

THE UNIQUENESS OF PRAGMATISM

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This article was first presented as a lecture. In it, Hilary Putnam sets out what he thinks is unique about pragmatism, and also what he believes is valuable in it.

As I related in a little book I published roughly a decade ago,¹ My first exposure to pragmatism took place at my alma mater, the University of Pennsylvania. At that time, in the late 1940's, E. A. Singer Jr., a distinguished student of William James who had taught at 'Penn' for many years, was still alive, and even though he was long retired from teaching, his books were read and his ideas were taught, especially by C. West Churchman (who was a teacher of Sidney Morgenbesser and Richard Rudner as well as myself). One day, Churchman wrote the following four principles, which he attributed to Singer, on the blackboard:

Knowledge of facts presupposes knowledge of theories.
Knowledge of theories presupposes knowledge of facts.
Knowledge of facts presupposes knowledge of values.
Knowledge of values presupposes knowledge of facts.

Both before and after writing that little book, I had occasion to meditate and write on the ways in which fact and value are deeply entangled. In my recent writing, the emphasis has been primarily on the significance of that entanglement for *ethics* rather than its significance for how we conceive of fact. My original plan for today's lecture was to address that latter topic in the context of the pragmatist tradition. But discussing the ways in which James and Dewey in particular understood the nature of fact turned out to involve much larger issues — in the end, I found that I had no choice but to say something about the ways in which pragmatism is and isn't a unique metaphysical tradition. To do this, today I am going to compare it with (1) contemporary 'naturalism'; (2) the Aristotelian tradition (which

taught us to use the word 'metaphysics'); and (3) Existentialism. Obviously, to even *begin* to do all this in one lecture, I shall have to indulge in some broad generalizations. Nevertheless, I think that inviting us to compare these traditions, and to reflect on what pragmatism does and doesn't have in common with them, may be an appropriate way to bring out the *uniqueness* of pragmatism in the history of post-Enlightenment philosophy, and that certainly seems an appropriate thing to do at an international conference on pragmatism.

Materialism *alias* 'naturalism'

As you doubtless already know, the philosophical movement which is dominant in the English-speaking universities today is 'analytic philosophy'. What you may not all know is that within analytic philosophy the dominant school of metaphysics today calls itself 'naturalism'. However, this is a conference on pragmatism, and Dewey, who popularized the term did not mean by it at all what today's self-styled 'naturalists' mean. (What he meant was simply *anti-supernaturalism*, and while today's 'naturalists' are also anti-supernaturalists, they have in addition, as we shall see in a moment, positive metaphysical views with which Dewey certainly would have disagreed.) To avoid confusion, I shall henceforth refer to the doctrines of this school by the (more accurate) term *materialism*, and reserve 'naturalism' for the Deweyan view.

In this section and the next I will need to explain and criticize this contemporary form of materialism. Although I shall not use the word 'pragmatism' in these sections, I believe that the criticisms I will be making are very much in the pragmatist spirit. (In spite of my reluctance to apply any 'ism' labels to myself, I find I am often classed by others as a 'pragmatist', after all.) At any rate, I shall be contrasting what these materialists think with what I myself think is true.

While some American materialists are rather coy about the real content of their view, their leading English counterparts are much more frank, and none more so than the recently deceased Bernard Williams. Williams' views have been closely examined by a philosopher much closer to my own

views than to Williams'. I mean David Wiggins, also an English philosopher, and one who — like myself — both admires Williams' brilliance and breadth of sensitivity and criticizes the materialist and relativist strains in Williams' thought. In his important essay, 'Truth, Invention and the Meaning of Life',² Wiggins argues that Williams gives the wrong significance to the distinction between what he calls 'the absolute conception of the world', the truths that finished science would supposedly 'converge' on, and what he calls 'perspectival' truths (which seem, in Williams' relativist account, hardly to merit the name of 'truths' at all). Wiggins — mistakenly in my opinion — accepts the notion of an absolute conception of the world that 'all possible or actual intelligent beings competent to look for the fundamental explanatory principles' would converge on, but he criticizes Williams for failing to see that the 'absolute/perspectival' distinction cannot possibly be a 'fact/value' distinction, for the simple reason that just about every term we ever use when we are not doing basic physical science belongs on the 'perspectival' side of the dichotomy. (Williams himself says that 'grass' and 'green' are terms that would not occur in finished science! But 'grass' and 'green' are not value terms.) A similar criticism was made by the economist-philosopher Vivian Walsh, who wrote:³

Economists cannot afford to neglect the failure of an advertising campaign that tried to sell a shade of green which consumers rejected, or the devastating results of a record drought upon grasslands. The things consumers (and clients!) want, or buy, or have produced for them, are chosen or rejected in terms of features that arguably would not appear in 'completed science' if it should ever arrive. They live, move, and have their being, just like those who make moral statements, on the 'wrong' side of the dichotomy between 'finished science' and everything else that anyone ever says.

I said, however, that American materialists are more coy about the real content of their view. Rather than say, as Wil-

liams does, that the only terms that would appear in a complete and non-perspectival account of reality are terms for primary properties, they usually say that what Williams calls the 'perspectival' terms (including terms for psychological states) are 'supervenient' on the primary qualities. The reason they say this, I believe, is that they are able (when no one is paying careful attention) to speak (and doubtless to think) that showing that psychological, intentional, etc. phenomena 'supervene' on 'primary qualities' is tantamount to showing that they are reducible to those qualities, and, at the same time, when someone does accuse them of being reductionists — which is clearly what they are at heart — to say 'Oh, but we didn't say that intentional phenomena are reducible to primary qualities; we only said they supervene on them.' But what exactly is 'supervenience'?

Supervenience

Although every philosopher who employs the term 'supervenience' would agree that there is a difference between saying that a type B of phenomena is supervenient upon another type A (usually described in the language of 'primary qualities') and saying that B-phenomena are *nothing but* A-phenomena, or that B-phenomena are *identical* with certain A-phenomena, or that the language we ordinarily use to speak of B-phenomena can be *replaced by* (or 'eliminated' in favor of) the language scientists use to speak of A-phenomena, in practice, as I mentioned earlier, supervenience is taken to have virtually the same metaphysical significance as identity or elimination or reduction. In other words, once materialists have said that B-phenomena are 'supervenient upon' A-phenomena, they often feel that they have, in effect, disposed of the question of the metaphysical status of B-phenomena, especially if they have argued to their own satisfaction that the supervenience of B-phenomena upon A-phenomena is 'local' rather than global'. But it is time to define our terms.

Define our terms! But that is not so easy. It has happened more than once in the history of analytic philosophy that a technical-sounding term has been used for some time as if it

had a satisfactory definition, when in fact it doesn't. I believe that this is the situation with respect to the term 'supervenience'. Of the many definitions which have been proposed, the following pair are by far the most common:

(S global) Phenomena describable by means of predicates in a certain set B are globally supervenient upon the phenomena describable by means of predicates in a certain set A if and only if *there do not exist two physically possible worlds, W_1 and W_2 , such that the objects are the same in both worlds, and their A-predicates are the same in both worlds, but their B-predicates are not the same.* In short, 'global supervenience' says that *global sameness of the distribution of A-predicates implies global sameness of the distribution of B-predicates.*

(S local) Phenomena describable by means of predicates in a certain set B are locally supervenient upon the phenomena describable by means of predicates in a certain set A if and only if *there do not exist two physically possible objects O_1 and O_2 , such that the A-predicates of those objects are the same but their B-predicates are not the same.* In short, 'local supervenience' says that *local sameness of the distribution of A-predicates implies local sameness of the distribution of B-predicates.*

Assuming that we accept talk of physically possible worlds and/or objects as acceptable, does this not make the concepts of local and global supervenience perfectly clear? The problem is that the metaphysical *use* of the notion of supervenience depends on the assumption that the relation of supervenience has certain properties, and the relations defined by (S global) and (S local) do not necessarily have those properties.

The most important property ascribed to supervenience is this: if B-phenomena supervene on A-phenomena, then it is supposed to be the case that B-phenomena are *determined*

by A-phenomena, where the sense of 'determined' is wholly unclear. In addition, although supervenience is supposed to be an *asymmetrical* relation, it is not hard to see that the accepted definitions of supervenience, (S global) and (S local), do not guarantee asymmetry at all.

To see why they do not guarantee either 'determination' or asymmetry, consider the following completely imaginable possibility: suppose that it turns out to be impossible for the physical universe to have had a different electromagnetic field from the one it actually has, whatever that may be, *without* there having been some difference in the gravitational field, and suppose at the same time that it is impossible for the physical universe to have had a different gravitational field without there having been some difference in the electromagnetic field. Does it follow without further argument *either* that the gravitational field 'determines' (or is really at the basis of) the electromagnetic field or that the electromagnetic field 'determines' (or is really at the basis of) the gravitational field? I see no reason why either should follow. There are many other possibilities, e.g., that each field leaves its 'imprint' on the other, or that both fields are determined by something more fundamental, perhaps by some feature of the laws of Quantum General Relativity (a theory we are still searching for!).

What this thought experiment reveals is that supervenience as conventionally defined simply means that there is a *functional relation* between A-phenomena and B-phenomena. That a functional relation amounts to *determination* — and to 'determination' *in which sense?* — is something that has to be made out in each case, not something that the mere fact (or assumption) of 'supervenience' does for us.

Consider, now, the case of psychological phenomena. If we assume classical physics, to say that psychological phenomena supervene *globally* on the 'primary qualities' of physics just means that in any two physically possible universes in which all the particles have the same masses, charges, velocities, and other 'primary qualities', all the organisms must also have exactly the same thoughts, desires, emotions, and other psychological properties. In short, global supervenience is just

the principle that *same global distribution of primary qualities implies same global distribution of psychological properties*. (In these days of quantum mechanics, it means that if the two physical universes have identical 'state vectors' in Hilbert Space, then organisms would also have exactly the same thoughts, desires, emotions, etc.)

That psychological phenomena are indeed *globally* supervenient in this way on fundamental physical properties (or 'states') few would today doubt. But that the psychological states of *individual organisms* are *locally* supervenient on the fundamental physical properties of those organisms is false, if we accept 'externalism with respect to the mental', as I have argued we must in 'The Meaning of Meaning' and elsewhere. By 'externalism with respect to the mental', I mean the thesis that the content of psychological states is individuated by a history of interactions with one's conspecifics and with the entire natural environment, and not just by what goes on inside one's skull. For example, according to externalists like myself, if we imagine that on Twin Earth the liquid our counterparts refer to as 'water' is actually 'twater' (chemical formula: XY₂) and not water (H₂O), then when the words 'I am drinking a glass of water' pass through the head of Twin Hilary what he is thinking is that he is drinking a glass of twater, while what I think in the same circumstance is that I am drinking a glass of water. Our thoughts are different even though the states of the quantized fields that our bodies consist of are identical; and this shows that thinking a thought with a given content is not 'locally supervenient' on the state of one's body.

Today, the usual response of the materialist philosophers I am speaking of is to grant the truth of externalism with respect to such intentional states as thinking and believing, but to claim that our psychological states have a, so to speak, 'local core'. In *The Threefold Cord; Mind, Body and World*, I argued that this claim is confused. To suppose, for example, that there is any one neural state that every person who thinks the thought that there are many good restaurants in Tokyo must be in, or one 'computational state' that she must be in, independently of why she thinks that thought or what her knowledge state,

interests, purposes, etc., are, is science fiction, not science. As I wrote there, 'The futile search for scientific objects called 'narrow contents' in the case of meanings and for 'internal psychological states' in the case of beliefs are alike instances of the rationalist error of assuming that whenever it is natural to project the same words into two different circumstances there must be an 'entity' that is present in both circumstances.'

As for 'global supervenience', as I and others have pointed out for many years, supervenience of psychological phenomena on the *global* environment does not imply that psychological explanations can be replaced by explanations in terms of 'primary qualities'. If someone lets the water run in the bathtub to take a bath, for example, the *type* phenomenon that figures in the psychological explanation 'She decided to turn on the water in order to take a bath' is not definable in fundamental physical terms. And explanations, as Donald Davidson rightly saw, connect events under *types*. A physical explanation of the trajectory of certain particles does not generalize to the same class of cases as the psychological explanation, that the subject decided to turn on the water in order to take a bath. Global supervenience does not mean that individual psychological states are correlated with individual physical states, or indeed, with definable set of physical states. Psychological explanations are still necessary, are still valid, and have ranges of applications which are not the *same* as those of any physical explanations.

Pragmatist 'Aristotelianism' is an alternative to reductionism

Some years ago, Martha Nussbaum and I⁴ argued that, according to Aristotle, 'the psychological activities of living beings, such as perceiving, desiring and imagining, are realized or constituted in matter, are in fact the activities of some suitable matter, and that the relation between form and matter is in fact one of constitution or realization not of either identity or mere correlation.' And we concluded by saying that 'we can have nonreductionism and the explanatory priority of the intentional without losing sight of the natural and organic

unity of the intentional with its constitutive matter that is one of the great contributions of Aristotelian realism.' Obviously, the positions we ascribed to Aristotle are positions that John Dewey also argued for, and *Human Nature and Conduct* has sometimes been characterized as a sort of 'naturalized Aristotelianism' (in Dewey's sense of 'naturalized', not the contemporary materialist sense!). The criticisms of the materialist school of 'analytic metaphysics' I have been making might be restated in Aristotelian language thus: the materialists speak as if the only explanatory principles were the fields and particles of fundamental physics; what they entirely fail to see is that the world has many, many different levels of form, and that types of form are also explanatory principles. If you want to explain why, for example, Kant wrote a certain passage in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, a knowledge of quantum mechanics and relativity theory won't help you; as I put it in a paper I wrote many years ago, most of the structure at the level of physics is irrelevant from the point of view of (a) higher-level discipline.

But pragmatism also has serious differences with the Aristotelian tradition, differences that, as has often been pointed out, are connected with the fact the Pragmatists came after and were deeply influenced by the discoveries of Charles Darwin. For Aristotle, a given individual belongs to one and only one (lowest) species (which lowest species a given individual belonged to is supposedly determined by the essence of that individual), and the essence of a given individual or species is supposed to be perfectly clear cut (and, of course, unique). But for Darwin and those biologist who built on his work, what is important is variation. Species do not have sharp boundaries; indeed the criteria for specieshood are actually criteria for species difference (e.g., 'populations' which are not cross-fertile belong to different species; populations which are geographically isolated and have sufficiently different phenotypes are normally classed as belonging to different species); and these criteria, as Ernst Mayr, the grand old man of today's evolutionary biology, always emphasizes, do not yield a 'clean' division of organisms into disjoint species. Nor is this a defect

in population biology: the basic teaching of Darwinism is that the line between species can't be sharp — otherwise one species could not evolve from another! In pragmatism, as in evolutionary biology, variation is fundamental, and 'essentialist' thinking is taboo.

Indeed, we may say that from an evolutionary biologist's point of view, species are historic entities, very much like nations. Being a dog is being a member of a species somewhat as being a Frenchman is being a citizen of a nation; someone with much the same characteristics as a Frenchman might be a citizen of Belgium, or of the United States, and something with many of the same characteristics as a dog might not be a dog, because the 'population' to which it belongs has sufficient distinctness and enough genetic and geographical isolation to count as a new species.

From a molecular biologist's point of view, the situation is quite different. It is true that even at the molecular level there is variation. It is not possible to give necessary and sufficient conditions for being a dog in terms of DNA, on account of the mechanisms of genetic variation that Mayr and other evolutionary biologists emphasize (indeed, there may be as much similarity between the DNA of a wolf and that of a dog as there is between a Chihuahua and a Great Dane), but there are true statements of the form 'If something did not have DNA with such-and-such properties, it would not be a dog'.

The two different points of view even lead to different decisions about what is a dog; it would not be surprising to learn that molecular biologists classed Australian dingos as a kind of dog, and population biologist did not, for example. And there are still other interests that can lead to still other, perfectly legitimate, decisions on what is and is not a 'dog'. For an ordinary 'dog lover', wild dogs are not 'dogs', while for a scientist they are. Australian dingos, *are* paradigmatic dogs for the aboriginal inhabitants, whatever population biologists (or ordinary Europeans or Americans) may say. All of these classifications are legitimate, and useful in the contexts for which they are designed. To ask what the 'real' essence of my last dog, Shlomit, was would be to ask a meaningless question.

The point I just made is nicely generalized (long before I was born) in a letter that James wrote late in his life, in 1907, to a philosophical critic, Dickinson S. Miller:

I got your letter about 'Pragmatism,' etc., some time ago ... I sent you a week ago a 'Journal of Philosophy' with a word more about Truth in it, written at *you* mainly; but I hardly dare hope that I have cleared up my position. A letter from Strong, two days ago, written after receiving a proof of that paper, still thinks that I deny the existence of realities outside the thinker; and Perry ... accused Pragmatists (though he doesn't name *me*) of ignoring or denying that the real objects play any part in deciding what ideas are true. I confess that such misunderstandings seem to me hardly credible ... Apparently it all comes from the *word* Pragmatism — and a most unlucky word it may prove to have been. I am a natural realist. The world *per se* may be likened to a cast of beans on a table. By themselves they spell nothing. An onlooker may group them as he likes. He may simply count them all and map them. He may select groups and name these capriciously, or name them to suit certain extrinsic purposes of his. Whatever he does, so long as he *takes account of them*, his account is neither false nor irrelevant. If neither, why not call it true? it *fits* the beans-*minus*-him, and expresses the *total* fact, of beans-*plus*-him. Truth in this total sense is partially ambiguous, then. If he simply counts or maps, he obeys a subjective interest as much as if he traces figures. Let that stand for pure 'intellectual' treatment of the beans, while grouping them variously stands for non-intellectual interests. All that ... I contend for is that there is *no* 'truth' without *some* interest, and that non-intellectual interests play a part as well as the intellectual ones. Whereupon we are accused of denying the beans, or denying being in any way constrained by them! It's too silly!⁵

Metaphysics after pragmatism

Of course, the anti-Aristotelian aspect of pragmatism was not confined to the rejection of the idea of fixed and immutable essences. Starting with Peirce's attack on 'the method of what is agreeable to reason' in 'The Fixation of Belief', Pragmatists attacked the idea that *apriori* knowledge of the contents and organizing principles of reality was possible. Although empiricism too was officially committed to the same rejection of apriorism, in practice, I would argue, pragmatism — and especially Deweyan pragmatism — was far more aware of the consequences of a consistent anti-apriorism. Dewey, for example, finds traditional empiricism in its own way as aprioristic as traditional rationalism.

Traditional rationalism, famously, thinks the general form of scientific explanations can be known apriori: we know apriori the laws of geometry and even the fundamental principles of mechanics, according to Descartes (and Kant even attempted a 'transcendental deduction' of Newton's theory of gravity.) But traditional empiricists write as if the general form of scientific *data*, indeed of all empirical data, can be known apriori — even if they don't use the word 'apriori'. From Locke, Berkeley and Hume down to Ernst Mach, empiricists consistently held that empirical data ultimately consists of 'ideas' or 'sensations' (Mach: *Empfindungen*), conceived of as an unconceptualized given against which all empirical knowledge claims can be checked. Against this William James had already insisted that while all perceptual experience has both conceptual and non-conceptual aspects, the attempt to divide any experience which is a recognition of something into parts is futile. 'Sensations and apperceptive idea fuse here so intimately (in a 'presented and recognized material object') that you can no more tell where one begins and the other ends, than you can tell, in those cunning circular panoramas that have lately been exhibited, where the real foreground and the painted canvas join together.' Dewey, continuing the line of thought that James had begun, insists that by creating new observation-concepts we 'institute' new data. Modern physics (and of course not only physics) have richly born him out. A scientist

may speak of observing a proton colliding with a nucleus, or of observing a virus with the aid of an electron microscope, or of observing genes or black holes, etc. *Neither the form of possible explanations nor the form of possible data can be fixed in advance, once and for all.*

As we have seen contemporary materialism (self-styled 'naturalism') largely ignores this Deweyan and Jamesian insight. For it, ideal knowledge is just future physics, and there is one fixed vocabulary — a vocabulary of which we already possess a sort of sketch in present-day physics — in which it will be couched.

Indeed, in one respect James' image of the 'cast of beans' in the letter from which I quoted is misleading. It suggests (although I am sure that this isn't what James himself thought) that there is a fixed set of fundamental objects, the 'beans', and that human creativity is restricted to choosing different collections of fundamental objects to name. But, for various purposes, we are constantly enlarging our notion of an object. Talk of 'quantized fields' in physics; of 'neuroses' in psychiatry; of 'populations' in biology, of 'recessions' in economics, etc., etc., etc., illustrates the way in which our conceptual vocabularies, our very conceptions of *what* there is to refer to, are constantly being enlarged. And in many cases, there are equally good but not identical ways of enlarging those conceptual vocabularies. The idea of one fixed conceptual vocabulary in which one can once and for all describe *the* structure of reality (as if it had only *one* fixed structure), whether in its traditional (e.g., Aristotelian) form or its recent materialist form is untenable.

It is untenable not only because reality is more *pluralistic* than metaphysicians are wont to admit — and 'pluralism' is something James loved — but because reality is also *vague*. Metaphysicians are wont to pretend that at some 'ultimate' level, there is no vagueness at all. But no real content attaches to this suggestion. Even to say, as some do, that 'the world itself is not vague; it is just that what we are referring to by our words is sometimes vague', is self-refuting — for if *reference* is vague, then something in the world *is* vague! — Or is refer-

ence supposed to be something *outside* the world?!

Returning for a moment to the Aristotelian conception: on that conception, as we have just seen, the very principles of being of all things, the essences, formed a distinct realm, a realm of 'intelligible beings', which was unchanging, closed, and open to inspection by the intellect. That realm was the subject matter of metaphysics.

Contemporary materialism also postulates a distinct realm of things which are the ultimate explanatory principles of all things (ignoring present day quantum mechanics and relativity, it often identifies them with fields and particles, which are *not* ultimate in today's physics). Following Quine, it often says that what we call 'change' is a sort of illusion, and that the ideal description of this reality would be in what it calls a 'tenseless' language. It does not think that realm can be known apriori, to be sure, but it does freely speculate about the form of an 'absolute conception' of that realm, a finished science. And it takes that speculation to be the only legitimate function of metaphysics. It is not hard to see that, at bottom, analytic metaphysics is a decidedly conservative affair. In rejecting the entire picture of a philosophical subject of metaphysics with a subject matter which consists of fundamental objects which are the explanatory principles of all 'beings', pragmatism is quite different.

I have, I think, shown that it is different — but not yet that it is *unique*. For another tradition — one slightly but not a great deal older than pragmatism, the continental tradition of existentialism (including, under that rubric, Heidegger's phenomenology, but not Husserl's) likewise attacked this conception of philosophy's task. I shall close this lecture by contrasting pragmatism and existentialism.

Pragmatism and existentialism

Existentialists, from Nietzsche on, used scornful language to describe the traditional metaphysical enterprise that I have so sweepingly (but, I think, not inaccurately) described. Heidegger famously described that enterprise as 'ontotheology'. The existentialists' alternative to what they saw as a fatally flawed con-

ception of the task of philosophy was (1) to offer a diagnosis of (what they saw as) the falsity at the root of most of our lives; and (2) to recommend a cure. For Nietzsche, fear of life is at the heart of our sickness, and the will to live (which Heidegger unsympathetically described as 'the will to will') is what has to be revived and strengthened. For Kierkegaard, addressing people who thought they were Christians, the problem was just that — that they (only) *thought* they were Christians. His 19th century coreligionists were sure that they knew what it means to be a 'Christian', and that was their problem. What they had to learn — not intellectually, because intellectualization is a principal symptom of their illness, but existentially — is what it really means to have a Christian relation to God. For Heidegger (even if he attempts to deny that 'authenticity' is a normative concept), the sickness is inauthenticity, and the valorized life combines authentic acceptance of absurdity (being 'held out into the Nothing') with submissiveness towards Being in ways that Heidegger interpreters endlessly argue about. What I want to emphasize is that along with the abandonment of metaphysics, this search for an existential connection to God, in Kierkegaard's case, or for a secular substitute for an existential connection to God, in the case of the atheist existentialists, led to either an abandonment of or an irresponsible relation to the political, as well as to a disinterest in, or a failure to see the *philosophical* significance of, science. In Heidegger's case, it also led not just to disastrous politics, but to a disastrous philosophy of history.

In contrast, Dewey famously declared that 'Philosophy will recover itself when it ceases to deal with the problems of philosophers and addresses the problems of men'.

It is important to note that Dewey wrote 'problems' in the plural. Pragmatists refuse to believe that there is just one problem of men, that is of persons, and just one solution. Dewey also wrote that philosophy 'has no Mosaic or Pauline authority of revelation entrusted to it.' The pragmatist philosopher does not pretend to be a prophet or an oracle. But pragmatist philosophy does aspire to 'the authority of intelligence, of criticism of ... common and natural goods.'⁶ The

pragmatist is willing to address existential concerns; but he does not think that one can responsibly address them, address them without falsifying them, without addressing quotidian concerns. If philosophy no longer has either a unique subject matter, nor a unique prophetic vision, then how can it continue at all? I sometimes hear students ask. Dewey's answer was that philosophy has no need to be unique (an answer which is, however, itself unique!).

James already argued in 'The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life' that 'the ethical philosopher must wait on facts,' and furthermore:

(H)e only knows if he makes a bad mistake, the cries of the wounded will soon inform him of the fact. In all this the philosopher is just like the rest of us non-philosophers, so far as we are just and sympathetic instinctively, and so far as we are open to the voice of complaint. His function is in fact indistinguishable from that of the best kind of statesman at the present day. His books on ethics, therefore, so far as they truly touch the moral life, must more and more ally themselves with a literature which is confessedly tentative and suggestive rather than dogmatic — I mean with novels and dramas of the deeper sort, with sermons, with books on statecraft and philanthropy and social and economical reform. Treated in this way ethical treatises may be voluminous and luminous as well; but they can never be *final*, except in their abstractest and vaguest features, and they must more and more abandon the old-fashioned, clearcut, and would-be 'scientific' form.⁷

Here James exaggerates when he writes 'indistinguishable'. Philosophy *is* distinguishable from statesmanship, spiritual exhortation, and literature. But the difference, Dewey would say is one of degree: philosophy at its best is simply more reflective, more critical, more wide ranging. 'Criticism' is a word Dewey loved, and, in fact, he once defined philosophy

as 'criticisms of criticisms'. Although Stanley Cavell has been at times critical (unfairly critical, I believe) of Dewey, I believe that Cavell's characterization of philosophy as 'education for grownups' is one that Dewey would have approved. A philosophy that renounces both the dreams of metaphysics and the self-importance of existentialism is a grownup philosophy; and only a grownup philosophy is fit to educate grownups.

One last but essential remark. To call upon us, as I just have, to renounce both the dreams of metaphysics and the self-importance of existentialism, is not at all to join the logical positivists of yesteryear in calling both metaphysics and existentialism 'nonsense'. There is much of permanent value in the writing of both traditional metaphysicians and the great existentialists. It would be false to Dewey's own spirit to deny that there is. But my self-imposed task today has been to bring out the uniqueness of pragmatism, and to do that I have had to emphasize what pragmatists see as the failings of these traditions.

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Notes

¹ *Pragmatism; an Open Question* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 13-15.

² Collected in David Wiggins, *Needs, Values, Truth*, third edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

³ Vivian Walsh, 'Smith After Sen,' *Review of Political Economy*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2000 (pp. 5-25), p. 9.

⁴ 'Changing Aristotle's Mind' (with Martha Nussbaum) and 'Aristotle After Wittgenstein' (both in *Words and Life*, Harvard University Press, 1994)

⁵ *The Letters of William James*, (edited by his son Henry James), *Atlantic Monthly Press*, 1920, vol II, pp. 295-296.

⁶ John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (LaSalle, IN: Open Court, 1926), pp. 407-8.

⁷ 'The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life', in *The Works of William James; The Will to Believe and Other Essays* (Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 158-9.