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OF

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EDITED BY

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THE DEFINITION OF 'PRAGMATISM' AND 'HUMANISM'.

His characteristic generosity has prompted Prof. James not only gallantly to come in and take his full share of the applause, with which some new conceptions have been greeted, but also to try to minimize his own services in their development. And much as his disclaimer of originality, if uncorrected, might go down as authoritative, I cannot allow him so readily to underrate the debt I owe him. If at the same time I take the opportunity to discuss terms of which the relations are as yet often confused, less by reason of their inherent affinity than because they have found the same expositions, and to give reasons for partial disquiet from the definitions which Prof. James has proposed. p. 155. I insist that the unavoidably personal aspects of my explanations may thereby be sufficiently obscured as to seem tolerable.

In the first place, then, I must confess that indignation at what seemed the blindness of Prof. James's critics in insistently admitting his eminence as a psychologist, but denying the coherence of his philosophical views, was a great stimulus to me in trying to bring out the inner connection of his scattered diatribes about the will to believe, the teleology of perception and conception, the nature of necessary truths, the distinction of immediate and discursive knowledge, etc. The discovery also that a willingness to believe was clearly, in some cases, a condition of the attainment of truth, and a cause of its 'reality,' naturally prompted to an inquiry how far this insistence might be traced, and what must be the general nature of an intellect in which such phenomena could occur. When subsequently the pamphlet on Practical and Practical Results announced to me the naming of 'pragmatism,' I found acceptance easy. But it seemed natural to generalize also this principle of Peirce to include similarly—What must be the nature of a mind in which practical consequences can become determinants of truth or falsehood? This inquiry led to examining and deepening doubts of the whole intellectual interpretation of the nature of knowledge, which has now come to seem to me as inadequate intellectually as its consequences are deplorable ethically, and to be all honeycombed with ambiguities, errors and

incoherences. Both the critical and the constructive results embodied in Arno and Humanism, moreover, seemed to me to follow so directly and logically from Prof. James's principles that I am still astonished that none of his immediate pupils seized an easy opportunity of anticipating both Prof. Dewey and myself. Since then I have become acquainted with Prof. Dretske's important work, which I take to have finally demonstrated the impossibility of the correspondence-with-reality view of 'truth,' and to ensure the overthrow of Absolutism by weapons crested from its own armoury, etc., by the very argument it had urged against realism.

This bit of psychical history will perhaps explain why I scruple to restrict 'pragmatism' to its original use. In Peirce's practical view it seems to evoke an extension which has undeservedly received, and even in Prof. James's account of the matter it is by no means easy to make the distinction sharp. To say that 'truth' should have practical consequences is very vague, and hints at no reason for the curious connexion it asserts. It is hard, moreover, to see why even the extreme intellectualism should deny that the difference between the truth and the falsehood of an assertion must show itself in some visible way. Even its actual denial, therefore, by over-anxious controversialists, hardly persuades me that Peirce's principle is more than a truism 4 which hardly deserves a permanent place and name in philosophic usage, and naturally merges and evolves into the wider sense of the term so soon as it is scrutinized.

For to say that a truth has consequences and that what has none is meaningless, must surely mean that it has a bearing upon some human interest: they must be consequences to some one for some purpose. But now, we may ask, how are these 'consequences' to be called the 'truth' claimed by the assertion? Only by satisfying or thwarting that purpose, by forwarding or baffling that interest. If they do the one, the assertion is 'good' and pro tanto 'true'; if they do the other, 'had' and 'false'. Its 'consequences,' therefore, when investigated, always turn out to involve practical predications of 'good' or 'had,' and to contain a reference to 'practice' in the sense in which we have used that term. So soon as therefore we go beyond an abstract statement of the narrower pragmatism, and ask what in the concrete, and in actual knowing.

1 In the October number of Mind; cf. the June number.

2 See Appendix, note 1.

3 It did not require the verbal ingenuity of Mr. Joseph's wrestlings with the conception in the last number of Mind to convince me of this.

4 So far as I have observed, Prof. A. E. Taylor alone has denied it outright. McTighe, University Repository, iii, 2, p. 59. But even he prudently refrains from trying to illustrate how 'between two doctrines which are so far as their consequences in practice are concerned, indistinguishable, there may yet be all the difference between proved truth and demonstrative contradiction'.

5 The strange narrowness of the intellectualists' conception of 'practice' is one of the most painful revelations of the controversy. They always profess at least to take the most sordid views of the 'useful'.
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The definition of 'pragmatism' may mean, we develop inevitably the full-blown pragmatism in the wider sense. All that the latter adds is a denial that into the establishment of truths there enter any other processes than the evaluation of their consequences. Peirce's pragmatism had already implied this process, but left open possibilities that other things also might go to the making of truth. These possibilities are definitely excluded when the Peircean pragmatist asks himself 'What more is there in truth?' and finds that there is nothing more.

Hence we may effect a transition from the original assertion that the truth expresses itself in the 'consequences' to the more advanced conclusion that it so expresses itself solely, i.e., consists in them, and that if it is really 'true' these consequences are 'good'. By itself, however, and without such further explanation, the word 'consist' may well appear to lack precision, and I myself have never used it. But it refers to a definite situation and to a perfectly consistent attitude towards knowledge. That situation may be referred to, that attitude may be defined, in a variety of ways, according as we approach it by one road or another. I may have arrived myself freely of this right by defining what I call pragmatism, as (1) the thorough and methodical revaluation of the influence of the purposiveness of mental life on all our cognitive activities; (2) as the conscious application to the theory of knowledge of the teleological psychology suggested by a metaphysical voluntarism; (3) negatively, as a protest against abstracting from the actual purposiveness of our experience in constructing theories of thought and reality; (4) as the doctrine that truths are values and that 'realities' are arrived at by processes of revaluation, and that consequently our 'facts' are not independent of our 'truths', nor our 'truths' of our 'goods'.

To these definitions I may now also add three of a more distinctly logical complexion, i.e., (5) that meaning depends on purpose, and Mr. Alfred North Whitehead's pithy formulas that (6) the meaning of a rule lies in its application, and (7), a further, that the truth of an assertion depends on its application.

Now it is of course obvious that these definitions are verbally various and, so to say, to build any critic who declines to look beyond the expression to the facts referred to. A thinker however who is really trying to grasp the meaning of pragmatism may find them helpful and may finally discover that for this purpose the expressions are really equivalent. In any case one who has not yet discovered their equivalence will have little claim to flatter himself that he understands what the question of pragmatism is about.

Pragmatism then, in this wider sense, refers to the way in which our attributions of 'truth' and our recognitions of 'reality' are established and verified by their working, and sooner or later brought to the definite test of experiments which succeeds or fails.

Humanism, p. 8, slightly paraphrased.

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...I. etc., give or deny satisfaction to some human interest, and are valued accordingly. It arises from the original pragmatism by the growth of the conviction that no other processes need be appealed to to account for the truths that are current, and expands the original establishment by consequences into a general view of the world and its human activities. In other words, pragmatism rests on facts which may easily be observed by any one who chooses to watch any process of actual knowing ending in the establishment of a claim to truth. The method by which the 'true' is discriminated from the false is plainly pragmatic, and has always been instinctively employed, though it's a full philosophic consciousness of its character has only recently been attained. And on the whole, pragmatism seems the last name for this method which has so far been suggested.

This wider pragmatism, moreover, embodies a very important truth just now, because, oddly enough, it has not yet been discovered as both a fact and a truism. I have long waited in vain for its critics to ferret this out, and can only put down their failure to the fact that they are still too excited to have observed how very innocuous a principle it really is. Instead of subverting all but the most greasy useful forms of knowledge it really vindicates all, but a few metaphysical phrases which have no genuine sphere of application, and so can hardly be said to mean anything.

Nevertheless, even here, some of the fundamental assertions are hardly in dispute. No critic of pragmatism has, I believe, directly denied either the omnipresence of psychological interest or the dependence on psychological satisfaction, which together pervade all intellectual functioning. The controversy therefore has not been perceived, and Prof. Taylor, and perhaps a few others, have evinced a tendency to suppose that what they imagine to be a disinterested interest in 'pure' thought and 'useless' knowledge, and a (presumably unreciprocated) affection for Absolutes are somehow not to be counted as cases of emotional interest, but to be disembodied apart from the common herd of psychological motives. Such fancies, however, are as untenable as Kant's 'pure respect for the moral law,' and when the epistemological conceptions of admitted psychological principles are calmly traced out, it will be seen that pragmatism is inevitable, and must gradually win its way to universal acceptance.

As regards what I have proposed to call Humanism, however, the situation is very different. Ideally, no doubt, it too should be a truism, for if all philosophies were reasonable and devoid of human frailties it would, as Prof. Dewey has remarked, be assumed as obvious that the nature of man must be presupposed in all man's reasonings. But actually, as Prof. Dewey well points out, this assumption is bitterly contested. And this probably will always...

1 Prof. Dewey's 'instrumentalism' might perhaps be substituted were it not so open to linguistic and aesthetic objections.

2 Psychological Bulletin, i, 10, pp. 336-337.
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be the case. For even a slight familiarity with the psychology of
philosophers will make it seem extremely unlikely either that they
will ever universally consent to use man's integral, unqualified
nature whole-heartedly, as a premise in their speculations, or view
its satisfaction as the conclusion to be reached, or that if they did
so consent, they would reach concordant results. Some Humanists
probably there will always be, indeed, who know little of their
nature, and whose prejudices and opinions have been stamped
shamlessly upon them by the 'religious' and the 'intellectual',
and we have to admit, indeed, that the 'enlightened' humanists
are more prone to this than the 'conservative', and when the
issue is raised, the Humanist may stand out more clearly as
the 'conservative'.

But to be a Humanist there will always be a certain whole-hearted
temperament, odious to the 'religious', and beloved of the 'intellectuals',
and because of the mode of life this will always, continue to be rare among
technical philosophers, though, in the course of time, the instinctively
humanistic nature will be permitted greater opportunities of growth
than heretofore, and its development, when it finds itself in an academic
career. And so for a long time to come we must expect still to see
the great principle of Protagoras maintained or perverted by those
conventionally unfitted to appreciate it.

There will consequently be many pragmatists who cannot rise to
Humanism; nor indeed is there any logical necessity why they should
do so. It is quite possible to accept pragmatism as an empirical
philosophy without doing so. It is quite possible to accept pragmatism as
an empirical method and analysis, without expanding it into a general
philosophy-principle. No one can be expected to have a metaphysic
else there would be no need for a Mind Association), or of
least to be conscious of it. Any one can, if he chooses, stop short
on the epistemological plane, as he can on that of science or of
ordinary life. If, on the other hand, he proceeds to become a
Humanist, he will no doubt regard his pragmatism as merely a
special application of a principle which he applies all round, to
ethics, aesthetics and theology, as well as to the theory of know-
ledge. Clearly, therefore, we must distinguish Humanism even
from the wider pragmatism.

But in the case of every philosopher who builds out his con-
vincions into a 'system' there will always be much that is not
deducible from any objectively formulated principle, and whether
he knows it or not, is subjective and idiosyncratic, due to his per-
sonal experience and personal reactions on the food for thought
which his life affords. For example, in the present state of our
knowledge, his interest in the question of a future life must largely
depend on whether he has or has not found his life worth living.
And generally it must be recognised that a philosophy is always in
the last resort the theory of a life, and not of life in general or in
the abstract. There is no reason, therefore, to anticipate that the
adoption of Humanism (or even of Pragmatism) will at all diminish
the number and variety of systems. Personally, indeed, it would

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seem to me to argue ahistorical conceit and stupendous ignorance of
the history of thought to cherish the delusion that all philosophies
as such alone were destined to win general acceptance (inclusio
nonsens), or even to be reflected, unimproved and unmodified, in any
human soul.

But the existence of this personal element should render critics
all the more cautious to discriminate between what is due to it and
the more objective factors in a 'system'. To quarrel with its
ideologies is no way to refute its fundamental principles: in
discussing these, such personal bids are always more or less irrelevant.
Now it is the present controversy I cannot but think that our critics
have often allowed our idiosyncrasies to bulk so largely as to ob-
scure the main issues: a procedure which may be partially excused
by the accidental fact that there happens to be an unusual amount
of concordance between Prof. James's personal 'over-beliefs' and
mine. Nor must it be forgotten that it was his Wurf der Macht that
inspired all the recent developments in the new philosophy, and participating
in the success of this philosophy, its aims, its ideals, and its
attitude, I think we are thus entitled to accept the conclusion that
Prof. James's over-beliefs have been relatively less important and
more or less insignificant.

1 Loc. cit., p. 335.

1 Humanism, p. xvi. It gives me to think that Prof. Dewey, loc. cit.,
p. 335 should have misinterpreted my remark. However, I am
delighted to welcome him and others; the more we are the merrier we shall
be, and the rosier the prospects for a 'freie Wissenschaft'.

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