in his ideas to the point of indistinguishable conflation, da Costa developed his original notion of quasi-truth: "Maybe it would be better to call our kind of truth quasi-truth, instead of pragmatic truth."<sup>2</sup> Quasi-truth is indeed not a philosophical theory of truth, rather it is a formal definition of truth, which can be philosophically interpreted as "an epistemic possibility of truth."<sup>3</sup> As widely remarked, the notion of quasi-truth as worked out by da Costa captures essential features of Peirce's definition of truth as the end of inquiry, e.g., the idea of self-correction over time, or the derivation of predictions from hypothetical propositions about practical consequences, or even the notion of satisfiability in a logical system, about which Peirce's ideas appear as forerunning Tarski's semantic conception of truth.<sup>4</sup> So, da Costa's quasi-truth is a mathematical treatment of Peirce's general account, using the logico-mathematical machinery of the twentieth century. Given Peirce's concerns with probability and statistical methods, this makes a lot of sense. However, in 2012, Prof. da Costa answered me in a surprising way. His own words were something like: "It has to do yes, of course. Truth is what works. And I have always preferred James to Peirce. I read a lot of James, how well he writes! I like James better than Peirce because James is more literary, his prose flows. Of course, I like Peirce a lot too, I admire him a lot, but Peirce ... well, Peirce is too much logical."<sup>5</sup> Besides being absolutely unexpected, coming from whom it does, these statements

notwithstanding all we know, give other clues about how da Costa philosophically understands truth. And, if the conceptual denomination of his theory changed from pragmatic truth to quasi-truth—the Latin prefix meaning as if to highlight the conventional character of the idea—this nonetheless should not stop us short of trying to identify a Jamesian stream in da Costa’s proposal.<sup>6</sup>

Now, at least one aspect of da Costa’s quasi-truth can be criticized from a Peircean perspective, to wit, its reduction of scientific inquiry to language:

Inquiry is controlled by the scientific community, being a social task. Therefore, it seems reasonable to suppose that *practice* can be identified with a collection of *primary statements*, which one can use to test, between certain limits, the propositions (theories and hypotheses) obtained in the way of inquiry.<sup>7</sup>

From a Jamesian perspective, this would be too restrictive as well, since James is trying in fact to expand Peirce’s primordial ideas from the practice of science to everyday practice. Nonetheless, da Costa’s mathematical definition of pragmatic truth as quasi-truth preserves the essential idea of the partial and incomplete nature of our knowledge, which nonetheless makes it less useful and employable, be it scientific, as for Peirce, or quotidian, as for James.

So, my plan will first be to present Peirce’s ideas; then, pass on to James’s; then, finally, to highlight da Costa’s most important points in his philosophical interpretation of his own theory in comparison to my presentation of Peirce’s and James’s points. Of course, my exegetical aim might not seem interesting from da Costa’s own perspective. However, my suggestions can—at least, I hope—be helpful in clarifying how James’s understanding of truth can be interpreted as a resource for a philosophical interpretation of Newton da Costa’s quasi-truth.

#### **THE BIRTH OF PRAGMATISM**

James was indeed the very first person to use the word “pragmatism,” in a public lecture and in print, as a denomination for



his own philosophy. He used it at a conference on August 26, 1898, before the Philosophical Union of Berkeley University. Shortly after, the conference was published in the *University Chronicle* under the title “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results.” In this lecture, James attempted to show his audience “the most likely direction in which to begin on the path of truth,” in the course of which he introduced the “principle of practicalism or pragmatism,” explicitly naming it “Peirce’s principle,” since he states he has heard it from Peirce’s own mouth in the early 1870s.<sup>8</sup> As the common story goes, Peirce came to invent his ugly word “pragmaticism” to differentiate himself from such readings of his “principle” as James’s. As a matter of fact, Peirce seems not to have used the term “pragmatism” in his own writings until James started talking about it, for the “principle” was originally thought of as a method for the clarification of conceptual terms; that is, with a view to eliminating intellectual confusions of a purely formal nature. Let us see Peirce’s context first.

Against the background of modern philosophy, Peirce sought to overcome the characteristic subjectivism of his antecessors. His opinion is that modern philosophy was insufficient to explain the success of science, attached as it was to mentalistic conceptions. Peirce considered as quite inappropriate the categories of clearness and distinctness of thought, as Descartes defined and bequeathed to all philosophers who followed him. The point should rather be to explain objective knowledge resorting to an objective methodology, and not to a subjective epistemology. So, Peirce argues, to achieve a higher degree of clarity in our conceptions, we should not think in terms of what is clearer or more distinct to us, since we may be wrong about how clear an idea actually is no matter how familiar we are with it. Besides, “to accept propositions which seem perfectly evident to us is a thing which, whether it be logical or illogical, we cannot help doing.”<sup>9</sup> Peirce also refuses to allow that the clarity needed may come from establishing the definition of a concept, such as Leibniz defended. Of course, although “nothing new can ever be learned by analyzing definitions,” we can put our ideas in order by defining them and reach a further degree of clarity.<sup>10</sup> But this is not

good enough for Peirce, to whom a third and higher degree of clarity comes only if we relate our concepts with our actions. This is the point when the pragmatic maxim is introduced:

Consider what effects, which 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.<sup>11</sup>

Read in isolation, this passage is rather difficult. But, from the context, we capture the suggestion of verificationism, as the author immediately adds: “our idea of anything is our idea of its sensible effects.”<sup>12</sup> These sensitive effects, together with the repeated use of “conceiving,” give the maxim a psychological tone Peirce will later seek to eliminate, and James will retain in a very personal interpretation. The expression “practical bearings” nonetheless reveals Peirce’s main intended point: we may be mistaken even when we use a conception in a definition, but when we actually use it, when the conception is described in our practical uses of it, there is little space as to how it should be interpreted. This is highlighted in later formulations of the maxim, where Peirce emphasizes circumstances and desires<sup>13</sup> and existential situations.<sup>14</sup> The emphasis falls not on consciousness, but on a logical and rational process of production of possible meaning, which makes a good candidate for being mathematized. The pragmatic maxim is primarily a logical principle relevant to the scientific method, not psychology, its main function being to help us select hypotheses, which makes pragmatism a logic of abduction.<sup>15</sup> However, more than a criterion for ascertaining formal meanings, Peirce states a maxim implying logical and practical consequences: how we should act once we accept certain habits of thought or conventions of meaning. This sense becomes clearer when Peirce returns to the topic after James starts talking about pragmatism, especially in the treatment of concepts such as truth, reality, probability, etc. In fact, if we experimentally test a theory that we believe is true, we expect certain effects to happen, preparing ourselves to face certain

practical consequences. If nothing we expect happens, the maxim tells us that something in our conceptions is not consistent with what is observed, and this influences not only our way of thinking, but above all our way of acting.

Now, consider James's rendition of Peirce's words:

To attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object, then, we need only consider what effects of a conceivably practical kind the object may involve—what sensations we are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare. Our conception of these effects, then, is for us the whole of our conception of the object, so far as that conception has positive significance at all.<sup>16</sup>

In spite of being more specific than Peirce, James is also vague in a sense. For one can wonder whether it is possible to determine how one should understand “effects of a conceivably practical kind” in relation to the meaning of any idea, since not every practically conceivable consequence of an idea necessarily defines its meaning, for “may involve” is rather vague. Lastly, James's identification of practical consequences with “sensations” and the restriction to “positive significance” give his expression of Peirce's ideas a very authentic one sufficiently distant from the latter's original methodological context. As will be clearer from now on, the main difference is that James is developing the human consequences of Peirce's formulations rather than trying to understand how science works. All this vagueness of expression is really intended by James, as he professes: “I think myself that it [i.e., the principle of pragmatism] should be expressed more broadly than Mr. Peirce expresses it. The ultimate test for us of what a truth means is indeed the conduct it dictates or inspires.”<sup>17</sup>

The main point of disagreement would be James's psychological reduction of the expression “practical bearings” in the original formulation of the pragmatic maxim to particular subjective reactions and sensations. As soon will be seen, this is fair enough for James's rendering of Peirce's expressions. However, if carefully read, Peirce's complaint does not say exactly that he disagreed with

James. Instead, the passage can be read as a token of Peirce's toleration of James's psychologism (and possibly of F. C. S. Schiller's "humanism" as well). Peirce's explicit motivation for naming his doctrine *pragmaticism* was his dissatisfaction with the use of the term *pragmatism* in too loose a way in "literary journals, where it gets abused in the merciless way that words have to expect when they fall into literary clutches."<sup>18</sup> The proper way to understand this passage is, in my opinion, that Peirce never saw the differences between his *pragmaticism* and James's *pragmatism* as insurmountable. Given the way James himself introduced the term, this can be fairly stated for him as well.

Do I mean to say there are differences? By all means, absolutely. My point is that, besides their acknowledged differences, there is still much in common to regard Peirce's and James's projects as complementary in strong and fruitful ways. In the following, I will stress the differences, hoping in the end they lead us to understanding them as complementary perspectives. As I think James's dedication of his *The Will to Believe* to Peirce should be taken as seriously as it is, let us first examine Peirce's ideas before turning to James's.

#### PEIRCE ON INQUIRY AND TRUTH

For Peirce, truth is an opinion, so it is semiotic in nature: a sign of the agreement between reality and what we assert about it, the conformity of a sign and its object, the result of our inquiries.<sup>19</sup> So, it is not transcendental or lofty in any sense, it is mundane and utterly intelligible, without being like just any common arbitrary opinion whatsoever: in the ultimate end of inquiry, truth will be that opinion that represents whatever inquiry discovers is the real. So stated, it seems Peirce is adhering to some sort of correspondent theory of truth; that is, the agreement between signs and their objects that in the ideal end of inquiry will—hopefully—be achieved. As such, this type of agreement is not a given, but we need to search it out. The importance of research follows: if pursued long enough by the right methods, inquiry will sooner or later lead us to discover truth. In other words, we will arrive at a satisfactory opinion about reality, capable of expression in sufficiently abstract signs.<sup>20</sup>

This is, in a few words, Peirce's notorious theory of the convergence of inquiry to truth, which during the twentieth century received vehement criticism by many important philosophers and epistemologists. Would it mean scientific method is infallible, that is, that there are no errors in scientific research? Would it mean there is an a priori truth since forever? Now, all of this seems absurd and implausible, given Peirce's radical fallibilism, according to which our knowledge is imperfect and we can never be sure our predictions will be verified, his adherence to the principle of synechism, according to which continuity is real and pervasive in experience, and his doctrine of tychism, according to which chance is objective and operative in nature.<sup>21</sup> It is impossible to address here all aspects of or criticisms to Peirce's theory, but it is possible to clarify some basic points.

Let us recall pragmatism, a term "ugly enough to keep itself safe from kidnapers," as Peirce ironically came to say.<sup>22</sup> Peirce chose this label to differentiate his specific methodological understanding of pragmatism as a method for clarifying the meanings, not of all ideas, but only of "intellectual concepts."<sup>23</sup> To achieve the maximum degree of clarity in our intellectual conceptions, then, we should imagine where they would take us in practice, that is, what course of action could possibly follow from them.

Recovering modern philosophy once more, let us remember beliefs were held by Hume to be "nothing but the vivacity of those perceptions they present."<sup>24</sup> But Peirce maintains that a belief is a sort of a willingness to act, claiming pragmatism is but a corollary of this idea.<sup>25</sup> As the essence of a belief "is the establishment of a habit; and different beliefs are distinguished by the different modes of action they bring about," beliefs prompt us to act.<sup>26</sup> Doubts, on the contrary, interrupt our mental habits, paralyzing our actions. When we become dissatisfied with our opinions, doubts irritate us. So, we feel the urge to inquiry to get rid of doubts. Doubt is indeed the driving force of investigation, the object of which is the establishment of belief. If the function of thought, as Peirce says, is to guide our actions, to clarify habits of thought is to clarify rules of

action: what kinds of habits lead to what kinds of action? Inquiry comes to an end only when another opinion capable of settling doubt is reached, whether true or false. Truth alone is not capable of prompting us to investigate or resolve our doubts, because it is independent of us; it is not given from the start, it is discovered in the end. Hence the importance of pursuing the right methods: fixing beliefs is not enough; we need to find a way of fixing true beliefs. The intertwining of truth with belief and doubt is encapsulated in Peirce's remark: "Your problems would be greatly simplified, if, instead of saying that you want to know the 'Truth,' you were simply to say that you want to attain a state of belief unassailable by doubt."<sup>27</sup>

Let us remember that Peirce's original perspective on scientific methodology lies in his insistence upon non-deductive methods of inquiry, most notably on abduction, besides the more popular induction and deduction.<sup>28</sup> Abduction is probably more correctly defined as the instinctive capacity or inference to an explicative hypothesis. For Peirce, the very logic of scientific advancement proves that "man's mind must have been attuned to the truth of things in order to discover what he has discovered." This is the only plausible hypothesis to explain the advancement of modern science: "unless man have a natural bent in accordance with nature's, we have no chance of understanding nature, at all."<sup>29</sup> According to Peirce, this is what Galileo Galilei meant with "il lume naturale": a natural ability of the human mind to guess correctly. For Peirce, human beings, like all other animals, developed instincts to the conservation of the species. Human rationality, defined as the instinctive capability of guessing rightly, developed in the same evolutionary way. This continuity between human mind and nature grounds the refusal of a substantial duality between matter and mind, subject and object, theory and practice. Since such continuity does not guarantee that we will unavoidably obtain truth, it is only the first step of inquiry, for instinctive suggestions must be submitted to experimental testing.<sup>30</sup> Now, what interests us here is that such continuity leads, first, to the continuous reformulation of the terms in which experience happens, while it is adopted as a norm

for action that guides conduct; second, inquiry is consequently a communal activity, for science is, above all, a mode of life:

Science is to mean for us a mode of life whose single animating purpose is to find out the real truth, which pursues this purpose by a well-considered method, founded on thorough acquaintance with such scientific results already ascertained by others as may be available, and which seeks cooperation in the hope that the truth may be found, if not by any of the actual inquirers, yet ultimately by those who come after them and who shall make use of their results.<sup>31</sup>

This is an infinite process, always recommencing and going on. Truth and knowledge appear then as semiotic products of our collective efforts to make sense of the world. So, this general picture inevitably leads to the abandonment of the ideas of absolute necessity, mechanicism, and determination. As Peirce says, “we must reject every philosophy or general conception of the universe which could ever lead to the conclusion that any given general fact is an ultimate one.”<sup>32</sup>

This is the general meaning of his philosophy, which can be inferred from his early writings: if we remember abduction has no logical security, the connection with the other inferential forms becomes clear, for the maxim allows us to distinguish the meanings of different abductive suggestions, showing how each one could influence our practical conduct in a different way.

In Peirce’s thought, science is above all a way of inquiring, a public, collective, and communicative way of making science, wherein communication and cooperation between scientists are crucial factors. Knowledge is a collective construction, so truth—however uncertain and controversial with respect to individual opinions in the present—will be reached by the collective union in a methodic and continuous effort to attain it in the future: “I hold that truth’s independence of individual opinions is due (so far as there is any ‘truth’) to its being the predestined result to which sufficient inquiry *would* ultimately lead.”<sup>33</sup>

In its general lines, Peirce adopts this perspective since his early writings. Truly speaking, he became less deterministic over time. In 1878, Peirce said it was a “great law” of scientific inquiry that truth would inexorably be found by anyone who followed the right methods:

Different minds may set out with the most antagonistic views, but the progress of investigation carries them by a force outside of themselves to one and the same conclusion. This activity of thought by which we are carried, not where we wish, but to a foreordained goal, is like the operation of destiny. No modification of the point of view taken, no selection of other facts for study, no natural bent of mind even, can enable a man to escape the predestinate opinion. This great law is embodied in the conception of truth and reality. The opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate, is what we mean by the truth, and the object represented in this opinion is the real.<sup>34</sup>

But later on, Peirce softened this claim, leaving it open to a more modest fallibilism and replacing “law” with “hope,” as if hope is our regulative principle in inquiry: we proceed believing that by the right methods we are able to reach truth. Since we cannot say there is something wrong with statistical induction, we must as a matter of fact acknowledge that we are all fallible, humanly too fallible – even if we die before attaining truth, the universe will nevertheless go on. Hence the old Peirce, already hardened by the renitent hardness of life, came to claim:

We all *hope* that the different scientific inquiries in which we are severally engaged are going ultimately to lead to some definitely established conclusion, *which conclusion we endeavor to anticipate in some measure*. Agreement with that ultimate proposition that we look forward to,—agreement with that, whatever it may turn out to be, is the scientific truth.<sup>35</sup>

Now, this means we are guided in our search for truth by “an intellectual hope” that truth can be found, and things explained.<sup>36</sup>



Truth as the aim of inquiry is something we strive for, but nonetheless we can never fully and once and for all attain. We can miss it, we can even die before we discover it. Is there something wrong with the logic of inquiry? Absolutely not! Is there something wrong with truth itself? Still the less! In the first place, we all can be wrong. In what sense then are we allowed to speak of convergence to truth? How can we hope to reach it?

The ground of Peirce's confidence is his long-held understanding that the law of large numbers justifies induction, making it a self-corrective method.<sup>37</sup> Now, if there is a reality, the iterated employment of inductive methods can reveal to us something about it. I risk saying induction is an idempotent operation: if persisted upon, it will furnish us a definite result as the ideal limit of our inquiries. To say that inductive methods are self-corrective means we use them to test the adjustment of our hypotheses to the reality of phenomena in a progressive way. So, even if we are presently wrong, if we continue to inquire, we should be able to correct ourselves by devising new hypotheses, developing them, testing them, and so forth indefinitely.<sup>38</sup> In other words, provided it continues by the right methods, and without predefined spatio-temporal limits, inquiry tends to truth; that is, partial truths can be overcome or even become more acutely true. There are not ultimately inexplicable or unintelligible facts—to suppose so is to give up all inquiry. But the idea of a sort of possible correspondence between the sign and its object is not totally absent from the theory.

Peirce's account of truth cannot be separated from his account of inquiry, once intertwined pragmatic, cognitive, and epistemological assumptions ground it. In the end, all of this leads to different respects in which truth and inquiry can be related.<sup>39</sup> Since inquiry is communal and knowledge is semiotic, truth can be understood as a common heritage, for science is above all a mode of life, as seen.

First, inquiry is a social, historically situated, and collective activity.<sup>40</sup> A poem by João Cabral de Melo Neto may help us here:

*Um galo sozinho não tece uma manhã:*

*ele precisará sempre de outros galos.  
De um que apanhe esse grito que ele  
e o lance a outro; de um outro galo  
que apanhe o grito de um galo antes  
e o lance a outro; e de outros galos  
que com muitos outros galos se cruzem  
os fios de sol de seus gritos de galo,  
para que a manhã, desde uma teia tênue,  
se vá tecendo, entre todos os galos.<sup>41</sup>*

The poem subtly illustrates the general idea: multiple inquiries, simultaneously pursued, each contribute a small parcel to the body of knowledge that is being simultaneously constructed and shared by different inquirers. Compare with Peirce's statements:

The scientific world is like a colony of insects, in that the individual strives to produce that which he himself cannot hope to enjoy. One generation collects premises in order that a distant generation may discover what they mean. When a problem comes before the scientific world, a hundred men immediately set all their energies to work upon it. One contributes this, another that. Another company, standing upon the shoulders of the first, strike a little higher, until at last the parapet is attained.<sup>42</sup>

Inquiry is like the cry of the roosters: it does not depend on any individual agent, but on the union of all the efforts that end up building a common objective. As in the poem, wherein the cries of roosters finally agree in the sunrise, truth is the agreement we hope to reach: an adjustment between being and being represented. The web of the morning is progressively weaved by the collective integration of beams of sunlight called in by the actual singing of roosters; so partial discoveries of each inquirer in the semiotic-linguistic level progressively compound a true iconical isomorphic net, by integrating anaphoric and cataphoric elements in the syntax of knowledge—each inquirer recovers previous steps and advances forward by integrating pieces of knowledge, so the web of signs becomes as complex and as voluminous as it continually grows in

multiple directions. This is a never-ending process wherein truth appears as the limit of our efforts to know reality. As such, truth is public, that is, of the nature of a shared opinion. A private truth does not make any sense: either truth is intersubjectively recognized as such or it cannot be called so.

As a limit, we can only approximate to truth without ever being certain to have absolutely found it. When we know our beliefs are false, this means we know what we know only because it is not possible to ascertain any other conclusion given the present state of inquiry.<sup>43</sup> Peirce is unequivocal about this: truth is what can be known and cannot be avoided if we follow the right methods.<sup>44</sup> Now, we can measure determinable probabilities; thus, we can with sufficient certainty determine a certain regularity in the course of experience. Of course, this certainty can never be absolute, it can only be as certain as are the mathematical measured probabilities. The point is there is no reason to doubt in such cases where inquiry has shown no other results are expectable, for in the long run the same general aspects will remain. This is Peirce's central point concerning the justification of induction in inquiry.<sup>45</sup>

We inductively test our theories and hypotheses. There is no determinism here, for the stress is not upon the definite way events happen, but in attaining one definite stage, and not another. Different lines of action may in fact lead to the same final result—not utterly final, but final in the sense that it closes some inquiry, not all inquiries. Once this stage is achieved, to get back and begin the questioning process again is unreasonable. If it is humanly impossible to attain absolute and ultimate truth, we should not because of that give up establishing partial truths, truths that are mathematically and probabilistically exact so to be precise enough for our concerns. So, this is a second aspect of truth: we can never claim we definitely know truth, for it is predestined or fated to be known in the future, which means we would be able to know it on the condition we inquire well and long enough.<sup>46</sup> Sooner or later, we shall be forced to represent the real as it is—and only this will satisfy our quest. It may never definitely happen, but once it happens,

inquiring any further is idle since there are no real and living doubts. As Peirce says:

In sciences in which men come to agreement, when a theory has been broached it is considered to be on probation until this agreement is reached. After it is reached, the question of certainty becomes an idle one, because there is no one left who doubts it.<sup>47</sup>

This leads to truth as convergence as the very agreement of inquirers. Even if we can only attain partial, situated, and particularly determinate truths, inquiry never ends. A definite conclusion is but a conclusion that is beyond reasonable doubt, that is, our knowledge is not absolutely beyond any possible doubt, but to doubt of what inquiry has revealed to us is unreasonable. Whereas scientific beliefs can in principle always undergo a revision, we should not be so quick to dismiss scientific findings, insofar as objective truth is a function of the communal nature of inquiry, not a predicament of individual inquirers asserting it. In sum, truth is a processual result; its recognition is directly bound to collective inquiry, not to individual certainties. Only in the ideal end of inquiry could reality and true opinions (in principle) be asserted as matching, for reality does not bend to what any individual wishes it to be.<sup>48</sup> Now, even though the community itself may be finite, knowledge is potentially infinite: the community's repertoire is capable of infinite growth, just as the difference between truth and falsity—which signs do represent reality as it is, and which signs do not—may grow in terms of increasing complexification without ever being denied. And even though there is no difference in nature between our feelings, our reactions to our feelings, and our thoughts—they are all semiotic in nature—this point is a consequence of Peirce's semiotic theory of mind, a special consequence of his refusal to attribute to sense impressions, to emotional dispositions, and to subjective insights the same gnoseological status as objectively assessable logical arguments. For reality endures, i.e., it persists in time; so, the truth or falsity of

our beliefs might eventually be fixed. As scientific activity keeps running, the ultimate assertion of truth lies always in the future.

Peirce thought his version of realism could explain what ancient scholastic realism and modern philosophy did not even have the means to sustain. For on purely psychological grounds modern forms of subjective idealism (mentalism, individualism, the myth of the private self, etc.) are incapable of accounting for the success of modern science. A rigid separation between subject and object makes it impossible to explain the success of objective knowledge, since the external object becomes the unknowable cause of cognition. This is where Peirce sees the historical permanence of nominalism, that is, the reduction of ontology to a theory of meaning, so all universality is confined to language and expelled from the real world.<sup>49</sup> Nominalism expels all normativity from inquiry, thus remaining unable to explain how it is possible to predict the future course of events. Confined within the receptacle of the individual mind or relegated to language, ideality is severed from ontology. Merely finding there are uniformities or regularities in experience is not enough, for it is still necessary to draw accurate consequences from such findings, and this is what Peirce thought his own position could do. In short, provided with a proper semiotic epistemology, realism avoids both the reduction of reality to subjectivity, operated by modern philosophers, and the metaphysical dogmatism of ancient and medieval philosophers.

In its more general sense, then, Peirce's theory presents truth as closely related to a regulative hope, as a sort of horizon at once unattainable and unstable, nevertheless consistent and, therefore, normative, in relation to which we can assess our current conduct. At this point, the correlation between truth, reality, and scientific method is crucial. For besides being a presupposition of scientific activity, realism is the only hypothesis that, according to Peirce, allows us to explain how we can self-correct. Therefore, the realist position favors self-control and the reflected adoption of beliefs and inferences beyond individual idiosyncrasy, throwing to the community the responsibility of judging the truth or falsity of assertions. For if there is a reality, the repetition of inferences will

lead to the discarding of erroneous inductions overall, even though individually or circumstantially we can never completely exempt ourselves from error.<sup>50</sup> Truth is not a narrative like any other, which we can prefer without any major consequences. Truth and knowledge compose our common heritage as human beings. Of course, truth and knowledge are subjective, and, as such, semiotic: at the ultimate and ideal end of all inquiries, our opinions should represent the real. Consequently, if truth consists in the agreement of a sign with its object, then that agreement is not given, but will be discovered—or, as Peirce came to acknowledge at various times, we must keep on hoping it will be discovered.

#### **PURPOSIVENESS AND TRUTH IN JAMES**

Notwithstanding their fundamental differences, there is at least one respect in which James and Peirce agree. In James's *The Principles of Psychology*, we find the strong link between mind and purposefully oriented actions that offers the key to interpreting James's brand of pragmatism, as well as his entire philosophy: "only actions that are done to an end and that show a choice of means can be considered undoubted expressions of Mind."<sup>51</sup> In point of fact, this is the immediate context for the introduction of the pragmatic maxim. When introducing Peirce's ideas in his 1898 lecture, James quotes a full passage where Peirce relates beliefs and habits, thus giving the key to interpreting his own use of Peirce's ideas. James's theory of truth must indeed be understood in the context of this general idea: purposiveness is the key to our mental life and actions.

Unlike Peirce, for whom the truth with a capital T is the ideal end of the investigation, the limit of our efforts to make sense of reality, James is much more concerned with partial truths, and much less than Peirce—at this point, perhaps confirming Newton da Costa's claims—turns his attention to our logical methods of obtaining truth, preferring to stress our quotidian dealings with what can or may be true. James certainly would not disagree with the nominal definition of truth in terms of correspondence to reality, going so far as to insist that it makes a huge difference whether how,

and how much, a belief does or does not correspond to reality. Substantially extending the idea of truth as satisfaction to belief, James emphasizes the human benefit of holding true beliefs, as this allows us to cope with factual harshness, to challenge the insubordination of experience to our idiosyncrasies. False beliefs, on the contrary, will sooner or later prove useless and be discarded. While it is possible one lives fairly well with false beliefs until the moment of one's death, the main point for James is not defining truth by the utility of what each of us actually believes, but by the utility of the belief of an ideal agent, situated in ideal conditions at the edge of the investigation.<sup>52</sup> Thus, there are epistemic criteria to establish the usefulness of an idea, of any idea, and not only intellectual concepts, as Peirce held. This clarifies the meaning of James's preferred metaphor: what is true has a cash value, an exchange value, it pays, and this pay is cognitive; knowledge is value, ignorance is not. The meaning of cash, in English, has confused a lot of interpreters of James's philosophy. Meaning, in prosaic situations, money that is on hand and ready to be used, originates in the Latin *capsa*, which refers precisely to the utensil where the money was kept—the box where it was kept. James's vocabulary is vernacular, quotidian, and intended to convey a very practical and mundane idea. Vague as it is, James never tried to make his language less so. Indeed, he thought that would give an intellectual, snobbish tone to his philosophy he would rather avoid: "In this real world of sweat and dirt, it seems to me that when a view of things is 'noble,' that ought to count as a presumption against its truth, and as a philosophic disqualification."<sup>53</sup> This indeed seems to be the distinct character of James's style of philosophizing:

A pragmatist turns his back resolutely and once for all upon a lot of inveterate habits dear to professional philosophers. He turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad a priori reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins. He turns towards concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action and towards power.<sup>54</sup>

So, when James speaks of pragmatic method, he sees in pragmatism a method to put an end to otherwise unending disputations of an excessively formal and artificial character. For James, pragmatism abandons the “rationalist temper” and allies itself to the “empiricist temper,” but not in a naïve fashion. James indeed believed pragmatism could ameliorate the empiricist temperament in philosophy, making the search for truth knowable in terms of what practical consequences are necessary to determine what any question really means.<sup>55</sup> Roughly speaking, when we try to decide what is the best approach to a disputed question of practical significance (such as abortion, vaccination, etc.), the best we can do is to apply the disputing judgments to specific concrete cases, as James’s famous squirrel example shows. This is not a reduction of truth to usefulness, as a common mistake goes. In fact, just as Peirce rejected the spirit of Cartesianism, so James is refusing all sorts of epistemology based upon a dualistic causal account of knowledge, as if we humans were subjective spectators, endowed with cognition and rationality to examine the material object, utterly inert and directly opposed to us, that causes our cognitive affections.

Specifically, pragmatism has been identified with raw utilitarianism, but that is also a mistake.<sup>56</sup> In a word, truth is the parameter for measuring the usefulness of beliefs, not what will be measured by them. Whereas a first reading of James’s principle of practicalism may convey the idea of a behaviorist tenor, that is nonetheless not the whole story. James sought to draw a much closer connection to our practical lives than a mere theory of impulsive reactions, more adequate to a crude stimulus-response model. Instead, James’s interest was in the consequences that can make a practical difference, and not just in those that are of theoretical value:

The ultimate test for us of what a truth means is indeed *the conduct it dictates or inspires*. But it inspires that conduct because it first foretells some *particular* turn to our experience which shall call for just that conduct from us.<sup>57</sup>



This formula interestingly suggests an equivalence of truth and meaning—being true means being pragmatically true, that is, being conducive to a certain conduct by prompting us to expect a certain down-to-earth result. Knowledge, in first place, is an act of knowing; as such, it is goal oriented, purposive, incarnated, and not isolated from practice. If it is possible to point to an idea's practical consequences in the lives of those who believe in it, then that is what the idea means for those who believe it. In other words: "The actual meaning of any philosophical proposition can always be brought to the ground for some particular consequence, in our future practical experience, whether passive or active."<sup>58</sup> Notice there is a difference relative to Peirce, and to Wittgenstein as well, to whom James is frequently connected.<sup>59</sup> James is not emphasizing a method of illative experimentation, nor pointing out specific local practices of ordinary language use; rather, James is stressing that our ideas should not be assessed exclusively by their internal rationality, or logical coherence, or scientific value, or functionality within a specific language game, but also, and maybe mainly, by their fruitfulness to how we are going to lead our lives if we accept them. In other words, James is interested in how our ideas become true to us as we live by them.

Now, for Peirce, as seen, pragmatism is a method, the logic of abduction, that is, a method employable to any kind of inquiry to help us select which hypotheses are the simpler ones that explain away our doubts and make sense of the facts under consideration. Pragmatism is not a doctrine of living, a philosophy of life, in the sense of an organized ideology of any sort. For James, this is true as well, but with a development. Pragmatism is a method that leads to a theory of how truth emerges in human experience: "Such then would be the scope of pragmatism—first, a method; and second, a genetic theory of what is meant by truth."<sup>60</sup> Of the many ideas James retains from Peirce, perhaps the link between practical experience and truthful meanings is the prime one. And so, the inquiry into truth is a direct consequence of the method, being inseparable from it. The gist of James's philosophy is captured in the idea that the assessment of all ideas, and not only of scientifically verifiable concepts

(whatever that can mean), should be related to what they make us think and how we consequently act.<sup>61</sup>

This leads James to reject two very common theories of truth. First, he rejects the concept of truth as a copy of reality. Second, he rejects truth defined as correspondence to reality. In the end, James assumes truth cannot be severed from its very process of verification, of what makes it true in experience. How an idea becomes true, in the first place, is the question to start from. Pragmatism, for James, is a method for construing the genesis of truth in experience, not a philosophical theory of truth like correspondence, coherence, etc.

#### TRUTHS ABOUT TRUTH

James's pragmatism, then, acquires a definite scope when compared to Peirce's general method of inquiry. When questioning how ideas come to be true in our human daily practices, how truth becomes important for us, the only utility pragmatism has is to help us choose which philosophies, hypotheses, theories, worldviews, and ideologies are most useful in guiding our thoughts and actions. For our actions change when we adopt one or the other ideology. For instance, I may decide to become a vegan because I believe in reincarnation of the soul regardless of mammalian species, or because I believe industrial animal husbandry is harmful to the planet, or because other sentient, mammalian species deserve the same kind of respect I give to other human beings, or because I simply cannot digest meat, and so forth. So, where should we look for the differences? In practice. Different people act differently when they believe different things; if there is a difference in the will to believe it will be reflected in the will to act. Maybe the difference in the worldviews is not a difference of values, as commonly stated, but just of how beliefs are organized. This, James believes, pragmatism can show: it can help us build ideas, theories, philosophies, etc. that are indeed useful and reliable. So, the positivistic reading of pragmatism as a verification method totally misses the main point, which is not how ideas can be shown to be

true, but how ideas do come to be true and what we do with them in practice.<sup>62</sup>

Based on this, James concludes that the traditional theory of truth as correspondence, as if truth were a faithful copy of something other than and outside of itself, is too restrictive. However, his rejection of a dualistic model of truth as a copy of an external object does not lead to a complete dismissal of the very idea of correspondence. This point will reappear further on, and we will see James's statements may lead to a sort of paraconsistency. The important point to retain here is to understand how ideas or beliefs can copy their objects, and then, in turn, to distinguish which ones are and which ones are not capable of copying their objects. In sum, James is concerned with what correspondence means and how it happens.

Now, if not every utility is true, every truth is still useful, because, in the first place, it satisfies the conditions for correctly copying its object. The meaning of a true idea is what it can reveal in the conduct it dictates or inspires. And a conception inspires a certain conduct precisely because it points out the need for that conduct. James's pragmatism, then, takes practice and its needs seriously. Therefore, more than a method, James's pragmatism is also an existential attitude, a way of conceiving the universe and our place and role within it.

This should inform a better understanding of what James is refusing. This is important because pragmatism has long been associated with a narrow positivistic worldview. In fact, James refuses the dualism of subject-object opposition in the name of an actor theory of knowledge, wherein indeterminism is the main factor—as humans, individually and in our societies, we are in the world, concomitantly and mutually living and evolving with the environment. Neither we nor the world we know can be considered as absolutely opposites, but only as co-determining each other.<sup>63</sup> This is the gist of James's approach to the idea of truth as a copy—it needs to be a satisfactory copy, in the sense that we can use it within the very same reality we are in, and not only to make sense of reality, as if we were not a part of it.

We find here a difference between James and Peirce. Peirce did endorse the idea that truth, as the ideal end of inquiry, is assimilable to satisfaction, but only in the sense that “satisfaction would ultimately be found if the inquiry were pushed to its ultimate and indefeasible issue.”<sup>64</sup> However, to James, to say that a theory or idea is true is to say that it helps us establish satisfactory relationships with other parts of our actual experience. For James, this is true for all of our ideas, from the most basic, such as common-sense notions of space and time, which help us deal with everyday objects and with other people, to the most scientifically elaborated, e.g., square root, or mitosis, or any other idea which helps us in scientific research. And this is exactly what Peirce rejects, for the reasons already expounded. Given his ideal of inquiry, Peirce did not approve of James’s proposal that true conceptions have a purchase value, a cash value; that is, they can be exchanged in experience for effective practical consequences. Peirce would not deny that true conceptions allow us to deal with facts in certain ways, putting them into context and inserting them in a fluid experiential continuity, the “stream of experience,” as James states;<sup>65</sup> but, he nonetheless never yielded to the widening James utilized to make the pragmatic principle account for how every word, conception, or belief of ours is put to work in the experience. In sum, Peirce would never do as James does and call his own theory a sort of instrumentalism: “[pragmatism] is less as a solution, then, than as a program for more work, and more particularly as an indication of the ways in which existing realities may be changed. Theories thus become *instruments*, not answers to enigmas, in which we can rest.”<sup>66</sup>

#### CRITICISM OF FORMAL DEFINITIONS OF TRUTH

According to James, the only meaning that can be given to a statement or belief being true is that it fits our experience. In this way, pragmatism also leads to some sort of criterion of coherence, but not mere syntactic coherence within an abstract and conventional formulaic language. In effect, James rejects the philosopher or scientist isolated in an ivory tower, always

emphasizing living agents instead of detached spectators, as seen. Inquirers are situated in the midst of a world of experience; their true ideas are those that lead to successful action.

One can grasp a notion of coherence emerging from James's pragmatism as the act of constructing an abstract puzzle. Instead of looking back and trying to put together the pieces of a puzzle that portrays something already existing (such as those you buy in stores), one must think from the standpoint of a painter of an image that concomitantly paints it and arranges its puzzle—the puzzle will be a true picture because the picture itself is made together with the experience of getting to know it. Then, the pieces of the puzzle must be adapted as it is still being manufactured, because the painting is not ready-made; thereby building the image that will be shown when the puzzle is finally mounted and ready. In the end, we shall not see the image of something previously existent—a photo of a familiar landscape, of a building, etc.—but we will have built an image of something that we have come to know as we painted it and fit the puzzle pieces together. In other words, the puzzle work evolves without the requirement to represent something known, but comes to gradually represent its object in the very process of coming to being definite—each piece is a little piece of truth, fixed together with the others and opening up other possibilities to fit other pieces.

This comparison indicates our entrenchment in the world of our experiences, so much so that certain opinions invariably lead us to the desired results—an inescapable dimension of reality is the incalculable amount of intersections and connections, forming “small worlds” within a pluralistic universe—a “multiverse”—that can be anything but absolute, as James himself states, but can be synechistic nonetheless, just as Peirce preconized.<sup>67</sup> Nor does the empirical fixity advocated by James indicate that there is only one way in which our ideas can copy reality. Now, if correspondence or agreement with reality means that our beliefs “fit,” there cannot be a single true form of adjustment; fitness is a priori indeterminate, although determinable in the stream of experience. Multiple, completely different beliefs can also fit together, since the universe itself remains always in process, unfinished and malleable. As

James explains: “Our interpretation of truth is an interpretation of plural truths, of directing processes, performed in rebus, which have only this quality in common, that they pay themselves.”<sup>68</sup>

#### TRUTH AND VERIFIABILITY

Truth, then, is not only a matter of semantic agreement or just syntactic coherence, but also and primarily something functional: an idea is true if it works in practice, that is, if it serves as a guide to lead us in the stream of experience, exploring the multiverses we inhabit (if one makes experience flow, let me add). Therefore, truth is something plastic, always changeable. It can even be a copy—like a drawing that copies an object, for example—but neither the only one nor the beneficial or immediately useful one. For truth is all a matter of consequences, but not the consequences we hope for or expect. The value of truth must be verified in an experience that is also plastic and changeable.

I venture to say, for James beliefs that agree with reality—thus being true—are the ones that lead us towards a still open future in which we are active players with a limited field to play in—we cannot fit any puzzle piece with any other. We thus arrive at another fundamental idea of James’s account of truth, and a more positive one: truth is its own verification process. As already seen, this is the originality of pragmatism: truth is understood as a creative process of producing novelty, so a verification process is not a formalizable process of quantifying instances, rather it is an act of creating a new and true idea: “New truth is always a go-between, a smoother-over of transitions.”<sup>69</sup>

Insisting on a thorough empiricist and experimentalist conception of our beliefs, James vehemently argues that a belief is true only if it is made true. This is what he means by checking a belief: verified—and not simply verifiable—beliefs are made true in the flow of experience. The functionality of our beliefs comes from this, because, even if we don’t know whether certain beliefs are true or false, it is their connection with facts that will make them one or the other. We can believe there are jaguars—onças pintadas—in the Atlantic Forest—Mata Atlântica—without bothering to verify it for

ourselves, but this will only become existentially true if someone actually verifies it; that is, if this statement is made true for living beings. Rather than trying to make sense of this idea in a Peircean fashion, one should understand, here, that James is refusing the quest for absolute first foundations for our knowledge, rather pointing to its processual character, knowledge and experience making up a whole free of ultimate elementary parts that could serve as foundational warrants of absolute certitude.

This seems to be the most fundamental issue of James's rebuttal of Clifford's account of beliefs: no one should ever be required to rationally justify every single belief one holds, either because that would make machines out of humans or just because it is plainly impossible. Experience is ground enough for our beliefs, a vague, rough, mundane, dirty, pragmatic, instrumental, and goal-oriented ground. It is the only ground we have.<sup>70</sup>

#### QUASI-TRUTHS FOR QUASI-MATHEMATICIANS

So, James's pragmatic truth seems to be a bad candidate for a mathematical treatment, contrary to Peirce's convergence theory of truth. The main point, for James, is to develop a theory compatible with our everyday realism, rejecting, of course, the ideal of truth as the consensus of rational experts as the truth, as Peirce's theory seems to make of it. Nonetheless, James does not dismiss epistemic considerations at all; he rather tries to integrate the epistemic approach to his own, as seen in his identification of truth with its process of verification or production. But this raises at least one question. If, on the one hand, James's pragmatism makes irrelevant the objection that there are true but unverified beliefs, on the other hand, it raises another problem; namely, what do we do with mathematical propositions? Or propositions from quantum mechanics? The literary vagueness of James's language—praised by Professor Newton da Costa—might as well accommodate the answer that if  $p$  were tested,  $p$  could eventually be verified.

If the puzzle comparison is helpful, then we can imagine the capitalized Truth as a growing self-organizing system, an organic whole to which partial truths come together once they become

verified, more or less in a Peircean fashion. But if the mere possibility of verification makes a belief true, then all these partial truths must already be true prior to their actual verification. In other words, a belief is and is not verified—true or useful—at the same time. So, is James’s pragmatic truth a kind of paradoxical truth or a paraconsistent truth? If a truth is and is not true, is it a quasi-truth? If we take James’s own words, such questions seem less troubling:

Truth is essentially a relationship between two things, an idea on the one hand, and a reality outside the idea on the other. This relationship, like all relationships, has its *fundamentum*, namely, the matrix of experimental, psychological and also physical circumstance, in which the correlated terms are inserted. (... What constitutes the relationship known as truth, I say now, is only the existence in the empirical world of this fundamentum of circumstance that surrounds object and idea and is ready to be either short-circuited or crossed entirely. As long as it exists and a satisfactory passage between the object and the idea is possible, the idea will simultaneously be true and will have been true about that object, whether the fully developed verification has taken place or not.<sup>71</sup>

This leads us to bracket the idea that truth, according to James, is something that is done with experience, since, as Haack states, if truth always starts to consist of the same truths, in the end it does not grow.<sup>72</sup> According to Haack, James holds two inconsistent views on truth. First, truth is discovered in experience, so what is true was always true; second, truth is made by us, so what is not true now can be made true in the future. And if this is so, then the thesis that truth grows would make James’s pragmatist theory inconsistent with Tarski’s material adequacy or “accuracy” condition for theories of truth, which form the basis for da Costa’s quasi-truth. Can inconsistency be cleared away or should we consider it as unavoidable, and maybe as a good quality of James’s account of truth?



Just to be clear, let us go back to some basics. Tarski's requirement is that a definition of truth, to be minimally acceptable, must imply all cases of

(*T*) '*S*' is true if *p*

where *S* names *p*.

Haack argues that it does indeed seem impossible to make James's theory agree with the semantic conception of truth, since it is not a question of deducing all cases of (*T*) from a formula. However, if the condition exposed in conventional *T* is softened, that is, if we understand it normatively in a pragmatist sense, as a rule of intentionality—in the sense that what we think must be understood in terms of what we are prepared to do—in the end, there is no ultimate inconsistency. In other words, by weakening the position that a definition of truth, to be acceptable, must be consistent with the truth of all cases of (*T*), then Tarski's requirement can be used to interpret informal definitions of truth, like James's.

Of course, we cannot, in this case, claim that the requirement of material adequacy prevents one from considering as fully valid some preposterous theories of truth—such as, for example, one that identifies “truth” with “everything written in the Bible.” A skeptic might even accept such an argument in favor of this kind of nonsense, arguing that if it makes sense for a person to believe the Bible, then we must accept that belief as true—but would that skeptic remain skeptical? Yes, it is true that, for James—and for Peirce, as well—“our non-intellectual nature does influence our convictions” before we can even be able to rationally decide on any conviction.<sup>73</sup> But would the skeptic comply with the fundamental pragmatic point that all of our ideas that are to be considered valid and true need to go through a process of verification and validation in their consequences? This makes verifiability a virtual process of making true, much more like a multivalent theory of truth, as it admits indeterminacy as an intrinsic value of truth. And what the *T* convention does seem to exclude are monovalent theories, or those

that are not bivalent, that is, those that compare truth to a fixed and pre-ordered model, incapable of satisfying virtual conditions of meaning.

This is exactly the point with da Costa's quasi-truth: as a formal definition, it captures the meaning of pragmatist theories of truth which are irreducible to the traditional correspondence theory of truth. For that reason, quasi-truth is a generalization of Tarski's semantic conception of truth, accounting for situations the latter was not supposed to account for, namely, paraconsistent situations.<sup>74</sup> So, loosely expressed, a "pragmatically true" statement is paraconsistent because it cannot be accommodated within the traditional notions of true and false, mainly because all interpretations we can provide of a sentence are necessarily partial—there is no absolute interpretation—and all our established repertoire of sentences can be relativized. In sum, a sentence is pragmatically true, or quasi-true, if it 'saves appearances,' serving as a useful instrument for the continuation of inquiry—or of experience, as James would rather say.<sup>75</sup>

The notion of quasi-truth is proposed by da Costa as a generalization of Tarski's theory to include partial structures beyond total structures for the interpretation of a formal language. In Tarski's system, languages are interpreted in structures wherein we can decide whether all objects of a universe  $A$  are related by a relation  $R$ . According to da Costa, the introduction of the notions of partial relation and partial structure are due to accommodate the incompleteness of our knowledge regarding whether the objects of a specific scientific context are related by  $R$ . In sum, the fact we do not know whether all objects of a domain  $D$  are related by  $R$  does not block the way of inquiry.<sup>76</sup> Incomplete and partial information about the domain can be satisfactory and we can go on formulating truth.

Now, Haack's proposal seems to partially converge with Da Costa's quasi-truth account. For Haack, the correct interpretation of James's theory of truth would be inconsistent with Tarski's  $T$  convention only if the impossibility of verification is identified with lack of meaning. But this was not James's idea. Rather than pointing

to the groundlessness of our practices, James points out that our personal truths, the ones which we deal with daily, may be false, so only the true ones will end up assimilated, validated, corroborated, and verified.<sup>77</sup> If, on the one hand, some propositions are practically and immediately impossible to verify or falsify, this does not at all mean that they can never be tested in the future and will then be confirmed or refuted. We must cope with an inherent incompleteness of information in our state of knowledge, provided we do not exclude the possibility of further determination. Haack's example is quantum physics, but da Costa also recalls classical mechanics, which was surmounted by relativistic mechanics, nonetheless without losing its instrumentality. Some propositions in astronomy in the time of Galileo Galilei were impossible to verify, some others were falsified with the continuation of inquiry, so "we may conclude, as a lesson of the history of science, that experience, in the wide acceptance of the word, will sooner or later refute any theory as an absolutely true picture of reality."<sup>78</sup> And this is itself a verifiable fact, which would lead to the conclusion that it would be proper to admit that "it is possible to maintain that such sentences are nevertheless verifiable or falsifiable, on the grounds that if they were to be tested, they would be verified or falsified."<sup>79</sup> In summary, Haack's argument is that James's theory is consistent with the idea that the right side—the definiens—of the biconditional expresses a necessary and sufficient condition for the truth of *S* in a trivial and non-informative way, since, according to her, it would be possible to maintain that certain propositions, more than neither true nor false, are neither verifiable nor falsifiable. Da Costa's philosophical interpretation of pragmatic truth asserts the very same point: "for some contingent propositions, which we will call basic or decidable, truth and pragmatic truth do coincide. In addition, a basic statement must be such that its truth or falsehood can, at least in principle, be settled."<sup>80</sup>

### **END GAME?**

Let me finish with an incitement. One thing that strikes us when reading those philosophers is the contrast of language. One can

claim that Peirce never sought to be prosaic and vernacular, while James is intentionally not specific in some of his formulations. And mastering da Costa's mathematics is also not an easy task. Philosophers are often difficult to understand. James's literary language, for instance, undeniably conveys the impression of lack of precision and even clarity at times. But all this is coherent with the idea that truth cannot be defined passively, as if we, readers, were static spectators of a distant scene where actors, the writers, are unaware of our presence. Actually, those texts imply our presence, requiring our involvement in creating the circumstances that make our interpretations possible and that allow us to do what we need to do to answer our questions.

The kind of involvement referred to can be grasped, in my opinion, through some examples taken from art. For instance, Banksy. Banksy's art puns Life with Lie – LI(F)E – revealing something that bothers us: gather ye lies as you can, a legend the dictionary might relate to us.<sup>81</sup> The dictionary is the father of all dunces, as we say in Brazil, for revealing supposedly true meanings. Robert Herrick's verse—gather ye rosebuds while ye may—was to advise us of our fugacious predicament in life and incite us to make the most of it. Nature is beautiful; the world, full of opportunities; love, sublime. Live your life, do not complicate it. What do Banksy's puns reveal? What is love to us? Should we adhere to any form of superficial hedonistic individualism of sorts? Have we all become too cynical? When were we not?

Well, maybe we are just cynical in a world that never was Herrick's world. Let me recall another one of Banksy's works. A rat holds a poster to us: —You lie. That is a fact. Psychologists, neuroscientists, and even entrepreneurs tirelessly tell us: we all lie, to others, to ourselves. It is true, we lie. But then why we do not like to hear such truths?

Now, if these instigations let us transition to professional philosophy and still retain some provocative purpose, I shall be satisfied. According to Da Costa, truth is an almost truth, a quasi-truth, it is a formulation we devise to accommodate our needs, both in our scientific and mundane practices. For Peirce, truth, reality,

and scientific method are closely related—inquiry may never end, but, as we pursue it, we retain the faint, fallible, and inescapable hope of attaining some truth. Truth is on the brink, and James agrees with that: we must make it ours; we need to build our lives so we can have something to believe in—and it is better it be true than not. Peirce would emphasize the hope for truth; James might be content to warn us we have to cope with the unfinished state of our present knowledge.

According to a considerable number of philosophers, the philosophical importance of pragmatism comes from its emphasis on the interpenetration of truth with practical utility, but not in a naive and superficial way, as more popular forms of utilitarianism do.<sup>82</sup> Of the classical pragmatists, James argued truth is nothing more than a function of beliefs, in the sense that it is what we must believe, verify, confirm, and sustain; at the same time, truth is not reducible to any of this. James calls this idea the cash value of truth. Bertrand Russell deplored it, arguing pragmatism ultimately leads to the worst forms of authoritarianism.<sup>83</sup> In addition to Russell's criticisms, Horkheimer's criticisms of pragmatism are also well known. For the pioneer of critical theory, pragmatism, especially in James and Dewey's versions—Horkheimer is curiously silent about Peirce, I suspected, out of ignorance—is a bourgeois philosophical mixture of positivism and Darwinism. It does not aim at transforming social reality, but preaches tolerance of exploitation and conformation to the social status quo, rejecting speculative thinking and dialectics in the name of logical-instrumental methods of rational control of natural and social reality.<sup>84</sup> These criticisms, though rebutted numerous times, remain relevant and are still commonly repeated today.

Whether those criticisms are fair is up to my readers to decide. My intention is to briefly present some of Peirce's and James's ideas regarding truth. Both for Peirce and James, reasoning and experience form a vicious circle from which it is impossible to escape, and it is this fundamental intuition that, I think, they conveyed to Newton da Costa. We cannot help inventing our concepts and we can never imagine being outside the world of

experience we try describing, even if, strictly speaking, we will never fully understand what we are doing. The postmodernist Banksy is not so far from that, in this peculiar comparison I am forcing. Common features uniting them are the defense of truth, the hardness of the real, and the idea that truth has the power to generate practical consequences of a public nature. Truth is doubly powerful: it is potential, it points to the future, and because of this very reason it has the power to guide our present conduct here and now, even if we do not want to recognize it, even if we like or dislike it in its mostly improbable and vague guises. Truth insists in not being neglected. Truth is fixed by popular wisdom: “lies have short legs”—and nobody likes to have one’s lies destroyed by truth. Truth has the power to discover or to create its vehicles, thus making them capable of transforming the surface of the earth, the minds we attribute to ourselves. And for this reason, truth is the human face of reality, a reality that contumaciously refuses to bend to our will, strenuously forcing our minds to represent it as it demands to be represented. Banksy’s sarcasm bluntly reveals the reality of our own hypocrisy, our own small will to recognize the truth of our absurdities in life. Peirce himself claims nothing is truer than true poetry.

The verses of the Brazilian composer Cartola acquire a much more tragic dimension if we read them in this key: each petty little dream of ours will be reduced to dust by the mill of the world.<sup>85</sup> Whether we want it or not, truth is truth, the world is what it is. It is therefore unavoidable to set firm foot on the ground. We may have diverging and antagonistic opinions, but reality will continue to be what it is even if we die and other inquirers continue on. Inquiry is endless. We are after all just one of nature’s unfinished projects, and, as such, it is up to us to make truth our aim, our inescapable limit. As nothing warrants any sort of parousia of truth, we must work for it and not against it. Truth is a task of ours, we either accomplish it or we will be forever avoiding ourselves.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The notion was first introduced in Mikenberg, da Costa, and Chuaqui, "Pragmatic Truth." It is impossible to give a full list of references to the notion of pragmatic truth by N. da Costa. See Krause "Filosofia de Quase-Verdade." On Peirce's importance, see da Costa "Logic and Pragmatic Truth," 247–48.

<sup>2</sup> da Costa, Bueno, and French, "Logic of Pragmatic Truth," 604.

<sup>3</sup> da Costa, Bueno, and French, "Coherence Theory," 261.

<sup>4</sup> This has already been noted by different authors; see Abe, "Verdade Pragmática" 163 f.; Bueno and de Souza, "Logic of Pragmatic Truth," D'Ottaviano and Hifume, "Pragmatic Truth"; Krause, "Filosofia de Quase-Verdade," 116.

<sup>5</sup> This was filmed, but the film is not available to the public up to now. Among others, at least one of da Costa's former students, Professor Edélcio G. de Souza, was in the audience.

<sup>6</sup> I follow the suggestion of Abe, "Verdade Pragmática," 165, and, in the end, rely on Haack, "Pragmatist Theory of Truth," and "James's Theory of Truth," as will be clear. To my knowledge, James's account of truth was never formalized.

<sup>7</sup> da Costa, "Logic and Pragmatic Truth," 248.

<sup>8</sup> James, *Writings*, 347.

<sup>9</sup> Peirce, *Writings*, Vol. 3, 259.

<sup>10</sup> Peirce, 260.

- <sup>11</sup> Peirce, 266.
- <sup>12</sup> Peirce, 266.
- <sup>13</sup> Peirce, *Essential Peirce*, Vol. 2, 346.
- <sup>14</sup> Peirce, 402.
- <sup>15</sup> Peirce, 226ff.
- <sup>16</sup> James, *Writings*, 348.
- <sup>17</sup> James, 348.
- <sup>18</sup> Peirce, *Essential Peirce*, Vol. 2, 334.
- <sup>19</sup> Peirce, 380.
- <sup>20</sup> For example, Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Vol. 5, 566.
- <sup>21</sup> See Salatiel, “Problema das Fontes Gregas” on these metaphysical issues.
- <sup>22</sup> Peirce, *Essential Peirce*, Vol. 2, 335.
- <sup>23</sup> Peirce, 401.
- <sup>24</sup> Hume, *Treatise*, 86.
- <sup>25</sup> Peirce, *Essential Peirce*, Vol. 2, 399.
- <sup>26</sup> Peirce, *Writings*, Vol. 3, 263.
- <sup>27</sup> Peirce, *Essential Peirce*, Vol. 2, 326; see also Hookway, “The Pragmatic Maxim and the Proof of Pragmatism,” 97; Hynes y Nubiola, “El Problema de La Unidad,” 92.
- <sup>28</sup> I have treated the subject in detail in Rodrigues, “The Method of Scientific Discovery in Peirce’s Philosophy.”
- <sup>29</sup> Peirce, *Essential Peirce*, Vol. 2, 444.
- <sup>30</sup> This idea can be found *passim* in Peirce’s writings, especially after 1898; see, for instance, *Reasoning and the Logic of Things*, 112.
- <sup>31</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Vol. 7, 54.
- <sup>32</sup> Peirce, *Writings*, Vol. 3, 206.
- <sup>33</sup> Peirce, *Essential Peirce*, Vol. 2, 419; see also Peirce, *Essential Peirce*, Vol. 2, 380.
- <sup>34</sup> Peirce, *Writings*, Vol. 3, 273.
- <sup>35</sup> Peirce, *Essential Peirce*, Vol. 2, 87.
- <sup>36</sup> Peirce, *Writings*, Vol. 6, 206.

<sup>37</sup> For example, Peirce, *Writings*, Vol. 2, 217; Peirce, *Essential Peirce*, Vol. 2, 443.

<sup>38</sup> See Hynes, “El Problema de La Unidad,” 84–87.

<sup>39</sup> There are whole libraries written on the subject. I take the idea of the different senses of the expression “convergence to truth” from Legg, “Charles Peirce’s Limit Concept of Truth,” but with some important qualifications from Hynes, “El Problema de La Unidad.”

<sup>40</sup> See Delaney, “Peirce on Science and Metaphysics.”

<sup>41</sup> The poem is called “Tecendo a manhã,” or “Weaving the morning.” Without any sort of poetic presumption, I can only offer an attempt at translating the poem: “No single rooster weaves a morning:/ he will always need other roosters./ One to catch this cry that he/ and toss it to another; and another rooster/ to catch this cry from a previous rooster/ and toss it to another; and other roosters/ that with many roosters more crisscrossing/ sun threads of their rooster cries,/so the morning from a slender web/ by this weaving arises from among all the roosters.”

<sup>42</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Vol. 7, 87.

<sup>43</sup> Peirce, *Essential Papers*, Vol. 2, 25.

<sup>44</sup> Peirce, *Writings*, Vol. 3, 273.

<sup>45</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Vol. 6, 100.

<sup>46</sup> Peirce, *Essential Peirce*, Vol. 2, 457–58.

<sup>47</sup> Peirce, 349.

<sup>48</sup> Peirce, *Writings*, Vol. 2, 239.

<sup>49</sup> This movement was first made by Abelard, as known; see Abelard, *Philosophische Schriften* I:16: “Nunc autem ostensis rationibus quibus neque res singillatim neque collectim acceptae universales dici possunt in eo quod de pluribus praedicantur, *restat ut huiusmodi universalitatem solis vocibus adscribamus.*” I beg the reader’s pardon for quoting in Latin and mainly for the crude translation I offer, but I was not able to find any English translation of Abelard’s work: “Now that the very reasons have been presented concerning why neither things taken singly nor things taken collectively can be called universals, for universals are predicated of

many things, *it remains that we are to ascribe universality of this kind to words alone.*” My emphasis.

<sup>50</sup> Peirce, *Essential Peirce*, Vol. 2, 468.

<sup>51</sup> James, *Principles of Psychology*, 23.

<sup>52</sup> Tiercelin, *The Pragmatists and the Human Logic of Truth*, chap. 3.

<sup>53</sup> James, *Writings*, 387.

<sup>54</sup> James, 688–89.

<sup>55</sup> James, 688–89.

<sup>56</sup> See, for instance, Russell, “Pragmatism,” who seems to have been the first to make this claim in a direct manner.

<sup>57</sup> James, *Writings*, 348 (added emphasis).

<sup>58</sup> James, 349 (added emphasis).

<sup>59</sup> See Peruzzo Jr, “Wittgenstein e a Dívida a James,” for a discussion of Wittgenstein and his debt to James.

<sup>60</sup> James, *Writings*, 697.

<sup>61</sup> Lapoujade, “William James,” (English trans), 3. In what follows, I rely mainly on Lapoujade’s interpretation, combining it with Rosenthal’s *Speculative Pragmatism*; see also Rosenthal, “Classical American Pragmatism,” for a succinct presentation of her main points.

<sup>62</sup> Rosenthal, “Classical American Pragmatism,” 85; Lapoujade, “William James,” 4.

<sup>63</sup> Calcaterra, “Constructing on Contingency,” proposes the label “radical humanism” to James’s philosophical stance on naturalism and individualism.

<sup>64</sup> Peirce, *Essential Peirce*, Vol. 2, 449–50.

<sup>65</sup> James, *Writings*, 690.

<sup>66</sup> James, 690.

<sup>67</sup> James, 1390, 745, 905. I cannot deepen such bold ideas here, but see de Waal, *Introducing Pragmatism*, 32; and Lapoujade, “William James,” 39: “It is impossible to say whether we are dealing with a *universe* (absolute unity) or with a *multiverse* (absolute multiplicity), which is how we arrive at a *pluriverse*.”

<sup>68</sup> James, *Writings*, 436.

<sup>69</sup> James, 695.

<sup>70</sup> Of course, James would agree with Peirce that if complete justification is impossible, a specific one is always possible and most of times sufficient to make our claims acceptable. On James and Clifford, see de Waal, *Introducing Pragmatism*, 32.

<sup>71</sup> James, *Meaning of Truth*, 909–10.

<sup>72</sup> In the following, I just summarize Haack's account from Haack, "Pragmatist Theory of Truth," and "James's Theory of Truth;" for Tarski and da Costa, see Bueno and de Souza, "The Concept of Quasi-Truth."

<sup>73</sup> James, *Writings*, 1263.

<sup>74</sup> Bueno and de Souza, "The Concept of Quasi-Truth."

<sup>75</sup> Mikenberg, da Costa, and Chuaqui, "Pragmatic Truth," 204; da Costa, "Logic and Pragmatic Truth," 249; Abe, "Verdade Pragmática," 167.

<sup>76</sup> da Costa, "Logic and Pragmatic Truth," 249–50.

<sup>77</sup> James, *Writings*, 346.

<sup>78</sup> da Costa, "Logic and Pragmatic Truth," 249.

<sup>79</sup> Haack, "The Pragmatist Theory of Truth," 241.

<sup>80</sup> da Costa, "Logic and Pragmatic Truth," 247.

<sup>81</sup> Banksy's art mentioned here can be easily found by a basic Internet search. The reader is invited to try to search for "enjoy your lie" and "you lie."

<sup>82</sup> Putnam's *Pragmatism* clearly exposes this naiveté.

<sup>83</sup> See Russell, "Pragmatism," and especially, *Power*, 210 f.; *History of Western Philosophy*, chap. 29, p. 728. See also Akehurst, *Cultural Politics of Analytic Philosophy*, 36–37.

<sup>84</sup> See Horkheimer, *Between Philosophy and Social Science*, and *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. See also Oliveira, "Aestheticization of Reality;" Tong, "'Critique' immanent in 'practice'"; Schmidt "The eclipse of reason and the end of the Frankfurt school in America."

<sup>85</sup> In the song “O mundo é um moinho,” which can be seen played by Cartola himself here:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L8U1Y9PBfig>.

# JAMES AND PEIRCE ON THE IMPORTANCE OF INDIVIDUALS: THE DIFFERENCES THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

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An unlearned carpenter of my acquaintance once said in my hearing: ‘There is very little difference between one man and another; but what little there is, is very important.’

–William James<sup>1</sup>

**O**n the question of “the individual and the community in pragmatism,” most people would probably think first of Dewey’s influential ideas about the individual and society: his conception of education as preparation for responsible citizenship,<sup>2</sup> perhaps, or his critique of the “ragged individualism” of unbridled capitalism.<sup>3</sup> But, because my work has focused primarily on logic, epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of science, and the like, the first topic that came to my mind was Peirce’s complaint about the “pernicious” individualism of Descartes’s criterion of truth,<sup>4</sup> and the role of the community in his own theory of inquiry. And I hope, one day, to return to the task of tracking how Peirce’s pragmatist understanding of truth and reality in terms of the community of inquirers grew from the seeds to be found in his 1868 anti-Cartesian papers;<sup>5</sup> and maybe, also, to explore the parallels, and the divergences, between Peirce’s critique of Descartes and James’s<sup>6</sup> – or try to get to the bottom of Peirce’s

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intriguing idea that a solution to the problem of induction requires us to acknowledge that “logic depends on the social principle.”<sup>7</sup>

But for the present occasion I have decided to take a quite different tack, beginning with the ideas expressed in a short paper in which James reflects on “the importance of individuals.” Until now, I hadn’t paid much attention to the context in which this paper of James’s appeared, but had simply enjoyed it as a free-standing piece, relishing its shrewdness about human beings and their idiosyncracies, and finding it a marvelously bracing antidote to the pseudo-sophisticated sneering at “individualism” fashionable in recent decades. Rereading this paper now, and paying closer attention to its context, I still found it just as delightfully human and just as psychologically shrewd as I remembered; but I also discovered that it has much more philosophical and historical substance than I had previously realized. This both raised some questions about James’s arguments and gave the present project a whole new twist.

For this little paper of James’s was just a small part of his contribution to the debate over the role of great men in history – a debate which, as an editor of Thomas Carlyle’s *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* observes, was “a major Victorian preoccupation.”<sup>8</sup> In 1880, James had published a long article on “Great Men, Great Thoughts, and Their Environment,”<sup>9</sup> largely devoted to criticizing an idea he attributes to Herbert Spencer and his followers: that great men are simply the product of their society. On the contrary, James argued: just as natural selection can explain what causes a mutation to be preserved or to die out, but cannot explain what brings the mutations about initially, so sociology can explain the forces that preserve or destroy great men, but cannot explain what produces great men in the first place. This paper prompted two replies, one from John Fiske,<sup>10</sup> and another from an admirer of Spencer’s called Grant Allen.<sup>11</sup> Fiske argued that James’s Spencer was a straw man – the real Herbert Spencer had never denied the role of individuals.<sup>12</sup> Allen, however, defended quite a strong social-determinist position. “The Importance of Individuals” is James’s reply to Allen’s reply to his earlier paper.<sup>13</sup>

Of course, Peirce also took an interest in the subject of “great men”; and this suggests that it might be fruitful to compare James’s ideas with Peirce’s researches – which, as we know from his notes for his class on this subject at Johns Hopkins University, he tackled from a distinctively statistical angle that seems, at first blush, markedly at odds with James’s intuitive, anecdotal approach. Moreover, though there is nothing explicitly epistemological in “The Importance of Individuals,” James’s earlier piece, “Great Men and Their Environment,” is in part concerned to stress that significant intellectual advances and discoveries are not, as James took Spencer to claim, predetermined by external forces, but, on the contrary, require “flashes of genius in the individual head.”<sup>14</sup> And this suggests that it might be fruitful to compare James’s ideas about the role of individual thinkers in the community of inquirers with Peirce’s stress on the individual’s vulnerability to ignorance and error.

Both comparisons, it turns out, open up the attractive possibility of combining insights from James and from Peirce. So, after a brief commentary on James’s paper, I will argue first that, despite their very different emphases, a full treatment of “the question of great men” might reconcile elements of James’s approach with elements of Peirce’s; and then that a complete theory of inquiry will surely need to accommodate both the individual contributions that James stresses, and the social mechanisms of correction and adjustment that Peirce highlights.

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As Peirce wrote of his old friend in a tribute shortly after his death, James’s “comprehension of men to the very core was most wonderful.”<sup>15</sup> Indeed, James had a remarkably shrewd and sympathetic understanding of what makes human beings tick; and “The Importance of Individuals” is a fine example of this understanding at work, as his marvelous quotation from his carpenter friend is of his keen ear for the *mot juste*.

Grant Allen, to whom James is responding, was primarily concerned to explore what we might call “national character.” Trying to understand why western civilization arose where and when it did, he stressed the geography and climate of ancient Greece, its busy mercantile culture, and so on.<sup>16</sup> He was impressed by the vast differences between the ancient Greeks and their contemporaries in Egypt, or in China – and played down the differences among the Greeks, among the Egyptians, among the Chinese. The difference between the mind of a Plato or an Aristotle or a Zeno and the ordinary Greek mind, he suggested, is petty by comparison with the difference between the Greek mind and the Chinese or the Egyptian mind.

James thinks this completely wrong-headed. Trying at first to be as conciliatory as possible, he begins as if the disagreement were simply a matter of emphasis: that, while Mr. Allen is interested in the large differences between “tribes,” he is more concerned with the small differences between the great man and the ordinary run of his tribe. But as he gives his “personal reasons” for emphasizing individual differences, James reveals that there is much more at stake than a mere difference of emphasis: for he not only suggests that an adequate philosophy should accommodate both kinds of difference, but also objects to the assumption “that the mere size of a difference is capable of deciding whether that difference be or be not a fit subject for philosophy.”<sup>17</sup> In fact, he continues, Allen’s emphasis is invidious, even perverse: the differences that most interest us are precisely those we don’t take for granted: not the very large differences between our dog and our human friends, for example, but the much smaller differences among those friends – or the even smaller differences between the ablest students in a class and the dullest. Moreover, James continues, it is the very fact that they interest us that makes these differences important: “the preferences of sentient creatures create the importance of topics.”<sup>18</sup> And anyway, he argues, Allen is blind to a crucial point: that “[t]he zone of the individual differences, and of the social ‘twists’ which [...] they initiate, is the zone of formative processes, [...] the line where past and future meet.” But it is exactly here that we see the

differences among tribes or nations “in the making.” So, James concludes, since the differences among tribes come about in part because of the actions and ideas of great men, Allen’s approach has things exactly backwards.<sup>19</sup>

Ingenious as this line of argument is, it is not, I think, entirely fair to Mr. Allen. True, as James says, Allen stresses the distinctive casts of mind he believes characteristic of different nations or tribes, and the role of the environment, especially of geography, in determining national character; true, as James says, Allen maintains that, if Plato or Shakespeare or (his example) Robert Clive<sup>20</sup> had died young,<sup>21</sup> the environment that produced him would have produced another great man of the same type. “Our circumstances have, unhappily, created amongst us a class of Bob Clive begetters,” Allen writes; “and whenever there is a Zululand or an Afghanistan to annex, so Sir Bartle Frere is forthcoming at once to annex it.”<sup>22</sup> But James doesn’t mention that Allen also points out, in response to the analogy that he had drawn with natural selection, that there is nothing in Darwin to suggest that mutations are mysterious, uncaused, or inexplicable.<sup>23</sup>

Nor does James note that Allen grants that an individual’s special talents or genius will be explicable in part by heredity, but then argues that the environment is also responsible, albeit indirectly, for the hereditary element. For, while in very homogeneous societies where “every man’s life closely resembles every other man’s” every child will inherit “a brain and nervous system of the relatively fixed ancestral type,” in a very heterogeneous society where different people live very differently there will be “numberless varieties of functionally acquired brain elements” to be inherited.<sup>24</sup> This argument seems to presuppose both a kind of functionalist conception of mind and, apparently, the heritability of acquired mental capacities; on neither of which, disappointingly, James makes any comment.

Moreover, one might well feel a little uncomfortable about the way James ups the ante – shifting, in the course of a few pages, from noting a difference of emphasis, to suggesting that his is the really important topic and the matters on which Allen focuses relatively

trivial, and from there to the very strong claim that Allen's approach inverts the appropriate scientific procedure. Still, a more sympathetic reading might recognize these rhetorical maneuvers as James's way of leading us away from Allen's stress on "the ancient Greek mind," "the ancient Chinese mind," etc., and back to what he believes to be the root of the problem: the inadequacy of "the contemporary sociological school," with its focus on "averages and general laws and predetermined tendencies," and "its obligatory undervaluing of the importance of individual differences."<sup>25</sup>

As this suggests, what James had presented in "Great Men and Their Environment" as objections to sociology are really objections, not to the scientific study of society, as such, but to a particular style of sociological study, the style James attributes, rightly or wrongly, to Spencer: sociological study focused exclusively on "external circumstances" such as geography, climate, etc., and taking for granted that these are sufficient to determine social development, including the production of the great men of any place or time. So James's contrast between "sociology" and "hero-worship" is more than a little misleading: the real point is not that the emergence of great men is wholly outside the scope of scientific study, but that such study would require a very different, and much subtler, approach.

James is of course correct in saying that Darwin's theory of natural selection explains why some of the random mutations that arise are preserved and others die out, but not why they arise in the first place. But, as Allen had already pointed out, it doesn't follow (and neither, so far as I am aware, does Darwin ever suggest) that the causes of these mutations are inherently beyond the reach of science. James is also correct in saying that, while sociological generalizations may suffice to explain why certain kinds of greatness will flourish in these or those social circumstances and wither and die in others, it will not explain why they arise in the first place – nor, as he adds, will such generalizations explain the sheer contingencies that often affect whether, or in what way, potential greatness is realized. But, so far as I can see, again it doesn't follow that "the causes of the production of great men" must be a complete

mystery, beyond the reach of scientific explanation altogether – which leads us directly to Peirce’s research on the subject.

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Peirce had a long-standing interest in the phenomenon of great men.<sup>26</sup> In 1859 he wrote an “Analysis of Genius,” in which he argued against Dr. Johnson’s definition – “large general powers accidentally determined in a particular direction” – and in favor of an understanding of genius as involving, not “general powers” but special powers, and not powers “accidentally determined” but inborn powers.<sup>27</sup> (Apparently, however, he changed his mind about innateness; for many years later we find him writing that “real power [...] is not born in a man; it has to be worked out.”)<sup>28</sup> In 1860, reflecting in “Private Thoughts” on “the inhumanity of a polemic spirit,” he had observed that we should still “revere a great man notwithstanding his mistakes,” silently adding to and modifying his words as necessary.<sup>29</sup> Many years later, James’s “Great Men and Their Environment” would be the subject of discussion at a meeting of the new Metaphysical Club that Peirce founded at Johns Hopkins,<sup>30</sup> and in the fall of 1883 Peirce began teaching a course at Hopkins on the subject of great men.<sup>31</sup>

He would later explain that he had chosen this topic as an appropriate medium for “training in inductive investigation,” and specifically of the application of statistical methods to phenomena where data are unavoidably imprecise and impressionistic. For “it was desirable,” he continues, “to explode the ordinary notions that mathematical treatment is of no advantage when observations are devoid of precision and that no use can be made of very inexact observations.”<sup>32</sup> The class began, Peirce reports, by constructing an impressionistic list of great men – “impressionistic” because it was based, not on any analysis of greatness, but purely on the impression of greatness conveyed by study of a person’s life and work: a list originally of almost 1,000 names, eventually whittled down to 288 – of which, to keep the task manageable, the class then considered one of every six. Then each student in the class ranked these men, giving each a number from 1 (the greatest) to 6 (the least great).<sup>33</sup>

The results – as Peirce illustrates by listing the rankings for Bolivar, Julian, and Swedenborg – were remarkably close; and, he tells us, there was no one on the list for whom the most extreme rankings differed by more than 2. The ballots were then added, and the mean value adopted as the “magnitude,” or degree of greatness, of that person.<sup>34</sup>

Peirce’s retrospective reflection on this course focuses primarily on the methodological question the class was intended to illustrate: the degree of objectivity possible in results based on imprecise observations. But there is also a good deal to be learned from the lists themselves, a selection of which is now published in volume 5 of the *Writings*. One list, evidently informed by Peirce’s categories,<sup>35</sup> distinguishes Men of Feeling (Firstness), Men of Action (Secondness), and Men of Thought (Thirdness).<sup>36</sup> And then, perhaps of most interest in the present context, there are the questionnaires that Peirce devised to systematize information about great men: their ancestry, family background, birth-order, childhood, precocity, physical stature, peculiarities, and health, sexuality, education, work habits, drive, children if any, etc.;<sup>37</sup> and the detailed answers filled in with respect to Michelangelo, John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, and others. Michelangelo, we learn, “[i]ddled at school. Would only draw. Began to draw as soon as he could use his hands,” worked “very” long and “furiously” hard, had a “[g]reat memory” but an “[a]wful” imagination.<sup>38</sup> Locke “[d]id not study much. Hated scholastic disputation. Discontented with Oxford”; his work habits were “diligent” and “methodical in the extreme”; his was an age of “[t]ussle with tyranny. Lax morals. Awakening science.”<sup>39</sup> Hobbes was “[n]ot able to endure contradiction. Swore much. Undervalued all other men.”<sup>40</sup> None of the three ever married. Etc., etc. Though Peirce offers no generalized statistical conclusions,<sup>41</sup> this remarkable class exercise hints, at least, at how complex and multi-faceted a scientific understanding of (as James would have put it) “the causes of the production of great men” would be.

Of course, when James and Peirce wrote about this question, the “blending” theory of inheritance that Darwin took for granted had

not yet been displaced by the Mendelian, “particulate” theory (a scientific shift which didn’t take place until after Mendel’s ideas were rediscovered, decades after he had published them, in 1900).<sup>42</sup> And, of course, neither James nor Peirce knew anything about DNA,<sup>43</sup> let alone about environmental triggers of gene expression.<sup>44</sup> Still, as I think about what current science might say about great men and their environment, I am struck both by Peirce’s prescience, and by the good sense of James’s resistance to simplified sociological determinism.

For a satisfying account would surely combine, as we would now say, both hereditary and environmental causes, and would also acknowledge what we now know to be the very complex interactions between heredity and environment. It would recognize an element of randomness, perhaps even speak of a genetic “lottery.”<sup>45</sup> It would also allow a role to the contingencies that James stresses, which can create the opportunities for potential greatness to manifest itself; or may stifle – or, as with an epidemic or a war in which a budding genius dies – cut off such opportunities altogether; and which may significantly affect the specific cast of a great man’s mind. (Peirce notes that Hobbes’s mother was so terrified by the news that the Spanish Armada was fast approaching the coastal town where she lived that she gave birth to young Thomas prematurely:<sup>46</sup> hence Hobbes’s observation that he and fear were born “twins”<sup>47</sup> – and perhaps also his later preoccupation with the need for a state to ensure the safety of its citizens).

I suspect that such an understanding would also confirm the young Peirce’s conviction that genius is more a matter of special powers than of generic brilliance; and the older Peirce’s appreciation that, while the potential for greatness may be inborn, its actualization requires (both luck and) hard work – in his words, “peirceistence” and “peirceverance.”<sup>48</sup> And I believe that, by revealing how many, and how complex, the relevant causal factors are, it would confirm Nietzsche’s observation that “every man knows very well that, being unique, he will be in the world only once,” and that “no imaginable chance will for a second time gather together in a unity so strangely variegated an assortment as he is”;<sup>49</sup>



and hence, also, warrant James's resistance to the much too simple socio-deterministic picture that he took to be all the sociology of his day had to offer.



Neither of James's papers on great men is focused primarily on epistemological issues; but the full title of the earlier, long piece, "Great Men, Great Thoughts, and Their Environment," reminds us that James's disagreement with Spencer and his admirers in part concerns "the function of the environment in mental evolution."<sup>50</sup> Perhaps, James writes, Spencer would be right to think of minds as "passively plastic" – if we were talking only of the minds of dogs or horses, or even primitive humans.<sup>51</sup> But "[t]urn to the highest order of minds," he continues, "and what a change!" For here:

Instead of thoughts of concrete things patiently following one another in a beaten track of habitual suggestion, we have the most abrupt cross-cuts and transitions from one idea to another, the most rarified abstractions and discriminations, the most unheard of combinations of elements, the subtlest associations of analogy; in a word, we seem suddenly introduced into a bubbling cauldron of ideas [...] [There] will be sallies of wit and humor; [...] flashes of poetry and eloquence; [...] constructions of dramatic fiction or of mechanical device, logical or philosophical abstractions, business projects, or scientific hypotheses [...].<sup>52</sup>

James's splendid depiction of this "bubbling cauldron of ideas," of the vitality and the fruitful idiosyncracies of the best minds and of the creativity and cross-fertilization they make possible, hints very suggestively at the role "great men of thought" have played in the mental life of the human race: they are, we might say, the yeast that makes productive intellectual ferment possible.

At first blush, James's preoccupation with "flashes of genius in the individual head" seems quite at odds with the markedly social character of Peirce's theory of inquiry.<sup>53</sup> For as Peirce understands them, the concepts of truth and reality are intimately bound up with

the idea of a community of inquirers. “The conception of reality [...] essentially involves the notion of a COMMUNITY,” Peirce writes in 1868; and “the [separate existence of the] individual man is manifested only by ignorance and error.”<sup>54</sup> In 1871, he offers a nice illustration:

Suppose two men, one deaf, the other blind. One hears a man declare he means to kill another, hears the report of the pistol, and hears the victim cry; the other sees the murder done. Their sensations are affected in the highest degree with their individual peculiarities [...]. [B]ut their final conclusions, the thought the remotest from sense, will be identical and free from the one-sidedness of their idiosyncracies.

And, he continues:

There is, then, to every question a true answer, a final conclusion, to which the opinion of every man is constantly gravitating. [...] Any truth more perfect than this destined conclusion, any reality more absolute than what is thought in it, is a fiction of metaphysics.<sup>55</sup>

Again, in manuscripts given the title “The Logic of 1873” by the editors of the *Collected Papers*, Peirce writes: “Let any two minds investigate any question independently and if they carry the process far enough they will come to an agreement which no further investigation will disturb.”<sup>56</sup> In 1878, in “How to Make Our Ideas Clear,” Peirce gives his now-famous definitions of truth and reality: “[t]he opinion which is fated to be agreed by all who investigate, is what we mean by the truth, and the object represented in this opinion is the real.”<sup>57</sup> And fifteen years later he defends this account against Paul Carus’s objections; now adding, however, that he never intended to suggest that we can be sure that consensus will eventually be reached on every question, and that “[a]ll that we are entitled to assume is in the form of a hope” that it will.<sup>58</sup>

Whether or not Peirce’s conceptions of truth and reality are, in the end, defensible, his insight into the ways in which an individual

inquirer's weaknesses may be compensated by others' strengths is undeniably important. In a community of inquirers there can be, not only division of intellectual labor – as when A's theoretical speculations are tested with the help of B's experimental ingenuity and C's facility with statistics, and so on – but also the kind of mutual compensation and correction that Peirce envisaged: complementary sensory, imaginative, or intellectual idiosyncracies; one over-emphasis counteracting another; a balance of more conservative members of a scientific community, patiently trying to modify an old theory in response to new evidence, and of more radical members, eagerly jumping on the bandwagon of a new but as yet untried speculation; and so forth.

But, of course, this kind of mutual correction is possible only because there are differences among individuals; it would be impossible if all inquirers had the same blind spots, the same sensory and cognitive weaknesses, the same intellectual strengths and weaknesses, the same biases. Moreover – and now we see how Peirce's logic of abduction intersects with James's observations about "great thoughts" – inquiry begins with conjecture, informed guessing at possible explanations and laws: in short, with new ideas. And so, while Peirce is quite right to stress that only in a community of inquirers will there be the resources to correct the idiosyncracies and compensate for the weaknesses of individuals, and so to extend evidential reach and encourage rigorous appraisal of evidence, James is also right to stress that the source of the new ideas that will be tested and sifted by the community is individual minds<sup>59</sup> – and of great ideas, the minds of great men.

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And now I am reminded of the letter James wrote to Paul Carus after hearing Peirce's 1898 Cambridge Conference lectures: "the whole thing [left] you with a sense that you had just been in a place where ideas are manufactured";<sup>60</sup> and of Peirce's complaint that "[t]here is a kink in my damned brain that prevents me from thinking as other people think."<sup>61</sup> Indeed: and but for that kink in Peirce's brain philosophy would now be much the poorer. The difference between

one man and another,<sup>62</sup> as James's carpenter reminds us, really is "very important."

#### NOTES

My thanks to Mark Migotti for very helpful comments on a draft, and to Pamela Lucken and David Wilson for their help in finding relevant material.

<sup>1</sup> William James, "The Importance of Individuals," *The Open Court*, 4.154, August 1890: 24-37; reprinted in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (1897; reprinted, New York, Dover, 1956), 255-62, 256-7. Page references given here will be to the reprinted version.

<sup>2</sup> "I believe that education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform." John Dewey, "My Pedagogic Creed" (1897), in *The Essential Dewey*, eds. Larry A. Hickman and Thomas Alexander (Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 1998, 229-35, 234), also in *Early Works of John Dewey*, Jo Ann Boydston, ed. (Carbondale, IL, University of Illinois Press, 1972, 5.84-95). See also John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (1916), in *Middle Works of John Dewey*, Jo Ann Boydston, ed., (Carbondale, IL, Southern Illinois University Press, 1976, 3-370).

<sup>3</sup> "So far, all is for the best in the best of all possible cultures: our rugged – or is it ragged? – individualism." John Dewey, *Individualism Old and New* (1929), in *Later Works of John Dewey*, Jo Ann Boydston, ed., 5.41-123, 45. Dewey uses the phrase again in "The Irrepressible Conflict" (1931), *id.*, 6.149-52, 151; in "Can Education Share in Social Reconstruction?" (1934), *id.*, 9.205-209, 205; and in "Our Un-Free Press." *id.*, 11.269-71, 270.

<sup>4</sup> "[T]o make single individuals absolute judges of truth is most pernicious." C. S. Peirce, *Collected Papers*, eds Charles Hartshorne, Paul Weiss, and (vols 7 and 8) Arthur Burks (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1931-58), 5.265 (1868).

<sup>5</sup> "Return," because I wrote on this topic many years ago, in "Descartes, Peirce, and the Cognitive Community," *The Monist*, 65.2, 1983: 156-81; reprinted in Eugene Freeman, ed., *The Relevance of Charles Peirce* (La Salle, IL, The Hegeler Institute, Monist Library of Philosophy, 1983), 238-63.

<sup>6</sup> See William James, *Radical Empiricism* (1912), in *Essays in Radical Empiricism and A Pluralistic Universe*, ed. Richard Bernstein (New York, E. F. Dutton & Co., 1971).

<sup>7</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers* (note 4 above), 2.654 (1878).

<sup>8</sup> Michael K. Goldberg, "Introduction," in Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841; Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1993), xxi-ciii, p. xxxiii.

<sup>9</sup> William James, "Great Men, Great Thoughts, and Their Environment," *Atlantic Monthly*, XLVI, October 1880: 441-59; reprinted under the title "Great Men and Their Environment" in James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (note 1 above), 216-54; and under its original title, slightly abridged, in Sigmund Diamond, ed., *The Nation Transformed: The Creation of an Industrial Society* (New York, George Braziller, 1963), 510-24. Here, I will usually refer to the paper by its shorter title, and always give page references to *The Will to Believe and Other Essays*.

<sup>10</sup> John Fiske, "Sociology and Hero-Worship," *Atlantic Monthly*, XLVII, January 1881: 75-84. Fiske, described by Wiener as a "philosophical historian," had been a member of the original Metaphysical Club. See Philip P. Wiener, *Evolution and the Founders of Pragmatism* (1949; Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972), 129-36.

<sup>11</sup> Grant Allen, "The Genesis of Genius," *Atlantic Monthly*, XLVII, January 1881, 371-81. Allen was "[c]elebrated not only as a writer of literature and criticism but as a historian, naturalist, anthropologist, biographer, and physicist." Paul Matthew St. Pierre, "Grant Allen," in *Canadian Writers, 1890-1920*, ed. William H. New (Detroit, MI: Gale Research Inc., 1990), 3-9 (also available at Literature Resource Center, Doc. No. GALE/H1200004783).

<sup>12</sup> For the present, I shan't try to determine whether James's interpretation of Spencer is, as Fiske believes, "over-hasty." Fiske, "Sociology and Hero-Worship" (note 10 above), 77. James quotes Spencer's *The Study of Sociology* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1874) at some length – but then, so does Fiske!

<sup>13</sup> The editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* declined to publish it, however, which is why it did not appear in print until several years later.

<sup>14</sup> James, "Great Men and Their Environment" (note 9 above), 253.

<sup>15</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers* (note 4 above), 6.184 (c.1911). Peirce continues: “Who, for example, could be of a nature so very different from his than I? He so concrete, so living; I a mere table of contents, a very snarl of twine.”

<sup>16</sup> Grant Allen, “Hellas and Civilization,” *Popular Science Monthly, Supplement*. James, “On the Importance of Individuals” (note 1 above), 256, XIII-XVIII (1878), 398-406.

<sup>17</sup> James, “Great Men and Their Environment” (note 9 above), 253.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 259-60.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Clive (1725-74) was the founder of the British empire in India.

<sup>21</sup> As a boy, James tells us, Clive had tried to shoot himself, but survived. James, “Great Men and Their Environment” (note 9 above), 228. R. J. Minney tells the story in more detail: as a young man in Madras, hard up and homesick for England, Clive had picked up a pistol, held it to his head, and pulled the trigger – twice; but the gun failed to fire. At this point another young man entered the room and, at Clive’s request, fired the gun out of the window; this time it went off, leaving Clive to conclude that fate had reserved him for some other purpose. R. J. Minney, *Clive* (New York, Appleton and Company, 1931), 22-3. (From the same book, I learned that Clive had almost died of a childhood illness, and narrowly escaped drowning on his first passage to India.)

<sup>22</sup> Allen, “The Genesis of Genius” (note 11 above), 379.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 374.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 377 (the homogeneous society), 378 (the heterogeneous society), and 379 (the environmentalist conclusion).

<sup>25</sup> James, “On the Importance of Individuals” (note 1 above), 261-2.

<sup>26</sup> See Nathan Houser, “Introduction” to volume 5 of the *Writings* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982), xxiii-xxv.

<sup>27</sup> Peirce, “Analysis of Genius,” *Writings* (note 12 above), 1: 25-30 (1859). Peirce, letter to Francis Russell (Jan. 1, 1909), in Carolyn Eisele, ed., *New Elements of Mathematics* (The Hague, Mouton, 1976), vol. 4, p. 977. (The observation comes from a critique of Paul Carus, whom Peirce describes as so “full of *himself*” that he was incapable of a genuine concern for truth.)

<sup>28</sup> James, “On the Importance of Individuals” (note 9 above), 261-2.

<sup>29</sup> C. S. Peirce, “Private Thoughts,” *Writings* (note 27 above), 1:5 (1860). Voltaire had expressed a very similar thought when he wrote that “[c]’est le privilège du vrai génie, et surtout du génie qui ouvre une carrière, de faire impunément de grandes fautes.” [“It is the privilege of true genius, and especially of the genius who opens a new path, to make great mistakes with impunity”]. Voltaire, *Le siècle de Louis XIV* (Paris, Armand Colin et Cie., 1894), 375.

<sup>30</sup> Brent writes that at Hopkins Peirce “founded a new Metaphysical Club, which was a genuine success as a crucible for philosophical ideas” (Joseph Brent, *Charles Sanders Peirce: A Life* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993)), 128. See also Max Fisch, “Peirce at the Johns Hopkins University” (1952); reprinted in Kenneth Lane Ketner and Christian J. W. Kloesel, eds., *Peirce, Semeiotic, and Pragmatism: Essays by Max Fisch* (Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 1986), 35-78; and Nathan Houser, “Introduction” to the *Writings* (note 27 above), 4: xix-lxx, xli-xlii. Houser tells us that Peirce proposed to set up this Metaphysical Club at the end of a lecture he had begun by defining metaphysics as “the science of unclear thinking” (p. xli); and that the Club expired in March 1885, after Peirce was dismissed from Hopkins, after its 43rd meeting (p. xlii).

<sup>31</sup> See Joseph Jastrow, “Charles S. Peirce as a Teacher,” *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Method*, 13, 1916: 724-5; Max H. Fisch and Jackson I. Cope, “Peirce at the Johns Hopkins University,” in *Studies in the Philosophy of Charles Sanders Peirce*, eds. Philip P. Wiener and Frederick H. Young (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952), 277-211, 355-60, 363-74.

<sup>32</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers* (note 4 above), 7.256 (c.1900).

<sup>33</sup> *Id.*, 7.258 (c.1900). The scale they used, Peirce tells us, was modeled on the scale of star-magnitudes developed in his *Photometric Researches*, Vol. 9 of *Annals of the Astronomical Observatory of Harvard College* (Leipzig, Wilhelm Engelmann, 1878); reprinted in Peirce, *Writings* (note 27 above), 3:382-493 (where, I note, Peirce’s concern was with “phenomenal light,” i.e., light as a sensation, rather than with “noumenal light,” i.e., light as something in the external world).

<sup>34</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers* (note 4 above), 7.258-61 (1900). Notice the synechistic character of Peirce's (surely correct) assumption that greatness is a matter of degree.

<sup>35</sup> Around 1896 Peirce again applies his categories to the classification of people, writing that "we remark three classes of men. The first consists of those for whom the chief thing is the qualities of feelings. These men create art. The second consists of practical men [...]. The third class consists of men to whom nothing seems great but reason." *Ibid.*, 1.43.

<sup>36</sup> Peirce, *Writings* (note 27 above), 5.35-37 (1883-4). I note that these lists include a tiny number of women under "men of feeling" and "men of action," but (so far as I can tell) none under "men of thought."

<sup>37</sup> Not surprisingly, perhaps, given that Peirce believed his own intellectual gifts were related to his left-handedness, one question was whether the great man was left-handed. *Ibid.*, 5:66 (1883-4).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:65-7

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:68.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> At least, not in the material included in the *Writings*.

<sup>42</sup> Mendel had delivered his now famous paper, and published it in the journal of the Brünn Natural History Society, in 1865. Gregor Mendel, "Versuche über Pflanzen-Hybriden," *Verhandlungen des Naturforschenden Vereines in Brünn*, Bd. IV für das Jahr 1865: 3-47. However, this paper languished unread for decades. The rediscovery of the Mendelian theory dates to the year 1900, with the publication of Hugo de Vries, "Sur la loi de disjunction des hybrides," *Comptes Rendus de l'Academie des Sciences*, Paris, 130, 1900, 845-7; Eric von Tschermak, "Über Kunstliche Kreuzung bei *Pisum sativum*," *Berichte der Deutschen Botanischen Gesellschaft*, 18, 1900, 232-9; and Carl Correns, "G. Mendel's Regel über das Verhalten der Nachkommenschaft der Rassenbastarde," *Berichte der Deutschen Botanischen Gesellschaft*, 18, 1900, 158-68.

<sup>43</sup> See Robert Olby, *The Path to the Double Helix* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974); Franklin H. Portugal and J. S. Cohen, *A Century of DNA: A History of the Discovery of the Genetic Substance* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977); Horace Freeland Judson, *The Eighth Day of Creation: Makers of the Revolution in Biology* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1979). There is a brief summary of the relevant



history in Susan Haack, “The Growth of Meaning and the Limits of Formalism: In Science, in Law,” *Análisis Filosófico*, XXIX.1, May 2009, 5-29.

<sup>44</sup> See e.g., Scott Gilbert, “Mechanisms for the Environmental Regulation of Gene Expression: Ecological Aspects of Animal Development,” *Journal of Bioscience*, 30, 2005, 65-74.

<sup>45</sup> Though I would not assume that which combination of its parents’ genes one child inherits, and which combination falls to his brothers or sisters, is in principle inexplicable – any more than which way the dice lands on this toss and on that (or where and when a hurricane makes landfall) is in principle inexplicable.

<sup>46</sup> Peirce, *Writings* (note 27 above), 5:68 (1883-4).

<sup>47</sup> In the words of Hobbes’s autobiographical poem, “The Life of Mr. Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury” (1680): “*Fame had rumour’d/ That a Fleet at Sea,/ Wou’d cause our Nation’s Catastrophe;/ And Hereupon it was my Mother Dear/ Did bring forth Twins at once, both Me, and Fear./ For this, my Countries Foes I e’r did hate,/ With calm Peace and my Muse associate.../* Thomas Hobbes, *The Life of Mr. Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury 2* (English translation of a poem originally written in Latin; London, 1680), available at [eebo.chadwyck.com.search/full\_rec?SOURCE=pimages.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=V49741].

<sup>48</sup> My source is Brent, *Peirce: A Life* (note 30 above), p. 16, reporting Peirce’s explanation of his intellectual achievements.

<sup>49</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “Schopenhauer as Educator” (1874), in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983), 125-94, p. 127.

<sup>50</sup> James, “Great Men and Their Environment” (note 10 above), p. 245.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 248.

<sup>53</sup> It is more than a little disappointing that Alvin Goldman – who for the last decade or so has been urging the importance of “social epistemology” – is apparently unaware that Peirce had explored social aspects of the theory of inquiry long before he did. See Alvin Goldman, *Knowledge in a Social World* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1999); and note that the tiny number of references to Peirce all lead us to brief, dismissive passages about his definition of truth, that the even smaller

number of references to Dewey lead us to even shorter comments about his philosophy of education, and that the only explicit reference to pragmatism occurs in a dispiriting list headed “Veriphobia”: “social constructivism, postmodernism, pragmatism, cultural studies, and critical legal studies” (p. 7).

<sup>54</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers* (note 5 above), 5.317, 5.311 (1868).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.12 (1871).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.319 (1873). These manuscripts are something like a first draft of what would eventually become “The Fixation of Belief,” *ibid.*, 5.388-410 (1877).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.409 (1878).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.610 (1893).

<sup>59</sup> In this context it may be worth noting that in the “Logic of 1873,” discussing “the method of public opinion” – which, interestingly enough, has been dropped by the time of “The Fixation of Belief” – Peirce observes that in any community “there will be a constant tendency to sporting,” i.e., to mutation. *Collected Papers* (note 5 above), 7.317 (1873).

<sup>60</sup> William James, letter to Paul Carus, March 18, 1898, quoted in Kenneth Lane Ketner and Hilary Putnam, “Introduction” to *Peirce’s Cambridge Conference Lectures* (1989), *Reasoning and the Logic of Things*, eds. Ketner and Putnam (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1992), 1-102, 36.

<sup>61</sup> My source is E. T. Bell, *The Development of Mathematics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1949), 519.

<sup>62</sup> And, of course, between one woman and another. So perhaps I should add that I first read “On the Impotence of Individuals,” some time ago now, in a period when many self-styled “feminist epistemologists” were stressing supposed “women’s ways of knowing”; and that James’s reflections helped me articulate one of the things I found so disturbing about such ideas: that, on the contrary, it is of the essence of sexism to perceive women, not as individuals, but as fungible representatives of their sex, as it is of the essence of racism to perceive those of other races, not as individuals, but simply as fungible representatives of their race.

# THE WILL TO BELIEVE AND THE WILL TO LEARN: JAMES, PEIRCE, AND ANTI-EVIDENTIALISM

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The present article contests the widely received view that Peirce and James are irreconcilably opposed on the issue of evidentialism. Whereas it is typically supposed that Peirce endorses an evidentialist position opposed to the anti-evidentialism of James's important essay "The Will to Believe," it is argued here that Peirce's own commitment to the spirit of the scientific enterprise involves a limited anti-evidentialist stance. Much like James, Peirce maintains that there can be no evidence to support one's initial faith that the pursuit of scientific inquiry is capable of yielding knowledge of reality, and that such a commitment to the communal activity of science rests ultimately upon certain hopes and sentiments. It is also acknowledged, however, that James admits counterexamples to evidentialism which Peirce would not endorse, insofar as Peirce's anti-evidentialism is strictly limited to those beliefs necessary to motivate the pursuit of the scientific enterprise.



## I

Insofar as commentators have distinguished between Peircean and Jamesian schools of pragmatism, James's landmark 1896 essay, "The Will to Believe" is typically identified as marking a fault line between their respective pragmatist approaches.

Whereas James's essay has been received as a classic statement of anti-evidentialism and a defence of the right to believe on passional grounds, Peirce continues to be regarded as a principal spokesperson for a more narrowly scientific pragmatism which could not possibly condone the kind of wishful thinking which James has been alleged to license. Such an account of Peirce's pragmatism and its relationship to James's is not without justification, and may appear especially well-supported by the argument of "The Fixation of Belief," in which Peirce criticises non-scientific methods of belief-formation for their tendency to engender doubt in their own results. Whatever else might unite James and Peirce, their respective positions concerning the intellectual respectability of passionately-grounded belief have generally been thought irreconcilable. Peirce, it might be suggested, is every bit as much of an evidentialist as the Cliffordian target of "The Will to Believe," and it was only James's devotion to his lifelong friend that could have prevented him from explicitly stating as much.

Without going so far as to repeat Gavin's bold thesis that there is a Peircean "will to believe,"<sup>1</sup> there is, nonetheless, reason to suspect that Peirce and James share more in common with respect to passional grounds of belief than has customarily been acknowledged. While several commentators have observed an allusion to James in Peirce's advocacy of a "will to learn," his scant remarks on the topic have generally frustrated any effort at detailed comparison. An apparent gesture towards the kind of passionate commitment more customarily associated with Jamesian than with Peircean pragmatism has therefore remained underexplored. Peirce's numerous remarks concerning the importance of scientific investigation of such attitudes and sentiments as hope and something akin to religious faith have received far greater

commentary. However, possible affinities with James have gone largely unnoticed and Peirce has not often been thought to develop his positions on such topics in sufficient detail to merit comparison against James's, or, indeed, to reward careful examination in their own right.<sup>2</sup> In his discussions of the affective dimension of inquiry, it might easily seem Peirce indulges in that romantic "transcendentalism" which Goudge distinguishes from the "naturalistic" tendency of Peirce's more compelling contributions to philosophy.<sup>3</sup>

Their largely unenthusiastic reception notwithstanding, Peirce's views concerning such affective states as hope and faith are neither merely florid rhetorical additions to his more technical discussions of scientific inquiry, nor indications of a problematic sentimentalism in tension with his otherwise scientific temperament. Indeed, it shall be argued, Peirce is like James in admitting an ineliminable role for the passions in motivating scientific inquiry. As shall also be seen, however, Peirce limits the extent of his own anti-evidentialism to what is strictly necessary in order to satisfy the necessary conditions of the possibility of scientific inquiry, whereas James allows more exceptions to the general principle of evidentialism which he criticises in "The Will to Believe."

The opening section discusses Peirce's suspicions of the nominalistic use to which James put pragmatism in "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results." Section Two then examines why one might claim to identify, in James's "The Will to Believe," certain nominalist elements of which Peirce would be similarly disapproving. The third section offers a closer inspection of James's controversial text, distinguishing between different kinds of counterexamples to evidentialism which he identifies in that paper. In Section Four, focus shifts to Peirce's important essay, "The Fixation of Belief," highlighting reasons why Peirce and James might be thought to occupy incompatible and irreconcilable positions with respect to evidentialism. Section Five contests such an interpretation, however, by showing Peirce to recognise certain affective states of the inquirer as necessary conditions for the possibility of inquiry, even where these indicate beliefs for which

there is insufficient evidence. Finally, in Section Six, Peirce and James are compared in terms of their respective forms of anti-evidentialism. A concluding section proposes that their positions be understood in terms of their broader realism or nominalism.

## II

In his entry on “Pragmatic and Pragmatism” for Baldwin’s 1902 *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*, Peirce traces the origins of the pragmatist movement to his own 1878 paper, “How to Make Our Ideas Clear,” and the methodological principle there set out for clarifying an idea in terms of its practical implications. Having thus identified its original source in his own work, Peirce proceeds to remark upon James’s development of pragmatist philosophy by commenting that “[i]n 1896 William James published his *Will to Believe*, and later his *Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results*, which pushed this method [of pragmatism] to such extremes as must tend to give us pause.”<sup>4</sup> While it is unclear from Peirce’s ambiguous phrasing whether he thinks James to have extended pragmatism beyond reasonable limits in both the 1896 paper and its 1898 successor, or only the latter of the two, several commentators have taken his suspicions to be addressed as much to the first paper as to the second.

That Peirce should have taken issue with *Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results* is not at all surprising, since it is here that James explicitly announces his intention to revise or extend Peirce’s pragmatism so as to elucidate contested concepts in terms of their implications for particular experiences, rather than general patterns thereof. Peirce had, by 1902, become especially insistent upon the scholastic realist commitments of his pragmatist maxim, and hence it could only have concerned him to see it rendered as the principle that

the effective meaning of any philosophic proposition can always be brought down to some particular consequence, in our future practical experience, whether active or passive; the point lying

rather in the fact that the experience must be particular, than in the fact that it must be active.<sup>5</sup>

More troubling still for Peirce, James would later claim that “[pragmatism] agrees with nominalism [...] in always appealing to particulars.”<sup>6</sup>

James’s nominalistic variation on Peirce’s principle is apparent from certain pragmatic examples from his 1898 paper. Unlike Peirce, for whom the application of the pragmatist maxim should result in a series of conditional statements elaborating the general empirical conditions under which a concept is properly deployed, James allows that pragmatism might “zero in” on specific practical implications at stake in a choice of hypotheses, without reference to any such law-like regularities. The practical disagreement which James here identifies between theism and materialism, for instance, concerns no law-like pattern of observable phenomena which might be expected from a materialistic universe instead of a product of divine intelligence, but, rather, a difference of ultimate outcome in which these prospective alternative universes would culminate, and their resulting implications for the eventual realisation of present human hopes and aspirations.

Application of the pragmatist principle to the debate between theism and materialism entails, according to James, that any real difference between the positions in question must lie in their respective implications for the future course of experience, and hence, in what he admits to be “an impossible case,” there can be no disagreement between the materialist and the theist if the present instant is assumed to be the absolute last in the history of the universe, and neither hypothesis is able, therefore, either to predict or to influence subsequent events any differently from the other.<sup>7</sup> Hence, as James puts it, “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.”<sup>8</sup>

James maintains theism and materialism differ, however, in their respective implications for the ultimate satisfaction of human ends, and whether the “utter final wreck and tragedy” of a silent universe

from which all memory of humankind's most cherished hopes and ideals has perished completely is all that might remain after every effort at moral improvement.<sup>9</sup> What is ultimately at stake, for James, in the disagreement between theism and materialism, is the promise of an "eternal moral order" and all that this entails for the value of present efforts to achieve ethical goals. As such, there is no experimentally observable regularity by which either of the two hypotheses might be distinguished from the other, but only a difference in the outcomes which they project, and in how commitment to either hypothesis might inform one's willingness to act for the sake of certain ends. To employ the language of Peirce's category theory, James includes instances of Secondness—particular outcomes and isolated actions—as part of a concept or theory's "practical meaning," whereas Peirce elaborates the pragmatic significance for a given general term exclusively by way of Thirdness, or functional rules governing patterns of observable phenomena. For Peirce, then, it is in terms of general patterns of sensible experience that the practical differences with which his pragmatism is concerned make themselves known. As Hookway suggests:

we can take it that the crucial difference between the two pragmatisms is that where James simply looks for the experiences that would result if the proposition were true or the conduct one should carry out in those circumstances, Peirce looks for patterns in experience and lawlike interrelations of action and experience: our understanding of a proposition is manifested in some (possibly quite complex and almost certainly conditional) habit of expectation.<sup>10</sup>

Insofar, however, as such regularities of experience must be available to experimental study, this means that Peirce's conception of a practical difference is tied to the standards of a scientific community of inquirers in a manner in which James's is not. Unlike James, whose pragmatism is significantly informed by his pluralistic drive to accommodate and respect the differing temperaments and emotional demands of individuals in all their irreducible



particularity, Peirce's "pragmaticism" takes little account of such individual differences and does not purport to tailor itself to the precise circumstances of particular agents engaged in the pursuit of specific practical interests. Rather, Peirce's pragmatism is premised on commitment to a scientific enterprise whose various participants are united in a singularity of purpose.

### III

Peirce's pragmatism differs from James's then, insofar as its conception of the practical is limited to general patterns of observable phenomena, and therefore excludes much of what James intends to include within its scope. It is irrelevant to Peirce's pragmatism, for instance, that differences of individual temperament might call for different means of satisfying their respective emotional demands under otherwise similar conditions, and hence that individuals might differ in terms of which hypotheses satisfy their various personal expectations. Nor—since hypotheses are practically indistinguishable, according to Peirce, except in terms of their respective implications for general patterns of observable phenomena to be expected under specified sensible conditions—is there any pragmatic difference, in Peirce's view, between theories which make the same empirical predictions but appeal to differing sensibilities, such that what gives solace and comfort to one might provoke fear, despair, outrage, or disgust in another. Hence there is no accounting for differences of individual taste and psychology in Peirce's version of pragmatism, for which the practical meaning of a concept is to be articulated in terms of general functional processes rather than individual ends or outcomes, and it is for this reason that he expresses reservations at the broader use to which James puts his pragmatist principle in 1898.

If what Peirce objects to, however, in *Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results*, is its inclusion of particular outcomes and actions within the scope of a concept's pragmatic significance, then it is difficult to see how he could have been any less concerned by James's position in "The Will to Believe." Although the term

“pragmatism” does not feature within James’s 1896 paper—any more than in the 1878 paper by Peirce to which the original published statement of the pragmatic maxim is typically traced—the argument of “The Will to Believe” is entirely consistent with what James would two years later be calling his “pragmatist philosophy.” In the 1896 paper, no less than its 1898 successor, it counts amongst the practical implications of some hypothesis that seriously to entertain it might provoke one rather than another set of feelings, which might contribute more or less effectively to the agent’s overall goal of satisfying more of its various preferences than would otherwise have been the case. The practical results at stake in both of James’s papers are those which are of interest to particular situated individuals, striving to address, by whatever means available, as many wants as possible.<sup>11</sup> James’s choice of examples in both papers is intended to highlight other kinds of practical difference than a scientific community would be competent to admit, perhaps most prominent amongst which are the alleged benefits to the agent of belief in the religious hypothesis. In such cases, James maintains, belief in one hypothesis rather than another has the not inconsiderable practical result that certain—possibly very profound and characteristically human—wants, which would otherwise have remained unmet, are thereby satisfied. Since, however, neither the religious hypothesis nor its irreligious counterhypothesis is any better supported by appeal to publicly-available regularities of experience, according to James, it can only be on the basis of affective, or “passional,” grounds that one might possibly decide upon either of these hypotheses, so that individuals must ultimately select whichever of the two appeals best to their own emotional disposition. When such profound interests are at stake, James maintains, and scientific inquiry is ineffectual to the matter in question, it is mere pedantry and intellectual puritanism to deny to passional considerations a legitimate role in determining an agent’s beliefs.

Indeed, James is quite explicit in holding that the counter-examples to Cliffordian evidentialism which he purports to identify in “The Will to Believe” concern the exceptional circumstances of

particular individuals who ultimately have no alternative but to accept personal responsibility for the beliefs which they are willing to endorse and to acknowledge the risks of so doing. With respect to the kinds of cases which he has in mind in this 1896 essay, James maintains, “[e]ach must act as he thinks best; and if he is wrong, so much the worse for him,” so that “whatever choice we make, we make at our peril.”<sup>12</sup> In such cases as these, there are, according to James, no universal norms or standards to which one might appeal in order to assess the rationality of the alternatives with which one is confronted, nor is there any other authority or interest to which one can defer in one’s decision over what to believe. As such, for James, it is not one’s commitment to standards of rationality that is here at stake but the sovereign right of each individual to express one’s character through one’s chosen beliefs, and the concomitant responsibility that one respectfully extend the same privilege to those with whom one might happen to disagree. Hence James’s essay is best understood as a plea for tolerance in the realm of belief, and as a valorisation of the heroic individual’s strength of character in the face of uncertainty.<sup>13</sup>

To take the example for which James’s essay is best known, the choice between agnosticism and religious belief is, he maintains, “a case where my own stake is important enough to give me the right to choose my own form of risk.”<sup>14</sup> That is to say, when so much is at stake—the prospect of salvation and eternal happiness in this case—and science offers insufficient grounds upon which to decide the matter in question, one cannot be deemed irrational for basing one’s choice upon the only available means remaining, by consulting one’s feelings as to what risk one is personally willing to take. As much as he insists that decisions of this sort are fundamentally personal matters, one’s choices about which reflect one’s “passional” rather than intellectual nature, James does not deny. However, there is a real risk that one might later have cause to regret one’s decision, while accepting that one can only ever choose on one’s own behalf in such cases.

## IV

Few texts in the history of the pragmatist tradition have attracted as much attention and controversy as James's landmark 1896 essay, "The Will to Believe." Although it was not until 1898 that James would adopt the term as a label for his own philosophical outlook—and he would then, with his characteristic generosity, credit Peirce with its first published statement—"pragmatism" was, for much of the twentieth century, largely identified with what were widely thought to be the principal claims of James's 1896 paper. As a result, much of the dismissive treatment with which "pragmatist" views were received until the last thirty or forty years may be understood in terms of positions commonly attributed to James in "The Will to Believe." Russell's early criticisms of the pragmatist conception of truth—which were to become canonical for much of twentieth century analytic philosophy—recall the uncharitable objections which James complained had frequently been levelled against his 1896 paper. To its critics, pragmatism was to become synonymous with a disregard for hard, possibly uncomfortable, facts in favour of undisciplined wishful thinking and the romanticisation of a juvenile "will to deceive," or "will to make-believe." In response to such crude dismissals, James's defenders have not failed to stress that his rejection of evidentialism is explicitly limited to cases wherein the choice between two hypotheses amounts to a "genuine option," the necessary and jointly sufficient conditions of which he specifies in terms of "liveness," "forcedness," and "momentousness."

Firstly, then, the hypotheses between which the agent has to choose must each appeal to them as plausible candidates for belief, or as potential beliefs which one could realistically imagine oneself holding. There is likely to be significant variation across different individuals as to which hypotheses satisfy this condition. Those which do, however, James terms "live." Any choice between two such hypotheses James therefore terms a "live option."

Secondly, the hypotheses in question must be mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive of the available alternatives. Suspension of belief in such cases is therefore, to all intents and

purposes, equivalent to rejecting one hypothesis and endorsing the other. Such options James terms “forced.”

Finally, the opportunity to decide between the hypotheses in question, and hence to revise any such decision, must present itself very rarely, if not once in a lifetime, and there must be some significant prospective good at stake. As such, the decision in question involves both commitment—insofar as it cannot be easily undone—and risk, insofar as one stands to gain or lose something of value. Options of this sort James terms “momentous.”

Those options which satisfy all three criteria qualify for James as “genuine.” Only in the case of genuine options for which there is insufficient evidence upon which to justify the choice of one hypothesis rather than the other does James permit that it is not irrational or otherwise intellectually discreditable to allow one’s “passional nature” to decide the matter. This, indeed, is the principal thesis of “The Will to Believe.”

The controversies surrounding James’s paper are doubtless due in no small part to the fact that even after the scope of its anti-evidentialism had been thus limited to genuine options of this evidentially undecidable sort, James discusses a variety of importantly different cases, in the course of which he offers a number of distinct considerations against Cliffordian evidentialism. James maintains, for instance, that there are cases in which belief in some hypothesis increases the likelihood of its truth. Such cases typically depend upon the agent’s performance of some task in which they are more likely to succeed if their actions are not impeded by doubt. It is more likely, for instance, that one shall make a good impression at a social event or, to take another of James’s examples, that one might successfully leap across a mountain ravine, if one’s efforts are not hampered by the anticipation of failure. In cases like these, James suggests, it is permissible to believe some hypothesis in spite of insufficient evidential grounds.

Self-fulfilling prophecies of this sort are importantly distinct, however, from other kinds of counterexamples which James offers against the evidentialist. In another set of cases, access to certain kinds of evidence for some hypothesis may not be forthcoming until

one has already lent a certain degree of credence to that very hypothesis, in what James characterises as something like a willing gesture of faith. Conjecturing, for instance, that God might make himself known, by way of religious experiences, only to those whose pre-evidential faith makes them receptive to such forms of evidence, James argues for the rationality of such willing gestures as a means towards the acquisition of greater stores of empirical data than might otherwise have been available.

Such cases are again distinct from those already discussed, wherein it is the risk of failing to secure some good of immense personal importance that licenses a degree of credence in excess of the available evidence. In cases such as these, access to the good in question is conditional upon belief in some hypothesis for which there is insufficient evidence to merit such an attitude, but, James maintains, the stakes are sufficiently high to warrant an exception to evidentialist scruples. These are presumably the kinds of cases which lend themselves most easily to uncharitable parody at the hands of James's critics, insofar as James here allows that a practical interest in attaining certain kinds of good might legitimately take priority over the concern that one have sufficient evidence for one's beliefs. What James's critics typically fail to acknowledge, however, is that it is—in cases of the second and third sort, at least—precisely a concern to believe true hypotheses, together with a willingness to risk false belief, that motivates the rejection of an evidentialist principle that would forbid gambles of this sort, even at the risk of permanently excluding access to such truths and their related advantages. Indeed, James and Peirce are far closer on this point than is widely appreciated, as shall shortly become apparent.

## V

When, in the second of his 1907 *Pragmatism* lectures, James credits Peirce with the original published statement of the pragmatic maxim, he remarks that:

In an article entitled ‘How to Make Our Ideas Clear,’ in the ‘Popular Science Monthly’ for January [1878], Mr. Peirce, after pointing out that our beliefs are really rules for action, said that, to develop a thought’s meaning, we need only determine what conduct it is fitted to produce: that conduct is for us its sole significance. And the tangible fact at the root of all our thought-distinctions, however subtle, is that there is no one of them so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference of practice.<sup>15</sup>

Hence, James notes, Peirce’s pragmatism depends crucially upon a conception of belief as a “rule for action.” As Peirce himself would remark, from Bain’s notion of belief as “that upon which a man is prepared to act,” pragmatism follows as “scarce more than a corollary.”<sup>16</sup> What distinguishes two beliefs, according to Peirce, are their respective implications for how one would act under specified conditions were one to hold either belief.

It is not only belief, however, but also doubt which carries implications for action, according to Peirce. To be in a state of real—as opposed to fictitious or Cartesian—doubt, Peirce maintains, is to be without a belief and hence without a rule for how to act in situations of a certain kind. For James too, beliefs are distinguishable from one another, and from doubts, in terms of their respective implications for action, and hence he maintains that “belief and doubt are living attitudes, and involve conduct on our part. Our only way, for example, of doubting, or refusing to believe that a certain thing *is*, is to continue to act as if it were *not*.”<sup>17</sup> Hence Peirce’s pragmatism agrees with James’s in recognising a practical difference between doubt and belief.

Though acknowledging “How to Make Our Ideas Clear” as the original published statement of the pragmatist maxim, however, James neglects to mention that this text is a sequel to Peirce’s 1877 paper “The Fixation of Belief,” and is intended to build upon the conclusions of that earlier document. It is in the 1877 paper, for instance, that Peirce first distinguishes belief and doubt according to their practical consequences, although his principal focus here is more with the methodological norms by which an agent might most effectively move from states of doubt to those of belief, ultimately

arguing for what might easily be mistaken for the very kind of scientific evidentialism which James would later oppose in “The Will to Believe.”

Although it is Clifford’s “The Ethics of Belief” which James identifies as the target of his 1896 essay, several commentators have noted certain affinities between James’s evidentialist target and the proto-pragmatism of Peirce’s monumentally influential 1877 text. As Hollinger remarks, for instance:

Clifford’s essay bears more comparison than it has received to a great American apotheosis of scientific method that appeared in the same year, Charles Peirce’s “The Fixation of Belief” (1877). Peirce brought science to bear on the entirety of belief and he did so with a spirit of moral rectitude.<sup>18</sup>

In Hollinger’s assessment, then, Peirce’s 1877 essay aligns him with Clifford—and against what James would later argue in “The Will to Believe”—insofar as it admits no legitimate alternative to what Peirce calls “the scientific method” of fixing belief, or “the method of science.” In spite of this important point of resemblance between Peirce and Clifford, however, and although the scientific enterprise is portrayed elsewhere in his writings as a kind of moral vocation, ethical considerations hardly feature at all in the argument of Peirce’s 1877 paper. What Peirce challenges in this important document is not the morality of non-scientific methods of belief-formation, but rather their effectiveness as means of overcoming the “irritation of doubt” which provides the stimulus for any inquiry.

Assessing in turn a series of different methods of fixing belief, Peirce concludes that only the method of science is fit to produce beliefs which shall not, sooner or later, give way to doubt and therefore have to be abandoned. For Peirce, then, there is something ultimately self-defeating about non-scientific methods of belief-formation, inasmuch as the beliefs they generate cannot withstand the pressures to which they are invariably exposed during the ordinary run of experience. One might, for instance, in accordance with “the method of tenacity,” simply opt for some belief and



obstinately cling to it, but, Peirce maintains, all of one's efforts shall ultimately be in vain as recalcitrant experience and exposure to opinions other than one's own irresistibly force the abandonment of all such tenuous and recklessly-adopted beliefs.

Not much better is achieved, moreover, by following "the method of authority," which commissions some group or institution to propagate an official body of opinion and punish all dissent. The practical difficulties confronting any such organisation are such, according to Peirce, that its grip over the populace shall always remain contested and rival points of view shall never be entirely suppressed. Nor, Peirce maintains, are beliefs adequately settled by "the a priori method," according to which one believes whatever is most satisfying to human reason, for one is apt to recognise that there are no clear means of resolving the disagreements which inevitably arise over which beliefs meet this standard.

Peirce doubtless underestimates the human capacity for prolonged and irrational credulity in the face of conflicting evidence and opposing views. For present purposes, however, it is sufficient to note that the anti-evidentialism for which James argues in "The Will to Believe" might seem to condone one or more of the non-scientific methods which Peirce criticises in his 1877 article. The method of tenacity, in particular, with its appeal to the sovereign individual's decisions over what they are willing to believe, invites comparison with the kind of doxastic liberty for which James has often been taken to license in his celebrated 1896 essay.

From what has been noted thus far, James and Peirce seem to be in straightforward disagreement with respect to the possible rationality of beliefs held on passional rather than evidential grounds. Peirce's argument in "The Fixation of Belief" portrays non-scientific methods of belief-formation as inherently self-undermining, whereas it is precisely James's objective, in "The Will to Believe," to identify exceptions to evidentialist constraints upon admissible belief. On closer inspection, however, Peirce's position is more nuanced than may appear from his 1877 paper. When the details of his position are taken into account, moreover, Peirce appears closer to James than at first glance.

To return for a moment to “The Fixation of Belief,” however, it is a principal thesis of that essay that only the method of science offers a coherent means of moving from doubt to belief, insofar as beliefs formed according to any of the non-scientific methods are bound eventually to give way to doubts. The method of science is committed, however, to a “Realist Hypothesis” which Peirce states as follows:

There are real things, whose characters are entirely independent of our opinions about them; those realities affect our senses according to regular laws, and, though our sensations are as different as our relations to the objects, yet, by taking advantage of the laws of perception, we can ascertain by reasoning how things really are, and any man, if he have sufficient experience and reason enough about it, will be led to the one true conclusion.<sup>19</sup>

How, Peirce asks, might such a hypothesis be justified? And how, in particular, might one justify the assumption that there are “real things” or “realities” which meet this description?

It might be wondered, indeed, how one might begin to argue for a claim which is implicitly assumed in the very practice of reasoning itself, as Peirce maintains is the case for the method of science, and hence for the Realist Hypothesis. To employ the method of science in arguing for one of its own presuppositions would, Peirce notes, be problematically circular, whereas he has already been seen to reject its non-scientific alternatives as inadequate methods of settling belief. If one cannot argue directly for the Realist Hypothesis, however, Peirce at least notes that the method of science is unlike its rivals in not producing doubt in its own methodology. Certainly, the method of science is likely to result in the provisional acceptance of erroneous hypotheses which one shall later have cause to reject. Crucially, however, the method of science does not give rise, Peirce maintains, to any doubts which would not be resolved by further application of the same method. Uniquely amongst the four methods which Peirce discusses, doubt is no longer a mere dead end for the method of science, but a stepping stone towards belief.

The question remains, however, as to what justifies Peirce's optimism about the future course of scientific inquiry. One might reasonably ask what Peirce has to say in reply to the so-called "sceptical meta-induction," according to which inference from past experience suggests that all inductively-formed beliefs shall turn out false sooner or later, or to the Kuhnian position which anticipates no end in principle to the series of crises and revolutions in incommensurable paradigms which constitutes the entire history of science.<sup>20</sup> This is a theme to which Peirce returns time and again in his numerous writings on the rationality of scientific inquiry and the conditions of its possible success. It is here, moreover, that Peirce's proximity to James becomes especially apparent, inasmuch as Peirce appeals ultimately to the will and sentiments of the inquirer—or, to employ James's terminology, their "passional nature"—to make good on the evidential deficit confronting the Realist Hypothesis.

Hence, in "The Doctrine of Chances"—the immediate sequel to "How to Make Our Ideas Clear" and the third in the series of articles which begins with "The Fixation of Belief"<sup>21</sup>—Peirce states that three sentiments, which he calls "interest in an indefinite community, recognition of the possibility of this interest being made supreme, and hope in the unlimited continuance of intellectual activity," are also "indispensable requirements of logic."<sup>22</sup> In the absence of such sentiments, Peirce maintains, agents shall lack sufficient motivation to participate in the demanding enterprise of scientific inquiry. It is a constant motif in Peirce's writings that for an inquiry to reach its natural end may often take more time and resources than any inquirer can contribute during a single lifetime, and that one must therefore be prepared, in committing oneself to any such project, to work for the sake of an objective which one may not live to see realised. The true inquirer must accept, that is, that their labours may not bear fruit until some future generation is able to make use of them, so that a generous willingness to work on behalf of interests other than one's own is therefore essential to the very possibility of the scientific enterprise.

More than this, however, Peirce repeatedly stresses that there can be no evidence to support the hypothesis that one's efforts shall *ever* bear fruit. The investigation in question might come to a premature close—owing perhaps to war or natural disaster—before future generations are able to take advantage of whatever findings one is able to make in the present, so that all of one's efforts shall have come to nothing. Not only an altruistic regard for one's fellow inquirers—both contemporary and future—is necessary to the spirit of scientific enterprise then, but a sincere and evidentially ungrounded hope that events shall turn out to favour, rather than frustrate, the course of an investigation. There is, however, nothing to justify the adoption of such sentiments, beyond their status as necessary conditions for the possibility of scientific inquiry. For Peirce then, no less than for James, it is sometimes admissible to allow sentiment to decide one's opinion on a matter of great importance when there is insufficient evidence to merit such an attitude.

## VI

In the fourth of his 1898 Cambridge Conferences lectures, Peirce describes what he calls “the first rule of logic,” as holding that one ought never artificially to obstruct the course of an investigation or “block the road of inquiry.”<sup>23</sup> According to Peirce, the road of inquiry is blocked whenever one assumes that there is nothing to learn from further investigation into a given domain, and hence that there can be no improvement upon the present state of knowledge in that field. Peirce maintains however that such an assumption will be absolutely repugnant and inadmissible to anyone of a genuinely scientific temperament, for the truly committed inquirer is animated by a “will to learn,” or what he elsewhere calls “the true scientific *Eros*.”<sup>24</sup> Peirce's talk of such a “will to learn” recalls the title of James's 1896 essay, inviting comparison between their respective positions.

For Peirce, then, the scientific enterprise is the expression of a restless and insatiable desire to learn, and rests therefore upon what

James would term the “passional nature” of the inquirer. What is first and foremost presupposed in the will to learn, according to Peirce, is a “dissatisfaction with one’s present state of opinion,” and hence the willingness to act so as to make up for its shortcomings.<sup>25</sup> The dissatisfaction which Peirce has in mind here is not, of course, any kind of sceptical unease that one’s beliefs fall short of some ideal standard and ought, therefore, to be abandoned, but rather the impatience which results from an unquenchable appetite for building and improving upon those opinions which one presently holds—rejecting them when necessary, but otherwise refining and strengthening them.

To repeat one of Peirce’s points from “The Doctrine of Chances,” however, the willingness to inquire is conditional upon the hope that one’s efforts shall not be thwarted. This presupposes in turn, moreover, that one believes that success is at the very least possible, and hence that there obtain whatever conditions are necessary for the possibility in question. Peirce, admittedly, does not explicitly state that any beliefs are necessarily implicit in this hope, but it is difficult to escape the conclusion that such doxastic commitments follow immediately from the apparent impossibility of hoping for anything that one does not believe to be possible. When, in addition, it is remembered that Peirce’s pragmatism construes an agent’s beliefs in terms of the general rules or habits by which their actions are informed, the willingness to inquire seems especially apt to imply various kinds of belief. If this is so, however, then Peirce is committed to the possible admissibility of beliefs grounded in such affective states as hope and desire, at least where these function as necessary conditions of the possibility of inquiry.

Like Peirce, moreover, James maintains that the possibility of the scientific enterprise rests on a kind of passionate commitment on the inquirer’s part, for which no adequate evidential support can possibly be offered. Indeed, the following passage from “The Will to Believe” could easily be mistaken for any of a number of Peirce’s remarks on the same topic:

Our belief in truth itself, for instance, that there is a truth, and that our minds and it are made for each other, – what is it but a passionate affirmation of desire, in which our social system backs us up? We want to have a truth; we want to believe that our experiments and studies and discussions must put us in a continually better and better position towards it; and on this line we agree to fight out our thinking lives.<sup>26</sup>

For James then, as for Peirce, it is a futile exercise to try and persuade the philosophical sceptic to abandon their position by appealing to evidence. What is really at stake between the sceptic and one motivated by the scientific spirit is not any disagreement over the evidence of the situation, but rather a difference in volition and sentiment.

In his 1901 text, “On the Logic of Drawing History from Ancient Documents, Especially from Testimonies,” Peirce compares the predicament of the scientific inquirer to that of a military officer who must capture an enemy position or else see his side defeated.<sup>27</sup> Like the officer, Peirce maintains, the inquirer has no option but to hope that there is some means of achieving their desired outcome, and that they shall find it. In both cases, moreover, the stakes are sufficiently great to warrant one in acting upon hope alone, however little evidence may support the hypothesis that the end in question is really achievable. In making such a comparison, moreover, Peirce echoes a similar analogy which James had made in “The Will to Believe,” wherein one has no option but to believe that one is able to leap across a mountain ravine if one is not to remain stranded and freeze to death. There are, however, certain relevant disanalogies between the two scenarios. In the kinds of cases which occupy James’s attention, no interests are at stake apart from those of the agent responsible for taking the risk. This is entirely characteristic of the appeal for tolerance which James makes in his essay, insofar as he explicitly leaves it to each individual to decide which risks they are willing to take. For Peirce, however, it is the interests of an entire community which are at stake, and not to act is as much to abandon one’s fellows. For Peirce then, there is something positively repugnant and immoral about not taking the kinds of risks

which a concern for the interests of the community of inquirers ought to lead one to take. Curiously, then, while Peirce does indeed speak of science in Clifford-like moralistic tones, as Hollinger observes, his doing so forms a part of a broader anti-evidentialist position. Like James, Peirce maintains that there are cases in which it is not irrational to act on beliefs which are unsupported by sufficient evidence, but, unlike on James's position, one would indeed be at fault not to.

## VII

In closing, it may be noted that the different kinds of anti-evidentialism implied in James's position and Peirce's are not unrelated to their respectively nominalist and realist forms of pragmatism. James's nominalist pragmatism is intimately connected to a broad suspicion of universal norms and a preference for allowing individuals to assess for themselves what is appropriate to the specific circumstances in which one finds oneself. Cliffordian evidentialism is objectionable to James not only in its disregard for the role of one's passional nature in the formation of one's beliefs, but also for its presumptuous efforts to prescribe a single universal norm of rationality for all persons and situations, irrespective of broader contextual considerations regarding what might be rational under the circumstances, such as the goods at stake and the agent's personal estimation of their relative value. For James, then, the anti-evidentialist outcome does not prescribe one decision rather than another, since every agent must evaluate each case on their, and its, own terms.

Peirce's conception of rationality is more unified and prescriptive than James's without subscribing, however, to the evidentialist's comprehensive prohibition against grounding one's beliefs in anything other than the evidence which bears on some matter. While privileging a general scientific conception of rationality in a manner reminiscent of the evidentialist, Peirce also maintains that science cannot provide its own foundation, but must rest upon various other commitments and presuppositions, including

a reverence for the investigative enterprise and its community of activists. There can be no question here, however, of a Jamesian plurality of values based upon the equal and separate authority of different agents. While it accommodates the wills and sentiments of inquirers within its account of legitimate belief, it is also expected, within the Peircean community of inquiry, that its members shall agree upon their most fundamental values.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See Gavin.
- <sup>2</sup> Hookway and Cooke are both notable exceptions.
- <sup>3</sup> See Goudge.
- <sup>4</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Vol. 5, 3.
- <sup>5</sup> James, *Pragmatism*, 259.
- <sup>6</sup> James, 32.
- <sup>7</sup> James, 260.
- <sup>8</sup> James, 261.
- <sup>9</sup> James, 263.
- <sup>10</sup> Hookway, 152.
- <sup>11</sup> Gale interprets James in particularly strong terms on this score.
- <sup>12</sup> James, *Will to Believe*, 63.
- <sup>13</sup> The closing passages of James's essay make his admiration for such heroism especially clear.
- <sup>14</sup> James, *Will to Believe*, 30–31.
- <sup>15</sup> James, *Pragmatism*, 28–29.
- <sup>16</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Vol. 5, 12.
- <sup>17</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Vol. 3, 11.
- <sup>18</sup> Hollinger, 75.
- <sup>19</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Vol. 5, 384.
- <sup>20</sup> Rosenthal maintains, however, that Peirce is closer to Kuhn than is typically appreciated.
- <sup>21</sup> The six-part series in question, collectively known as the "Illustrations of the Logic of Science" series, appeared between November, 1877 and August, 1878 in *Popular Science Monthly*.
- <sup>22</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Vol. 2, 655.
- <sup>23</sup> Now published as *Reasoning and the Logic of Things*, James originally arranged these lectures on behalf of Peirce, who was somewhat resentful at the suggestion that this be taken as an opportunity to speak on

”more popular subjects” as opposed to the topics in formal logic which were at that time occupying his attention.

<sup>24</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Vol. 1, 620.

<sup>25</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Vol. 5, 583.

<sup>26</sup> James, *Will to Believe*, 19.

<sup>27</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Vol. 7, 219.

*HÁBITOS Y CONOCIMIENTO:*  
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El presente artículo trabajará con los conceptos de creencia y hábito, considerando la perspectiva subjetivista de William James y, asimismo, la objetivista de Charles S. Peirce. Nos enfocaremos en mostrar las distancias entre ambos autores para centrar la discusión en la noción de creencia sustentada por Peirce como un “condicional contrafáctico.” Precisamente, para este filósofo norteamericano, la idea de creencia como condicional contrafáctico es lo que posibilita el sentido objetivo del mundo. Con base en esta definición de creencia, se defenderá el pragmatismo peirceano considerando la relación hábito-creencia-contrafáctico como una condición necesaria para la formulación de hipótesis y modelos científicos. Utilizando este aparato conceptual, se desarrollará posteriormente una noción de modelo científico, destacando su función hipotética en tanto posibilidad de pensamiento que permite imaginar la realidad más allá de lo empíricamente observable. Es precisamente este argumento el que permite justificar el pensamiento científico y su aproximación hacia el conocimiento de los “hábitos del mundo real.”



A finales del siglo XIX, el movimiento pragmatista surgió como una reacción filosófica ante los principios de la epistemología moderna. Diferentes concepciones filosóficas postulaban el conocimiento desde una perspectiva fundacionista: a saber, consideraban que algo puede estar presente de manera inmediata a la conciencia y, por eso mismo, se constituía como el fundamento del conocimiento verdadero acerca del mundo. Para la filosofía cartesiana, este “algo” eran los estados mentales; por otro lado, para las filosofías materialistas y empiristas lo dado a la conciencia eran los estados propios de los objetos. De acuerdo con la metáfora empleada por Richard Rorty, esta caracterización del conocimiento científico postula la idea de “un ojo de la mente,” a través del cual le son accesibles a la conciencia humana entidades fundamentales sobre las cuales la ciencia infiere un conocimiento verdadero.<sup>1</sup>

La necesidad de un fundamento epistemológico, como criterio de verdad del conocimiento dio paso a lo que Richard Bernstein<sup>2</sup> llamó “angustia cartesiana.” Esta búsqueda de un fundamento implicó asumir una postura relativista que exigía considerar caminos excluyentes: o bien, considerar la existencia de un fundamento del conocimiento; o bien, aceptar la indeterminación del mundo. Esta posición trajo consigo la reformulación acerca de las condiciones objetivas de la ciencia, y como consecuencia postuló criterios metodológicos (como al evidencia empírica) para determinar la verdad de una teoría.

El pragmatismo implicó en este punto una respuesta que motivó diferentes contraargumentos. En este sentido, edificó un marco teórico pluralista a través del cual se pudiera mediar entre las discusiones relativistas y las objetivistas. A diferencia del relativismo, el pluralismo postulado desde el enfoque pragmático no justifica la validez de toda proposición de sentido (aun cuando fueran contradictorias entre sí); en cambio se pregunta sobre las condiciones objetivas del conocimiento. Pero, dichas condiciones objetivas no surgen de la dualidad sujeto/objeto, ni de las propiedades sensibles de los objetos en la experiencia. El criterio de objetividad se plantea desde el campo de la intersubjetividad (la

interacción comunicativa entre hablantes) y la suprasubjetividad (las creencias y códigos que regulan la interacción comunicativa). De ahí que, la noción de hábito y consenso constituirían criterios metodológicos para escapar de las paradojas dualistas de la ciencia, pero también para evitar las consecuencias del escepticismo inherente en las discusiones de la ciencia moderna.

En el presente trabajo abordaremos los conceptos pragmáticos de creencia y hábito, desde la perspectiva subjetivista de William James<sup>3</sup> y la objetivista de Charles. S. Peirce.<sup>4</sup> Nos enfocaremos en mostrar las distancias entre ambos autores para centrar la discusión en la noción de creencia en Peirce como un “condicional contrafáctico.” Precisamente, para el filósofo norteamericano, esta idea de creencia como condicional contrafáctico es la que posibilita el sentido objetivo del mundo. Así pues, frente a la postura pragmatista de James, en las líneas subsiguientes se defenderá el pragmaticismo peirceano, considerando la relación hábito-creencia-contrafáctico como una condición necesaria para la formulación de hipótesis y modelos científicos.

Posteriormente, se desarrollará una noción de modelo científico desde una perspectiva pragmática, destacando su función hipotética en tanto posibilidad de pensamiento. De acuerdo con el razonamiento semiótico de Peirce, la posibilidad de establecer una proposición, tal que postule una relación condicional contraria a la experiencia observada (y observable hasta ese momento), permite de hecho potencializar el pensamiento hacia la investigación de los “hábitos del mundo real,”<sup>5</sup> y es en este marco—debemos añadir— en donde los modelos científicos permiten pensar los fenómenos más allá de la observación empírica.

#### **HÁBITOS Y CREENCIAS: DE WILLIAM JAMES A CHARLES S. PEIRCE**

La noción de creencia en la filosofía moderna establece un punto de referencia en la discusión pragmatista. Podemos rastrear este concepto en la filosofía empirista de David Hume,<sup>6</sup> así como en el concepto de “canon de la razón pura” de Immanuel Kant.<sup>7</sup> La discusión fundamental de William James se enfoca en los principios

y problemas de la ciencia empírica, y es por ello que vamos a retomar la noción de creencia de Hume, como punto de partida para abordar dicho concepto desde la postura pragmática.

Para el filósofo escocés una creencia es un sentimiento que permite distinguir entre las ficciones de la imaginación y las ideas del juicio. En este sentido, es una experiencia del espíritu que permite reconocer lo que es real, de lo que no lo es. De ahí que...

Siempre que un objeto se hace presente a nuestra memoria o a nuestros sentidos, inmediatamente, por la fuerza de la costumbre, nuestra imaginación se ve obligada a concebir aquel otro objeto con el que va unido; y dicha representación siempre va acompañada por una sensación o sentimiento, distintos de las divagaciones de la fantasía. En esto consiste la naturaleza de la creencia.<sup>8</sup>

Consideremos algunos puntos destacables dentro de esta definición. En principio, el término “costumbre” tiene que ver en Hume con una disposición producida por la repetición de un acto.<sup>9</sup> Esta disposición conforma el cimiento de la relación causal de los fenómenos: a saber, en virtud de haber observado dos hechos vinculados entre sí (por ejemplo, fuego-calor), la costumbre obliga al observador a inferir que la observación de uno implica la ocurrencia del otro. Se genera entonces una representación que vincula dos hechos u objetos y, en este sentido, la facultad de la imaginación es la que posibilita dicha concepción. Hay dos puntos relevantes a considerar. Por un lado, la imaginación como facultad creativa, pues no es la ocurrencia del fenómeno la que determina su representación de conocimiento, es la imaginación misma la que establece los vínculos que constituyen la representación causal de los hechos. Por otro, está el papel de la costumbre que traza una expectativa sobre la ocurrencia de los hechos, de tal manera que permite al pensamiento determinar las cuestiones de hecho.

La discusión específica de W. James sobre el empirismo está en razón de los fundamentos científicos.<sup>10</sup> El filósofo pragmatista considera problemática la justificación de las sensaciones simples

como fundamentos del conocimiento. Si bien no niega la existencia de una “realidad independiente” que se impone al pensamiento – cuestión que también va a sostener Peirce–, empero la noción de “sensación simple” le resulta contradictoria como principio para dar cuenta de la conciencia. Por ello afirma que “muchos libros comienzan con las sensaciones, consideradas como hechos mentales más simples [...] Pero esto es abandonar el método empírico de investigación. Nadie ha tenido nunca una sensación simple de sí mismo.”

Para James, desde el punto de vista del método empírico de la investigación en psicología, la conciencia está constituida por multiplicidad de objetos y relaciones, en donde las ideas son entidades que se vinculan entre sí, unas con otras.<sup>11</sup> De ahí que no resulta justificable pensar en entidades simples, separadas y fundamentales. Y de ser el caso, dichas entidades simples no son resultado de la observación empírica, sino de la reflexión analítica posterior a la experiencia. De ahí que, el autor acepta el papel de la experiencia como el campo en donde se someten a prueba las teorías y creencias, pero rechaza el carácter de fundamento de la conciencia de las impresiones o sensaciones simples.<sup>12</sup>

Sin embargo, el papel de la imaginación en la conformación de la creencia resulta fundamental desde la perspectiva pragmática. En contra del idealismo y del empirismo, James sostiene un argumento en contra del dualismo sujeto-objeto: una representación de conocimiento (sea una imagen o concepto) tiene una función cognitiva determinada por la conjunción de diferentes experiencias y, dado que las experiencias se vinculan entre sí por analogía, parecido o sucesión, entonces, cada nueva experiencia constituye un punto de avance, una transición hacia el objeto conocido. En este punto, cada experiencia desarrolla, transforma y corrobora el conjunto de experiencias interconectadas que constituían la imagen de algo en el mundo. Pero, para que esto funcione así, es necesario que la relación entre experiencias anteriores y experiencia actual estimule la formulación de una expectativa, es decir, la posibilidad de pensar la ocurrencia de algo en el tiempo. Por eso, “en este proceso de desarrollo y corroboración [...] como una sucesión de

transiciones concretamente sentidas, reside todo lo que pueden contener o significar el hecho de que una idea conozca una percepción. Siempre que se den tales transiciones, la primera experiencia conoce la segunda.”<sup>13</sup>

Se construye así un “sistema de experiencias” en donde cada experiencia está en una relación de transición con otras dentro del sistema. Esto es, hay experiencias actuales que suprimen o remplazan las anteriores; o bien, dichas experiencias anteriores se transforman y amplían su significado; o, finalmente, hay experiencias que representan a otras porque cumplen mejor su función significativa.<sup>14</sup> En todo este sistema, la experiencia es la piedra de toque que determina la validez del contenido experiencial. Las ideas y objetos representados dentro de este sistema de experiencias conforman a su vez sistemas interconectados de ideas que se corresponden con los sistemas mismos de la realidad.

Y es en este punto donde la imaginación adquiere un papel relevante. A través de su cuerpo, el ser humano tiene una experiencia directa de las relaciones y transiciones dentro del flujo continuo de la experiencia. Pero, además, la experiencia es un acto creativo de la imaginación: establece las relaciones de interconexión entre experiencias y representaciones. De ahí que James parece seguir a Kant en el papel conformador de la imaginación, pues para el filósofo alemán la imaginación es la que constituye una representación del objeto sin su presencia (imagen), pero también la que permite pensarlo en la percepción de la experiencia (esquema). La creencia para James se plantea sobre la base de esta postura cognitiva. Las representaciones de conocimiento—sustentadas en el planteamiento “una experiencia conoce a otra”—tienen una función práctica concreta: “experimentar sobre nuestras ideas de la realidad nos ahorra el trabajo de hacerlo con las experiencias reales que estas representan.”<sup>15</sup> Y este significado práctico constituye el carácter fundamental de una creencia, pues permite observar los fenómenos del mundo desde un conjunto de expectativas. En su trabajo *La voluntad de creer*, el autor caracteriza la creencia en dos sentidos: como una disposición a actuar de una manera determinada; y



además como un acuerdo que establece una comunidad con respecto a la verdad del mundo.

Para James, esta verdad es práctica, no necesariamente epistemológica: una creencia verdadera depende de su utilidad en una circunstancia verificable. Así, una creencia es real si los miembros de una comunidad necesitan de ella para afrontar el advenimiento del mundo en la experiencia. Frente a una nueva experiencia, la creencia funciona como aquel sistema de interconexiones que determina una expectativa frente al fenómeno y, simultáneamente, admite el azar y la variabilidad de objetos en la nueva experiencia. De ahí que no hay separación entre sujeto-objeto (o en la nomenclatura de James “conciencia-contenido”), pues la creencia constituye el acto creativo de la imaginación que produce una imagen cognoscible del mundo que permite, posteriormente, obrar sobre la existencia. La experiencia es, desde este punto de vista, el criterio de verificación de una creencia, y es por ello que James ha insistido en retomar las riendas de la investigación empírica.

En cambio, para Peirce la verificación de una creencia no constituye una condición necesaria para que la creencia funcione como tal. Junto con James, acepta la autoridad de la experiencia para confrontar la validez del conocimiento, así como el rol de los deseos y pasiones en la elección de una creencia por otra; pero no reduce la función significativa de la creencia al ámbito de la cognición subjetiva, ni a su verificación empírica.

Sigamos el razonamiento del pragmatismo peirceano: una creencia conforma un contenido proposicional cuyo significado es otro contenido proposicional. En el texto “¿Qué es el Pragmatismo?”, Peirce se pregunta cuál es entonces el significado específico que determina una creencia.<sup>16</sup> Sin recurrir al criterio verificacionista de la psicología, establece que el significado de una creencia es un hábito aplicable a la conducta sujeta a autocontrol en toda situación y en todo fin. De ahí que el significado de una creencia está en relación con el futuro, es decir, con una acción aún no observada, pues “la conducta futura es la única que está sujeta a autocontrol.”<sup>17</sup> Las creencias, en consecuencia, configuran un

campo de expectativas en tanto predicen la ocurrencia de hechos experimentales a futuro, los cuales pueden ser descritos por la proposición afirmada como hechos posibles deducidos a partir de la intuición y la imaginación.

Sin embargo, la afirmación de un hábito auto-controlado no es resultado del mero intelecto racional. En el texto “Pragmatismo” — un trabajo redactado a manera de carta dirigida a un editor como aclaración por el rechazo en la publicación de un artículo—Peirce entiende por “auto-control” un hábito que tiene una tendencia o “propósito” proyectada hacia la realización futura de un conjunto de acciones presentes, mismas que están en interacción con los hechos actuales.<sup>18</sup> La idea de autocontrol tiene que ver con una conciencia que se establece en los esfuerzos de confrontación generados por los hechos de la experiencia y la experimentación en la imaginación. Si este esfuerzo logra generar en el intérprete una disposición a la acción (o bien debilita una disposición anterior), entonces se formula un hábito auto-controlado. De ahí que el propósito de la creencia dirige los comportamientos hacia una tendencia al cumplimiento de las expectativas y la satisfacción de los deseos, pese a las contingencias surgidas en el mundo factual.

De ahí que para Peirce, el criterio de utilidad de una creencia no puede determinarse por las consecuencias prácticas observables en los comportamientos de los intérpretes. Su noción específica de creencia se postula en términos de una posibilidad no factual: a saber, el pensamiento falible del investigador de ciencia no implica necesariamente la falsedad de sus creencias. Desde una perspectiva semiótica, plantea una noción de verdad pragmática que permite cimentar la creencia en criterios objetivos. En este sentido, la verdad de una proposición no tiene que comprobarse en ciertas condiciones fácticas; pero sí se pueden postular en la imaginación ciertas condiciones como posibilidades en las cuales podría comprobarse su verdad, considerando una tendencia o propósito encaminado hacia la satisfacción de los deseos.

### HÁBITO EN PEIRCE Y LOS MODELOS EN LA CIENCIA

Para Karl-Otto Apel la noción de “hábito” en Peirce sugiere una línea de continuidad con la noción de “círculo hermenéutico” del W. Dilthey y el concepto de “mediación dialéctica” de F. Hegel.<sup>19</sup> En un esfuerzo por precisar el concepto, en principio se puede afirmar que el carácter de un hábito está determinado por la anticipación de las posibilidades de existencia presente y, en este sentido, la naturaleza de dicha anticipación se materializa a través de la acción presente.

La postura psicológica de William James supone que hay un vínculo directo entre el comportamiento observado y la expresión de una creencia. Como se planteó en las líneas anteriores, la observación de un comportamiento en la experiencia es una condición epistemológica necesaria para determinar la validez de una creencia desde un enfoque verificacionista. El pragmatismo de Peirce no está de acuerdo con este supuesto, que bien puede caer inevitablemente en una falacia de petición de principio.

Una primera definición de Peirce nos permitirá iniciar esta reflexión. Para el filósofo norteamericano “la esencia de la creencia es el establecimiento de un hábito, y las diferentes creencias se distinguen por los diferentes modos de acción a los que dan lugar.”<sup>20</sup> En este sentido, un hábito constituye las reglas de comportamiento que se fundamentan en principios generales, pero dichas reglas no se correspondan directamente con nada empírico. Entonces, un hábito es una guía normativa para toda acción, en el sentido de determinar no acciones presentes, sino aquellas que podrían surgir como posibilidades lógicas, aunque en el ámbito de la experiencia sean improbables. De ahí que la postulación de una creencia tiene que ver con el desarrollo del comportamiento no observable, prospectado hacia un futuro incierto pero imaginable como posibilidad.

Acerca de los principios que fundamentan un hábito, conviene establecer que los “conceptos intelectuales” determinan hábitos de tal manera que contienen como referencia un comportamiento general.<sup>21</sup> De ahí que el hábito está sujeto al pensamiento de generalidad y, por lo mismo, se manifiesta como terceridad

susceptible de constituirse de manera lingüística (en proposiciones y leyes). Pero el comportamiento general enunciado como ley no es presente, ni observable; en todo caso, es un “would-be,” una posibilidad engendrada por la cognición sin una correspondencia directa con la experiencia observada hasta ese momento. En este sentido un hábito implica “la tendencia (que) consiste en lo que será, y lo que ha sido no tiene que ver con ello. Pero lo que será no es un Acontecimiento Real. Es cierto que algunos hábitos fisiológicos y algunos otros están determinados por lo que se ha hecho [...] sólo porque hay una tendencia especial en virtud de la cual lo que se ha hecho se hará con más frecuencia...”<sup>22</sup>

De ahí que el hábito peirceano determina las condiciones de una acción que no ha ocurrido. Para Apel en este planteamiento descansa la idea de la creencia como un hábito constituido como un “condicional contrafáctico”: es decir, la función reguladora de un hábito no establece una consecuencia práctica real o existente; sino que postula un efecto práctico con independencia de la circunstancia determinada, aun cuando ésta sea contraria a toda experiencia previa.<sup>23</sup> Siguiendo las reflexiones planteadas por Peirce en su trabajo “Cómo esclarecer nuestras ideas,” Apel traduce la filosofía peirceana al lenguaje de la filosofía analítica y, desde esta perspectiva, considera que el significado de un hábito es una representación de las consecuencias prácticas posibles, deducidas en función de una regla del pensamiento. Así pues, en tanto representación, el contenido proposicional de un hábito es el resultado de un “experimento mental.”<sup>24</sup>

De acuerdo con lo anterior, un experimento mental es un ejercicio epistemológico en el cual se establece una función regulativa general del comportamiento, a partir de la anticipación imaginativa del intérprete y antes de la ocurrencia empírica de los hechos. Para Apel, si bien el experimento mental permite la corrección o falsación de una afirmación hipotética en tanto predicación de cualidades vinculadas a estados del mundo; empero, en el proceso de conocimiento (constituido de manera circular por la abducción/inducción/deducción) sólo confirma la fuerza del razonamiento deductivo: a saber, una postura nominalista implicada

en la semiótica peirceana en donde se acepta que, a partir del significado postulado en la hipótesis como posibilidad, se deducen consecuencias lógicas imaginables derivadas de las leyes, creencias y conocimientos previos que dirigen el pensamiento.

Esta “terceridad de la primeridad,” como la denomina el propio Apel, constituye uno de los fundamentos de la Máxima Pragmática que en el pragmaticismo peirceano será la piedra angular sobre la cual se articulará la distancia frente al pragmatismo de W. James.<sup>25</sup> Dicha máxima es un principio de razonamiento en el cual la concepción de los objetos implica el experimento mental de sus efectos prácticos. Por ello, concebir un objeto implica integrar sus efectos prácticos (sus cualidades posibles e imaginables) en una representación del pensamiento que no se reduce a una circunstancia específica observable.<sup>26</sup> Lo interesante de este enfoque está en la oportunidad de caracterizar al conocimiento como un proceso dinámico que no está sujeto de manera condicionada al ámbito de la experiencia y, por tanto, al campo de la comprobación empírica. En este punto concreto, el pragmaticismo de Peirce constituye un avance de la teoría del conocimiento como superación de los problemas implicados en el subjetivismo kantiano y el empirismo clásico.

Esto nos permite notar una condición concreta de los modelos científicos. Frente a la modalidad del esquematismo kantiano, Peirce postula una solución semiótica en clave no trascendental: el diagrama es una suerte de esquema constructivista que se constituye a posteriori, es decir, después de la abstracción e interpretación de diferentes experiencias.<sup>27</sup> En este sentido, Eco considera al diagrama, siguiendo las disertaciones de Peirce, como un “programa que sólo ocasionalmente se representa visualmente [...] siendo precisamente puro ícono, el diagrama exhibe un estado de cosas y nada más [...] se limita a mostrar relaciones de inherencia.”<sup>28</sup>

La noción de diagrama en Peirce se deriva de una postura diferente, no parte del entendimiento puro y de la estructura subjetiva como fundamento para deducir los principios de la síntesis de conocimiento. En cambio, la postura pragmática peirceana considera la lógica de la investigación y, a partir de ahí, deduce la

validez objetiva de la síntesis inferencial. Dentro de esta lógica, la validez del conocimiento descansa en la crítica del sentido que considera el consenso intersubjetivo de los miembros de una comunidad de pensamiento, como condición necesaria para la validez de un conocimiento. De esta manera, el diagrama tiene una lógica constructivista en donde las relaciones que componen la representación del objeto surgen como resultado de interpretaciones sucesivas, que detonan un proceso continuo a posteriori que construye al final del camino un diagrama conformado por elementos simbólicos codificados por una determinada comunidad. El diagrama parte de una inferencia hipotética inicial en el proceso de interpretación, y mantiene así una dinámica semiótica dual: por un lado condiciona la experiencia cognitiva del sujeto; y por otro se va construyendo episódicamente de manera procesual en un intercambio permanente con los datos sensibles de la experiencia. Por ello, “a diferencia del esquema, es tentativo, revisable, dispuesto a crecer por virtud de interpretación.”<sup>29</sup> Si bien el diagrama, al igual que el esquema, están configurados por una “imaginación figurativa,” o bien “imaginación productora,”<sup>30</sup> empero, la peculiaridad del diagrama está determinada por su elemento de segundidad: a saber, reelaborarse a partir de las ocurrencias constantes que determinan la existencia del fenómeno en la experiencia.

De acuerdo con el artículo de Peirce titulado “Cómo esclarecer nuestras ideas,” lo real se identifica con la opinión última que resulta consistente dentro de la comunidad de investigadores y, en este sentido, no deja lugar a disensos posteriores.<sup>31</sup> Ello supone un progreso permanente del estado de conocimiento, en tanto cada opinión, vista como hipótesis, resulta plausible dentro de la comunidad, pero no concluyente: es, ante todo una sugerencia de sentido que debe cuestionarse al interior de los hábitos y creencias de la comunidad.

Pero, esto último nos lleva a sospechar de esta condición de la metafísica como un mero convencionalismo, que sólo argumenta (en apariencia) la eficacia de la práctica y la pertinencia de una validación provisional de cualquier convicción. Para evitar el

problema emergente, Peirce propone—de acuerdo con Otto Apel—dos condiciones que funcionen como “contra-instancias” frente al convencionalismo. Una de ellas, considerar los presupuestos trascendentales kantianos, pero según el esquema de los postulados de la razón práctica: a saber, establecer un “principio regulativo” que determine una finalidad al progreso del conocimiento, pero en tanto fin, es sólo una suposición hipotética no necesariamente realizable (de manera fáctica). En el sentido de la pragmática peirciana, este principio regulativo está en suponer como fin el consenso último, el acuerdo final en el que los miembros de una comunidad se han puesto de acuerdo sobre la verdad del objeto y, por ende, su realidad.

Así pues, la idea de una evolución infinita del conocimiento nos permite inferir la existencia hipotética de una comunidad asimismo infinita. Un ideal regulativo que suponga el consenso absoluto como un fin hipotético permite establecer límites metafísicos (no realizables en lo fáctico) que encauce el comportamiento de los sujetos hacia la consecución de ese fin. De ahí que, dentro de esta evolución infinita del conocimiento, la razón se materializa, primero en hábitos de comportamiento y leyes de pensamiento, para luego concretizarse en la comunidad de sujetos cognoscentes que han alcanzado un consenso sobre el sentido de su realidad.

Esto nos permite deducir algunas conclusiones importantes con respecto al conocimiento proporcionado por un modelo científico. La realidad o mundo que establece la articulación entre teoría y fenómeno, por mediación del modelo, no es una cuestión comprobable dentro de un estado de conocimiento específico. En todo caso es una evidencia demostrable a posteriori, como finalidad, no como medio.

Así pues, un modelo, resultado de una forma específica de conocimiento, no puede establecer un vínculo exhaustivo y determinante con una realidad potencial, en todo caso es una posibilidad de conocimiento que no puede comprobarse en la experiencia. La facticidad de una ciencia, desde una semiótica trascendental, no depende de la experimentación particular, sino de la acumulación evolutiva de una comunidad, del consenso

determinado por la humanidad y, desde este punto, de la posibilidad misma del conocimiento científico de plantear un interpretante final último. Todas estas condiciones no dependen del científico, ni de una institución específica, sino de los fines mismos de conocimiento de la humanidad.

Este punto es importante porque el realismo semiótico de Peirce no plantea la no existencia del mundo externo, o del mundo físico; sino que el conocimiento de la estructura real de la naturaleza, como “hábito real del mundo,” es una condición teleológica: un ideal regulativo que determina el sentido de la ciencia, no una condición empírica particular de la investigación.<sup>32</sup> La diversidad de modelos y enfoques epistemológicos permiten esa evolución episódica del conocimiento que pondera la realidad del mundo como una posibilidad alcanzable como finalidad sin fin por la comunidad de pensamiento.

Desde este punto, conviene precisar que, desde una semiótica trascendental, una comunidad que tiene como fin el conocimiento de la totalidad de hecho es incapaz temporalmente de acceder a ese nivel de realidad a través de sus teorías y modelos científicos. Pues, este conocimiento de lo real, como fin, es evolutivo: es decir, implica la integración consensuada de todos los conocimientos posibles realizada por una comunidad universal.

#### **CONCLUSIÓN: PRECISIONES Y DISTINCIONES EPISTEMOLÓGICAS ENTRE PRAGMATISMO Y PRAGMATICISMO**

En un ensayo publicado en 2019 había iniciado una primera discusión sobre la distinción de la noción de “verdad” en W. James, J. Habermas y Ch. S. Peirce.<sup>33</sup> Ese trabajo me permitió comenzar el camino hacia la incursión de las discusiones que el pragmaticismo plantea frente al pragmatismo, pero ahora siguiendo la lectura de Peirce desde la filosofía del lenguaje, la epistemología y la semiótica. En este sentido, considero que es importante hacer una síntesis sobre lo que he explorado hasta ahora.

El pragmaticismo de Peirce constituye un avance considerable respecto a las epistemologías anteriores. Su enfoque semiótico permite establecer puntos de discusión frente a los fundamentos de



la filosofía moderna. Coincido con Otto Apel con un punto fundamental: el cambio de paradigma que implicó la noción de “creencia” y “hábito.” Si bien en principio fueron términos comunes en las cartas y discusiones de los círculos pragmatistas a los que pertenecían Peirce y James; empero, el giro peirceano constituyó un punto radical en la transformación de la epistemología contemporánea.

Considero que la teoría semiótica de Peirce constituyó el verdadero fundamento del llamado “giro pragmático.” Mi argumento se fundamenta a partir de la noción de creencia y sus consecuencias en el ámbito de la ciencia—por supuesto, en principio estoy dialogando con las consideraciones que el propio Apel realiza al respecto, pero iré más allá. En los inicios del movimiento intelectual pragmatista llega a un campo común de referencia respecto a la noción de creencia: considerar máximas o principios regulativos que dirijan la acción hacia un fin parece ser una noción de sentido común bastante evidente. En este aspecto, la postura psicológica de James encuentra en la conducta observable el criterio para determinar la verificación de una creencia operando en el campo de las acciones prácticas y la utilidad.

Peirce está siguiendo a Kant muy de cerca en la discusión sobre la moral y la filosofía de la historia. Retoma de este último ámbito la noción de “ideal regulativo” para establecer el criterio de “finalidad sin fin” como un ideal que determina las acciones de manera prospectiva: a saber, como un conjunto de actos dirigidos orgánicamente hacia un fin ideal, que no implica su realización histórica.<sup>34</sup> Este fundamento constituye la base del razonamiento pragmaticista sobre la creencia, y sería determinante para comprender que, por un lado, el fin de las acciones no es directamente observable y, por otro, que las acciones siguen ideales regulativos que no están determinados por la contingencia empírica de los hechos presentes.

La ecuación resultó interesante cuando se formuló la Máxima Pragmática. Por primera vez en el pensamiento peirceano se planteó un fundamento consistente acerca del modo en que la ciencia podría escapar del círculo vicioso implicado en la comprobación del

conocimiento a través de la evidencia empírica. Así pues, pensar en la creencia como un condicional contrafáctico resultaría relevante para comprender cómo nuestros modelos científicos y metodologías no sólo eran potencialmente falibles; sino que además no estaban comprometidos con su verificación empírica. De hecho, la distinción más importante que hace Peirce a la noción de creencia de James está asentada en la afirmación de la realidad como una posibilidad de pensamiento sujeta a la intuición y la imaginación... en un campo de investigación racional más allá de la observación...

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Rorty, *La filosofía y el espejo de la Naturaleza*, 44 y ss.

<sup>2</sup> Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, 13 y ss.

<sup>3</sup> James, *La voluntad de creer*; James, *El significado de la verdad*.

<sup>4</sup> Peirce, *Obra filosófica reunida, Tomos I y II*.

<sup>5</sup> Peirce, Tomo II, 502 y ss.

<sup>6</sup> Hume, *Investigación*, 61 y ss.

<sup>7</sup> Kant, *Crítica de la Razón Pura*, 625 y ss.

<sup>8</sup> Hume, *Investigación*, 72.

<sup>9</sup> Hume, 75.

<sup>10</sup> James, *Principios de Psicología*, 219.

<sup>11</sup> James, *Principios de Psicología*.

<sup>12</sup> Baste señalar como una referencia al problema señalado por William James la relación entre conciencia-percepción como fundamento de la apercepción-autoconciencia, planteado por la epistemología de Kant. Uno de los planteamientos problemáticos de Kant, en su trabajo “Refutación del Idealismo”, está en afirmar que no puede haber autoconciencia (yo pienso-experiencia interna) sin la conciencia-percepción de algo (experiencia externa), y esto establece un argumento en contra del idealismo cartesiano. Cfr. Kant, *Crítica de la Razón Pura*, 246 y ss.

<sup>13</sup> James, *El significado de la verdad*, 98.

<sup>14</sup> Esta idea de James sobre un sistema de experiencias y un sistema de ideas interconectadas está muy cercano a la cosmología evolutiva de Peirce, específicamente a la noción de “sinequismo”. Para el filósofo norteamericano el sinequismo consiste en la continuidad de ideas, en donde las ideas se extienden en el tiempo y afectan a otras ideas. De ahí

que una idea, al diseminarse, pierde su afectación pero permanece su cualidad. Al respecto: Cfr. El texto del propio autor “La inmortalidad a la luz del sinequismo”. En Peirce, *Obra Filosófica Reunida*. Tomo II, 49 y ss.

<sup>15</sup> James, *El significado de la verdad*, 101.

<sup>16</sup> Peirce, *Obra filosófica reunida*. Tomo II.

<sup>17</sup> Peirce, Tomo II, 421.

<sup>18</sup> Peirce, Tomo II, 421.

<sup>19</sup> Apel, *El camino del pensamiento de Charles S. Peirce*, 90 y ss.

<sup>20</sup> Peirce, *Obra filosófica reunida*, Tomo I, 177.

<sup>21</sup> Sobre la relación del Hábito con los conceptos y la experimentación en el Mundo Interior y el Mundo Exterior, Peirce publicó una nota en el MS 318: 183–184. La nota está reproducida y puede consultarse en el texto: Cfr. Peirce, *Obra filosófica reunida*, Tomo II, 655.

<sup>22</sup> Peirce, *Obra filosófica reunida*, Tomo II, 578–9.

<sup>23</sup> Apel, *El camino del pensamiento de Charles S. Peirce*, 100 y ss.

<sup>24</sup> Si bien la noción de “experimento mental” (Gedankenexperiment o bien thought experiment) se atribuye en su primera acepción al científico danés Hans Christian Ørsted (1812) y posteriormente al filósofo austríaco Ernst Mach “Über Gedankenexperimente”<sup>24</sup>, filósofos como Karl Otto Apel han insistido en que la relevancia de la Máxima Pragmática propuesta por Peirce constituye una forma precisa de comprender cómo operan los experimentos mentales. Cfr. Apel, *El camino del pensamiento de Peirce*, 105 y ss.

<sup>25</sup> Apel, *El camino del pensamiento de Charles S. Peirce*, 163 y ss.

<sup>26</sup> Para trabajar la relación entre la Máxima Pragmática, el Experimento Mental y el Hábito en Peirce, Cfr. Apel, *El camino del pensamiento de Peirce*, 278.

<sup>27</sup> Peirce, *Obra filosófica reunida*, Tomo I, 578–9.

<sup>28</sup> Peirce, Tomo I, 137.

<sup>29</sup> Peirce, Tomo I, 139.

<sup>30</sup> Peirce, Tomo I, 139; Kant, *Antropología en sentido pragmático*.

<sup>31</sup> Peirce, Tomo II.

<sup>32</sup> Peirce, Tomo II, 503.

<sup>33</sup> Ver: Horta, 123–147.

<sup>34</sup> Cfr. Kant, *Filosofía de la Historia*, 39 y ss.

# WILLIAM JAMES AND CHARLES SANDERS PEIRCE ON EXPERIENCE AND PERCEPTION:

A RADICAL EXPLORATION OF THE UNIVERSES OF EXPERIENCE

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This paper aims to show the fundamental accord in Charles Sanders Peirce's and William James's views on perception and experience. Both classical pragmatists discover the richness of experience and from the renewed value they see in experience they construct a theory of perception. There are important nuances and differences between the two, but my claim is that their agreement is deeper than previously thought. Such agreement, in a pragmatic fashion, can be understood in how both of their accounts of experience converge in a richer theory of perception as a result of the pursuit that the pragmatic maxim makes possible.



**I**t has been acknowledged almost unanimously that one key feature of pragmatism is the overcoming of false dichotomies. This goes hand in hand with the directedness of intellectual concepts towards consequences in action and conduct, as well as a future-oriented conception of belief and knowledge. Both Peirce and James in their own versions of pragmatism are quite effective at questioning different dichotomies. This is an important reason why pragmatism criticises the “spectator theory of knowledge,” i.e., a theory of knowledge that assumes a static nature of knowledge. For the classical pragmatists, knowledge cannot be defined in terms of fixed pieces of information. Rather, knowledge is part of an interactive dynamism with experience that is oriented to future interaction with experience. Pragmatists such as Peirce and James hold that beliefs are not discrete information but habits of action. The spectator theory of knowledge (one focused in the past and in fixed individual beliefs) and its corresponding theory of perception presupposes a chasm between the subject who knows and the world that is known. Our pragmatists attacked the presuppositions that led up to such dichotomy.

Thus, in this article, I will put forward both Peirce’s and James’s conception of experience as a natural derivation of their pragmatisms and will propose that this dynamic conception of experience helped them derive an altogether novel conception and theory of perception. Peirce’s pragmatism and James’s radical empiricism allow a natural questioning of experience, reality, and perception. One of the theses to uphold here is that Peirce’s pragmatism and James’s radical empiricism converge in their openness to the universes of experience, that openness is radical and evolves into a deep theory of perception. Peirce himself recognised that his own pragmatism leads up to a view of experience very similar to James’s radical empiricism. In this paper I will substantiate why Peirce thought so. However, Peirce’s attitude to James’s pragmatism is somehow ambivalent. Due to this unclear appraisal of James by Peirce, differences have been emphasized enough. In fact, few people have shown their important

convergence. Christopher Hookway is one of these scholars who has shown the deep elements of convergence between the two pragmatists, Hookway tells us:

On at least two occasions, Peirce acknowledged that his pragmatism was closely tied to James's "radical empiricism." In 1903, he called himself a "pragmatist or radical empiricist" (CP, 7.617); and two years later he attributed James's endorsement of pragmatism to a recognition that "his radical empiricism substantially answered to the writer's definition of pragmatism, albeit with a certain difference in the point of view" (CP, 5.414).<sup>1</sup>

Peirce's positive assessment of James's radical empiricism as properly pragmatistic is one of the main reasons why I believe they share a common openness to experience that the pragmatic maxim renders possible. Of course, there is also that puzzling affirmation of James in which he insists that his radical empiricism is not tied necessarily to his pragmatism:

[T]here is no logical connexion between pragmatism, as I understand it, and a doctrine which I have recently set forth as 'radical empiricism.' The latter stands on its own feet. One may entirely reject it and still be a pragmatist.<sup>2</sup>

Nonetheless, the different perspective that Peirce and James have about pragmatism does not alter the fundamental agreement of their conceptions of experience and perception, as will be shown below. James provided a statement of his own doctrine for Peirce's entry on pragmatism in *Baldwin's Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*. There, James's quotation defined pragmatism as a philosophy which claims that "the whole meaning of a concept expresses itself either in the shape of conduct to be recommended or of experience to be expected."<sup>3</sup> Peirce noted that "between this definition and mine there certainly appears to be no slight theoretical divergence, which, for the most part, becomes evanescent in practice."<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, in yet another passage critical of James's claims about the content of his pragmatism, Peirce again favourably

concludes that “practically, his view and mine must, I think, coincide, except where he allows considerations not at all pragmatic to have weight.”<sup>5</sup> It is the content of that coincidence and convergence which we will explore in what follows.

#### PEIRCE’S ACCOUNT OF PERCEPTION AND EXPERIENCE

Charles Sanders Peirce evolved many of his views on experience and perception over the years. We have fascinating material in his early anti-Cartesian papers in his *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* series and in his *Illustrations of the Logic of Science* series of papers. However, in these lines I will mostly focus on his late works. I will focus on late works because these mature thoughts have a reflective clarity of being related to pragmatism. Peirce’s *Harvard Lectures* of 1903 attempted to clarify what kind of pragmatism he was aiming to achieve. In the *Harvard Lectures*, Peirce introduces a new theory of perception grounded in the categories and the results from phenomenology, aesthetics, and ethics (what he called, in his architectonic system, the ‘normative sciences’) and the metaphysical doctrines he considered the consequences of pragmatism.

Thus, for Peirce, there is a realm of reality associated with each of the categories. His phenomenology (the application of his system of categories) helps us to see that by prolonging inquiry in the context of a discipline of knowledge we will eventually find a realm where categories are manifested. With regards to the classification of patterns of intelligible experience, the category that stands out is thirdness. Theories of perception require this methodology; they need to be grounded in the richness of experience. The reality of thirdness, thus, is necessary to explain a mode of influence of external facts that cannot be explained by mechanical action alone but are required to account for the continuity, complexity, and richness of experience. Peirce argued that pragmatism is a logical or semeiotic thesis concerning the meaning of a particular kind of symbol: the proposition. Propositions are vehicles to express the habits of experience in a self-controlled and intelligent way. Therefore, Peirce’s approach to perception reveals a “mode of



being” and uses his pragmatic method and semeiotic to ground perception in the system of categories.

**PEIRCE’S METAPHYSICAL BACKGROUND OF PERCEPTION**

Peirce derived a body of beliefs and doctrines from the use of the pragmatic maxim. His pragmatism used the maxim in such a way that a theory of categories and a set of metaphysical doctrines evolves out of it. In order to understand his theory of perception, let us introduce, as briefly as possible, this set of conceptions.

Peirce offered his system of categories as a way of making sense of the “three universes of experience.” The system of categories encompasses everything that can be manifested in experience, conceivable as well as actual. The categories are three: firstness, secondness, and thirdness.

Firstness is the category of possibility and quality; something that is undefined and possible is a first. Let us consider for a moment an example we could elaborate on: if I go out and I find myself surrounded by fog, the feeling of indetermination by the presence of the fog is firstness. Secondness is the category of reaction and facts; in our example I will feel the need to stop before the fog, and I react to it. A fact that is concrete is a second, too; let us think of a given individual event: inasmuch as I can identify it as a single event, then it is a second. Finally, thirdness is the category of habits, of patterns of experience: if I successfully find myself a way of navigating through the fog, because I understand it will eventually fade in a particular direction, that habit of action will capture the thirdness or pattern of a natural event such as fog.

Other than the distinction of universes of experience, which accounts for the richness of experience, Peirce also developed, by applying the consequences of using his pragmatic maxim as a logical principle, an a posteriori metaphysics that includes different doctrines. The three doctrines are:

1. Tychism: there is real chance

2. Synechism: real continuity (with respect to experience and perception is fallibilism objectified) is manifested in reality, and is prior to the discreteness of objects of experience.
3. Agapism: real growth of habit-forming behaviour is present in nature and reality.

Peirce recognised propositions as signs. Signs refer to their objects in two ways: indexically and iconically. On the one hand, to refer indexically is to address the subjects of the proposition. Reference in an iconic way, on the other hand, points out the predicates of the proposition. The proposition, as a symbol, bridges reality and language. From the standpoint of Peirce's realism, the *Harvard Lectures* have a very important point of argumentation in explaining how the proposition connects propositional thought and perception. The study of perception is the study of the relationship that allows the proposition to signify experience.

Peirce's realism of categories allowed Peirce to develop a thorough description of the richness of perception from the richness of experience. Peirce (not surprisingly!) proposed a triadic division of conceptions that are at work in perception: percepts, percipuum, and perceptual judgment.

The percept is the limiting case of inference contained in the perceptual judgment. The percept, as a limiting mind-independent aspect of inference, holds the end of reality. For Peirce, the doctrine of scholastic realism (universals or generals are real, and they are prior to their instantiations) is assumed in the claim that generality is present in perception, not something added up by the mind in the process of cognition. This constitutes the "mode of being" of perception. If we were to use the pragmatic maxim, we would discover what is involved in perception: a limiting case can be a habit, something general or continuous, or something vague, or both. A percept is from the point of view of the perceiver, the limiting case of what is perceived. In a wide sense, the percept tells us that experience is continuous and independent of us; the real world is actually the world of "insistent generalised percepts."<sup>6</sup> In a more specific sense: experience is experimental and never detached

from interpretative activity (habits of anticipation), so percepts are conditioned by our organisms. A perceptual judgment (which is a second, the statement of a fact) is defined: “a higher grade of the operation of perception.”<sup>7</sup> The perceptual judgment involves our ability to react to a percept. In a wide sense the perceptual judgment is a fallible *prima facie* account of what is perceived (we do not feign doubts on these). In a narrow sense the perceptual judgment is an abductive hypothetical element that can be true or false. The theory of perception finally integrates the *percipuum* (which is the third, the mediating relation): a content of perceptual judgment that connects with the percept as a habit. The *percipuum* in a strict sense is temporarily rooted, always understood in a context of continuity and in a wide sense is a dispositionally organised sense of expectation (habit), and a belief. Let us offer an example: I am having a stroll outdoors and suddenly I do not feel the sunlight anymore (that is the percept), I look up to the sky and notice that the clouds are closing so I make a judgment with a proposition such as “the sky is closing,” and then I connect the judgment with previous experience and notice that it is consistent with the higher possibility of a storm, so I dispositionally prepare to act and find refuge.

The distinction between percepts (which are not propositional) from “perceptual judgments” (which are propositional) addresses real elements of perception mediated by reference. For instance, Peirce’s example of a “composite photograph” reflects how generality is given in percepts as well as perceptual judgments. Peirce liked the example of a composite photograph: a composite photograph is a complex representation. However, this representation reflects reality better than a simple photograph; a simple photograph can only account for one angle of an event or fact. Peirce rejected the view that perception is composed of individual discrete impressions. Perception, like experience, is governed by continuity. Perceptual judgments are the first premises of all reasoning. The processes by which perceptual judgments arise from percepts became crucial for Peirce’s realist case. If perceptual judgments are the starting points for all intellectual development, then we must be able to perceive generality; percepts are the limiting

cases of inference where there are perceptual judgments. A logical consequence of this trend of thought is that percepts are themselves general; we cannot single them out as individuals without carrying out inferential steps.

In the *Lowell Lectures*, Peirce rejects a version of Kantian idealism that exhibits a problem in its account of perception. Peirce's diagnosis, unsurprisingly, finds a nominalistic prejudice at the origin of the problem. The problem lay in the denial of immediate perception. This is due to the nominalist belief that: should inquiry and cognition find an incognizable aspect of things, then inquiry must stop. According to Peirce, this viewpoint "cuts off all the possibility of ever cognising a relation,"<sup>8</sup> for what makes reasoning sound is having a right method that can take into account the tendency to guess correctly and assure progress towards the truth.

In this way, the realism involved in the new theory of perception is a premise of pragmatism. Furthermore, in spite of its limits, perception has the added guarantee of eliciting progress in further inquiries.

Secondary qualities, those aspects of our perceptions that the empiricist tradition dismissed as characteristics not of things, but of our ideas of things, are real though degenerate. As long as experience reveals law-governed patterns and changes in the colours or other secondary qualities that things display, then experience of percepts can reveal patterns of qualities and properties that should be included in the idealisations forming our description of reality.

By 'reality' is to be understood that part or ingredient of the being of anything which does not depend upon that thing's actually being represented.<sup>9</sup>

Peirce's interest in realism converges with his constant desire to offer a proof for pragmatism. The assumption is that scholastic realism is one of the premises of a proof of pragmatism: should we want to carry out successful abductions (and inferences in general), we need to adopt scholastic realism first. What mediates between all

our inferential processes is a real mediation, only provided by scholastic realism. The proof of pragmatism did not have a definitive form; it seems that one of the things Peirce continued to believe was the fundamental assumption that realism must be a premise for correct reasoning. Anything related to the science of inquiry and pragmatism as a method of right thinking, as expressed in the *Harvard Lectures*.

Peirce argued that the mode of inference that he called abduction is also latent in perception. Perception is experience mediated by inference, and most clearly by hypothetical inference. For Peirce, pragmatism, considered as the logic of abduction, followed from these propositions involved in the case for perception:

- (1) that nothing is in the intellect that is not first in the senses;
- (2) that perceptual judgments contain general elements;
- (3) and that abductive inferences shade into perceptual judgments without any sharp line of demarcation.

Peirce called the above statements of his pragmatism “cotary” propositions. The cotary propositions are presented as obvious truths which can be used as premises in arguing for pragmatism. Peirce, as noted above, makes a distinction between “perceptual judgment” and “percept;” it seems that all we know about the percept is drawn from the perceptual judgment.

Thus, according to Peirce, the fundamental dichotomy that we need to address for a theory of perception is the specific way we encounter experience: “everything which is present to us is a phenomenal manifestation of ourselves,” but this “does not prevent its being a phenomenon of something without us, just as a rainbow is at once a manifestation both of the sun and of the rain.”<sup>10</sup> Peirce states of the pragmatist:

That he will have no difficulty with Thirdness is clear enough because he will hold that conformity of action to general intentions is as much given in perception as is the element of

action itself, which cannot really be mentally torn away from such general purposiveness.<sup>11</sup>

After understanding Peirce's theory of perception and experience, we can understand why Peirce says that the definition of pragmatism formulated by James

differs from mine only in that he does not restrict the 'meaning,' [...] as I do, to a habit, but allows percepts, that is, complex feelings endowed with compulsiveness, to be such [...] if he is willing to do this, I do not quite see how he need give any room at all to habit.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, for Peirce, habits are embedded in reality itself, and then one needs to be a radical empiricist in order to correctly apply the pragmatic maxim. Let us move on to introduce James's account of experience and perception.

#### **JAMES'S ACCOUNT OF EXPERIENCE AND *THE PRINCIPLES OF PSYCHOLOGY***

As Owen Flanagan explains with regard to the Jamesian view on consciousness, there is a conflicting development in James's psychology that swayed as he developed his thought.<sup>13</sup> What applies to consciousness, however, is not exactly the case for his view of experience that seems to be very consistent throughout his writings. In these lines we will see that early work on psychology and perception and later views are bound by the conviction about the richness of experience. In the *Principles of Psychology*, James defended introspective psychology as a way of searching to validate an experimental shift to psychology. He tells us:

The English writers on psychology, and the school of Herbart in Germany, have in the main contented themselves with such results as the immediate introspection of single individuals gave, and shown what a body of doctrine they make. The works of Locke, Hume, Reid, Hartley, Stewart, Brown, the Mills, will

always be classics in this line; and in Professor Bain's Treatise we have probably the last word of what this method taken mainly by itself can do – the last monument of the youth of our science, still untechnical and generally intelligible, like the Chemistry of Lavoisier, or Anatomy before the microscope was used.... But psychology is passing into a less simple phase. Within a few years what we may call a microscopic psychology has arisen in Germany, carried on by experimental methods, asking of course every moment for introspective data, but eliminating their uncertainty by operating on a large scale and taking statistical means.<sup>14</sup>

The tradition of empiricist psychology that goes from Locke to Herbart treats experience as a succession of units (“ideas”) that are discrete, independent, and substantive. James thinks that the requirement to make psychology a true science involves a recognition of the biased view of experience previous psychology holds. The imposition of a discrete nature to experience is, indeed, an atomisation of experience that James (and Peirce) does not take for granted. The view of James is quite opposed to the discrete conception of a scattered experience of atoms of individual experience. In his chapter “The Stream of Thought,” James avows the fluidity and continuity of experience and consequently of perception. James criticises the Humean view of sensations as units of image and sensation. Or as James describes it,

Hume's fantastical assertion that we can form no idea of a thing with either quality or quantity without representing its exact degrees of each.... Strange that so patent an inward fact as the existence of ‘blended’ images could be overlooked! Strange that the assertion could virtually be made that we cannot imagine a printed page without at the same time imagining every letter on it – and made too by a school that prided itself particularly on its powers of observation! However, of such blunders is the history of psychology composed.<sup>15</sup>

What is true for the psychology of perception is also true for the theory of knowledge that dominated modern philosophy and its view of consciousness. On this, Gerald Myers tells us:

That same tradition went astray, James held, in locating the basic unit of consciousness in something discrete like an image or sensation. The picture that resulted, of consciousness being compounded into “complex ideas,” was especially mischievous. It not only fostered a wrongheaded kind of introspection, neglecting relations, feelings of continuity and changes in consciousness, and so forth, but it also promoted the notion that the basic units of consciousness resemble physical objects by being discrete, independent, substantive, and capable of being rearranged in successive complexes.<sup>16</sup>

James’s proposal in the *Principles of Psychology* is to ground psychology in experimental methods, but this proved quite limited insofar as there are some philosophical misconceptions that can bias our interpretation of experimental conditions. This is why it was necessary for James to propose a more radical theory of experience: his radical empiricism.

#### **RADICAL EMPIRICISM**

James explains to us that rationalism emphasises universals and makes wholes prior to parts in logic and in being, while empiricism stresses the part and treats the whole as a collection and the universal as an abstraction. For James, these views have generated an unjustified dichotomy: we must either trust reason alone or trust the sense data. Classical empiricism, however, as we have seen above, imposes some preconceptions to experience that in fact impede it from being radical enough. James tells us:

To be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced.<sup>17</sup>



The problem of classical or ordinary empiricism is that it is not sufficiently open to experience, it imposes a philosophical misconception as to what counts as “an experience.” James was becoming aware of the limited view of experience that empiricism holds: reduced to a pale report of what we can count as individual sensations and facts. Empiricism inverted the perceptual report of the knower for what is known. The sorry state of empiricism needed a radical reform, Blum tells us:

This deceptively simple and reasonable sounding methodological tenet would ultimately lead James to articulate a bold and innovative notion of experience, a notion inspired by various facets of James’s research and reflections.<sup>18</sup>

James starts with the parts and considers the whole of experience as of the second order. This is a philosophy of plural facts, referring them neither to substances nor to absolute mind. But it differs from Hume and others; it is more radical. Our consciousness of experience does not include only what we call events and qualities of those events. James tells us:

The only things that shall be debatable among philosophers shall be things definable in terms drawn from experience...the fact that the relations between things, conjunctive as well disjunctive, are just as much matters of direct particular experience, neither more or nor less so, than the things themselves.<sup>19</sup>

This entails that

the parts of experience hold together from next to next by relations that are themselves parts of experience. The elements of experience are not connected by us. Experience itself possesses a concatenated or continuous structure.<sup>20</sup>

Experience is, then, always continuous: “fringed forever by a more that continuously develops,”<sup>21</sup> and which can therefore never be contained or hemmed in by our predictions and expectations.<sup>22</sup>

Radical empiricism only allows elements directly experienced and does not exclude any such elements, even the ones that were not included in a conscious report of what we experienced. The relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations and so be counted as real. Ordinary empiricism tends to do away with connections of things, insisting mostly on disjunctions. There are different negative consequences of the biased view of the classical empiricists. James tells us that George Berkeley was led to a nominalism, the idea that the connections are not real but imposed by our perceiving mind. James, here, turns out to be a realist about the real connections as independent of us. With David Hume, as it was stated above, things are loose and separate with no manner of connection. As for the Mills, James tells us that for James Mill similars have nothing really in common and for John Stuart Mill physical things and selves are made of discontinuous possibilities. Rationalism is in no better place than empiricism, rationalism adds trans-experiential agents of unification, imposes a priori conditions to experience. But if empiricism had been radical and had taken conjunctions into account this would not be needed. Radical empiricism gives full justice to conjunctive relations and unlike transcendentalism, it does not treat them as true in a supernal (heavenly, ethereal) way. For the radical empiricist, the unity of things and their variety do not belong to different orders.

#### **JAMES'S "EXPERIENCED RELATIONS"**

In order to be a radical empiricist James acknowledges the existence of other senses, which, although vague and imprecise in their content, nonetheless represent significant components of our experiential repertoire. James acknowledges the vagueness that exists even with regards to our senses, sometimes two or more senses interact in ways that allow us to engage with experience more organically:

It is as if there were in the human consciousness a sense of reality, a feeling of objective presence, a perception of what we may call 'something there,' more deep and more general than any of the

special and particular ‘senses’ by which the current psychology supposes existent realities to be originally revealed.<sup>23</sup>

There is an important number of different ways in which we experience relations and, unfortunately, we cannot exhaust them here. But suffice to say that the coordination of our senses bespeaks the interrelatedness of our coordination of experience and perception. About this, Blum tells us:

Putting the matter in his typically poetic but lucid prose, James asserts that “knowledge . . . lives inside the tissue of experience” (P: 321). Experience, for James, is a broad category of awareness or awarenesses, within which knowledge obtains. The visual metaphor is useful for understanding the notion of experience that James endorses, and its contrast with “knowledge.” Experience is no clean concatenation of rational states of discursive knowledge that follow one after the other like an assembly line of distinct tableaux—it is, rather, a dynamic and often roiling stream of concepts, images, intuitions, feelings, and intimations, much of which may only tantalize our awareness at the fringe, but which colors and tints the whole of our experience in pervasive and profound ways. “Static concepts,” James insists, cannot be substituted for the complex and multicolored warp and woof of our “moving life.”<sup>24</sup>

The dynamism of experience requires, then, a philosophical disposition to cope with an ever-changing world. Radical empiricism is glad to acknowledge dynamism, but this also bears the realisation of our own limitation: we ought to humbly recognise that our perceptual reconstruction is always fallible. In the experimental context of exploring radical empiricism with the development of some boys, Blum tells us:

But this quality of the experience can hardly be appreciated by the out-side observer, who—despite having access to all its outward features—cannot grasp the sense of the experience as it is created and undergone by the boys themselves. This is the import of James’s radical empiricism—a philosophy that, while seeking to

provide as concrete and accurate a perspective on experience as possible, also insists on accommodating all those inherent dimensions of experience that, by their very nature, resist clear and distinct articulation.<sup>25</sup>

Radical empiricism, thus, enriches our conceptual ability to account for everything that presents itself to experience and configures perception. James is aware that sometimes there are aspects of experience that allow us to make sense of it but are not always manifested as sense data as such. That is the case of the most important aspects that actually help us to make sense of experience, such as conjunctive relations, the cognitive relation, substitution, and especially the co-terminousness of different minds. Our limited access to experience assumes that for us, no matter how well we construct a report of our perception, experience is always the work of subjects with a particularly perspectival situation. On the discovery of the inevitable subjective aspects of experiences, Myers comments:

Experiences are to be explored introspectively, partly for the experimental discoveries enjoyed, but also for revealing the pragmatic value of notions like, for instance, oneself. Failing to appreciate this, one will never survive a reading of *The Principles of Psychology*. It is a monumental attempt to connect, introspectively, key philosophical and psychological concepts with relevant experiences so that the experiential differences (cash-value) made by the distinctions contained in the concepts are disclosed.<sup>26</sup>

What could be better suited to understand our perceptual access to experience in its relation to our goals than James's pragmatic method? Let us recall what James understood the method achieves:

I wish now to speak of the pragmatic method. The pragmatic method is primarily a method of settling metaphysical disputes that otherwise might be interminable. Is the world one or many? – fated or free? – material or spiritual? . . . disputes over such

notions are unending. The pragmatic method in such cases is to try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences. What difference would it practically make to anyone if this notion rather than that were true? If no practical difference whatever can be traced, then the alternatives mean practically the same thing, and all dispute is idle.

This view is already present in the early work. James's pragmatism and the notion of experience is germinally present in the *Principles*:

That theory will be most generally believed which, besides offering us objects able to account satisfactorily for our sensible experience, also offers those which are most interesting, those which appeal most urgently to our aesthetic, emotional, and active needs.<sup>27</sup>

The above, then, means that James's radical empiricism is pragmatic, it reconciles the different positions and limitations of our access of experience and then helps us construct a coherent and open account of perception.

#### **JAMES'S ACCOUNT OF PERCEPTION**

For James the distinction between sensation and perception is less sharp than commonly conceived. Sensing is awareness of the perceiving subject in an aspect of her perceiving, sensing is the lively aspect of our experiencing. James tells us:

a set of that's, or its, of subjects of discourse, with their relations not brought out. The first time we see light, in Condillac's phrase we are it rather than see it. But all our later optical knowledge is about what this experience gives.<sup>28</sup>

The account of sensation is not independent of our habits of perception. Only in idealised cases is sensation separable from perception. James's famous example focuses on what the baby comes across in its initial experience:

[T]he infant encounters an object in which (though it be given in a pure sensation) all the 'categories of the understanding' are contained. It has externality, objectivity, unity, substantiality, causality, in the full sense in which any later object or system of objects has these things. Here the young knower meets and greets his world; and the miracle of knowledge bursts forth, as Voltaire says, as much in the infant's lowest sensation as in the highest achievement of a Newton's brain.<sup>29</sup>

Perception, then, includes sensation as conscious, mediated by our habits: this is the point at which James realises the need of the metaphysics of experience:

thoughts and things are absolutely homogenous as to their material, and...their opposition is only one of relation and of function. There is no thought-stuff different from thing-stuff...but the same identical piece of 'pure experience' (which [is] the name I give to the materia prima of everything).<sup>30</sup>

One example of how the ubiquitous pure experience is a necessary presupposition of perception is given in what James takes to be the experience of the "present consciousness." On this, Myers explains James's words thus:

The elusive nature of the experience is precisely this flow or continuity of constant transition, and it is easy to overlook it in favour of the events (the "content" of the specious present) themselves merging one into another. But, though the "content" of the specious present is ever changing and thus distracting to consciousness, "the specious present, the intuited duration, stands permanent, like the rainbow on the waterfall, with its own quality unchanged by the events that stream through it."<sup>31</sup>

The stream of our perception is, then, our ability to engage with a world of experience, our awareness of the sensations that are given to us as well as the ability to interpret them. Myers says about this:

Perceiving is more complex than sensing; it involves awareness of the relations surrounding the objects of sensing and is thus "knowledge-about" and not merely "acquaintance". I am sensing if noticing a pink patch more or less in isolation, but am perceiving if noticing the relations belonging to the patch. On this view, sensing is not subjective, and in saying of a baby that it only senses and does not perceive, we should mean simply that the baby does not apprehend the multiple relations surrounding what it does succeed in noticing.<sup>32</sup>

Summing up the very many interesting aspects of James's account of perception that we cannot explain further here, it becomes quite clear that the radical openness to experience that James requires is a pragmatist attitude. James's radical empiricism is a body of beliefs about experience and perception that follow from the adoption of his pragmatic method and his pragmatic attitude.

#### **PRAGMATISM: EXPERIENCE AND PERCEPTION**

Both Peirce and James emphasise the continuity of experience and the natural and seamless connection of perception and experience. A natural consequence of this is the non-discreteness of perception. The overcoming of dichotomies, a characteristic of pragmatism, is also at play: both pragmatists show us that there is an unjustified dichotomy assumed in experience. Empiricist and rationalist views of experience tend to presuppose that sensation is objective and perception is subjective, and that there is a chasm between the two. Peirce and James explain to us that these views lack an adequate theory of mediation. Peirce's realism of perception and James's radical empiricism provide the required mediation. On this issue, Hookway tells us:

When Peirce tried to meet these challenges by insisting that mediation, law, and external things are directly present in experience, he agreed with James in insisting that experience is richer than earlier empiricists had supposed. And when he argued that law and mediation were present in experience through our

experience of real continuity, the connections with radical empiricism are very strong indeed.<sup>33</sup>

In this article I argued that the convergence that Peirce and James have on their views of perception is derivative of their radical openness to experience. For James experience is mediated by experienced relations, and they have to become the mediation for a fair view of perception. For Peirce, the theory of categories allows us to develop a theory of perception that is radical too: it allows us to make sense of all the universes of experience. For Peirce, the ability to construct such a theory of perception is yet another liberating consequence of the use of his pragmatic maxim, as he argued in his *Harvard Lectures*. Though James expressed the view that his pragmatism is independent of his radical empiricism, we can actually see that James's view of the maxim also had the same liberating effect: understanding that the maxim helps us to focus on desirable action is a first step towards a radical approach to experience. When James tells us that his pragmatism is not necessarily tied to his radical empiricism he is thinking about the philosophical attitude of the pragmatist, but the methodology that the maxim offers is indeed linked to his radical openness to experience.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Hookway, "Logical Principles and Philosophical Attitudes," 122.
- <sup>2</sup> James, *Pragmatism*, 6.
- <sup>3</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Vol. 5, 466.
- <sup>4</sup> Peirce, 466.
- <sup>5</sup> Peirce, 494.
- <sup>6</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Vol. 8, 148.
- <sup>7</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Vol. 7, 634.
- <sup>8</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Vol. 5, 56.
- <sup>9</sup> Peirce, *Annotated Catalogue*, 'Reflexions upon Reasoning,' MS 686:1.
- <sup>10</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Vol. 5, 283.
- <sup>11</sup> Peirce, 212.
- <sup>12</sup> Peirce, 494.
- <sup>13</sup> Flanagan, "Consciousness as a pragmatist views it," 46.
- <sup>14</sup> James, *Principles of Psychology*, Vol. 1, 191–2.
- <sup>15</sup> James, *Essays in Psychology*, 145.
- <sup>16</sup> Myers, "William James on Time Perception," 26.
- <sup>17</sup> James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 22.
- <sup>18</sup> Blum, "William James on How to Study Experience," 431.
- <sup>19</sup> James, *The Meaning of Truth*, 6–7.
- <sup>20</sup> James, 6–7.
- <sup>21</sup> James, *Pragmatism*, 150.
- <sup>22</sup> James, 327.
- <sup>23</sup> James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 62.
- <sup>24</sup> Blum, "William James on How to Study Experience," 432.
- <sup>25</sup> Blum, 435.
- <sup>26</sup> Myers, "Pragmatism and introspective psychology," 21.
- <sup>27</sup> James, *Principles of Psychology*, Vol. 2, 940.
- <sup>28</sup> James, 3–4.
- <sup>29</sup> James, *Psychology: Briefer Course*, 20.
- <sup>30</sup> James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 72.
- <sup>31</sup> Myers, "William James on Time Perception," 358.
- <sup>32</sup> Myers, 353.
- <sup>33</sup> Hookway, 133.