

Pragmatic Metaphysics: A Pathway for the Future

Metafísica Pragmática: Um Caminho para o Futuro

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Abstract: Classical American Pragmatism embodies a unique paradigmatic structure which offers a powerful tool for moving beyond a welter of traditional alternatives and dilemmas embedded in the philosophic tradition and pervasively operative even today, either explicitly or implicitly, in what is currently considered “cutting edge” philosophy. The present paper will explore the way pragmatism offers a novel understanding of the nature and “worth” of metaphysics, providing a reorientation for uniting the insights of traditional speculative philosophy with some of the contemporary recognitions of its limitation. This pragmatic understanding of the nature of metaphysics, and indeed of human experience and knowledge in general as well as the cosmos in which it is embedded, has important implications both for contemporary attempts to “situate” metaphysics in the context of philosophic inquiry and for contemporary attempts to come to grips with the full significance and uniqueness of Classical American pragmatism.

Keywords: World; nature; process; perspectivalism; categories; dispositions; temporality; interactional unity.

Resumo: *O pragmatismo americano clássico incorpora uma estrutura paradigmática única que oferece um instrumental poderoso para ultrapassar a confusão de dilemas e alternativas tradicionais imiscuídos na tradição filosófica e, de maneira penetrante, operativos mesmo atualmente, ou explícita, ou implicitamente, no que se considera correntemente como a vanguarda da filosofia. O presente artigo trata de explorar o jeito em que o pragmatismo oferece um novo entendimento da natureza e do “valor” da metafísica, fornecendo uma reorientação para unir os insights da filosofia especulativa tradicional com algo do reconhecimento contemporâneo de sua limitação. Este entendimento pragmatista da natureza da metafísica, e, por certo, da experiência e do conhecimento humanos em geral, como também do cosmo em que ela está, tem implicações importantes, tanto para tentativas contemporâneas de “situar” a metafísica no contexto da investigação, quanto para tentativas contemporâneas de acertar as contas com a significância total e a singularidade do pragmatismo americano clássico.*

Palavras-chave: *Mundo; natureza; processo; perspectivismo; categorias; disposições; temporalidade; unidade interativa.*

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embedded in the philosophic tradition and pervasively operative even today, either explicitly or implicitly, in what is currently considered “cutting edge” philosophy. The present paper will explore the way pragmatism offers a novel understanding of the nature and “worth” of metaphysics, providing a reorientation for uniting the insights of traditional speculative philosophy with some of the contemporary recognitions of its limitations

“Is Metaphysics Possible?” is a much debated question these days. Announcements of the death of metaphysics pour in from commanding figures such as Rorty and Derrida, et al, while opposing camps proclaim that the announcements themselves are fraught with unexamined metaphysical presuppositions. Debate occurs almost as strongly among advocates of the importance of metaphysics. For many who accept some version of traditional metaphysics, the rejection of the possibility of speculative metaphysics “in the grand tradition” signals the rejection of metaphysics itself. Opposing camps adamantly respond that the rejection of metaphysics traditionally understood nonetheless allows for an understanding of metaphysics as an enterprise which, though changed in nature, yet retains its vital function. This new function is itself understood in widely varying ways, some limiting it to a phenomenological depiction in one sense or another of the features of concrete human existence, others including within its scope somewhat more extended claims of one sort or another, with varying types of justification. Within such a contemporary context of debate many pragmatists distance themselves from speculative metaphysical endeavors, which to them seem to be embarrassingly “old fashioned” and distinctively non-pragmatic. Yet pragmatic philosophy is intimately intertwined with a novel paradigm for speculative metaphysical endeavors which offers not a throwback to times past, but a new pathway for the future.

The most illuminating focus for illiciting an implicit contemporary pragmatic understanding of the nature of metaphysics, as well as for setting the context for interpreting its content, is perhaps to be found in its descriptions of rudimentary lived experience as seen from the perspective of its understanding of meaning as habits of response. This may at first seem a strange place to begin the metaphysical journey, for the pragmatic theory of meaning is frequently held to make metaphysical issues meaningless. But in fact, the opposite is the case.

There is a two-fold philosophical sense of meaning as habits of response running throughout the pragmatic position, one ontological, the other epistemic, both of which undercut the level of the biological in terms of the contents of scientific analysis. The dependence of the organism on the environment from which it and its habits have emerged is causal or ontological, but this has nothing whatsoever to do with a causal or reductionist or “naturalized” theory of perception, with causality as expressed in scientific categories, or with a related reductionistic ontology. Rather, it concerns the fact that there is an independent “hardness” or “bruteness” to that which is ‘there’ that will either frustrate or allow to progress the purposive activities of the organism. In this sense one may speak of the adequacy of meanings in terms of the objective categories of the ongoing conduct of the biological organism immersed in a natural world.

The dependence of the perceived environment on the organism is, however, also noetic or epistemic. Such noetic/epistemic dependence involves neither the above excluded features nor objective categories, but rather is an intentional mind-object relationship that can be epistemically studied from within. In this second sense one speaks of the adequacy of meanings in terms of the appearance of what is meant. The

significance of biological habits, not as ontological categories, but as epistemic categories, is that such ontologically rooted dispositions, habits, or tendencies are immediately experienced and pervade the very tone and structure of immediately grasped content.

This dual focus points to our ontological-epistemic embeddedness in a reality not exclusively of our making. There is an inseparable relationship between the human biological organism bound to a natural universe, and the human knower who through meanings constitutes a lived environment. From the context of organism-environment interaction, there emerge irreducible meanings which allow objects to come to conscious awareness. Such meanings are irreducible to physical causal conditions or to psychological acts and processes; yet they emerge from the biological, when the biological is properly understood, for the content of human perception is inseparable from the structure of human behavior within its natural setting.

Both the ontological and phenomenological dimensions of habit relate to a fundamental feature of pragmatic philosophy, the creative, interactive unity of humans with that which is independently there. Experience is this rich ongoing transactional unity, and only within the context of meanings which reflect such an interactional unity does anything emerge for conscious awareness. Experience is always experience within a world, and the things that come to awareness within the world, and the world itself, as the outermost horizon of meaningful rapport with the independently real, as the encompassing frame of reference or field of interest of organism-environment interaction, reflects as well this interactional unity.

Lewis captures the import of this in his claim that, “It may be that between a sufficiently critical idealism and a sufficiently critical realism there are no issues save false issues which arise from the insidious fallacies of a copy theory of knowledge.”¹ As Peirce so well summarizes, Though “everything which is present to us is a phenomenal manifestation of ourselves,” this “does not prevent its being a phenomenon of something without us, just a rainbow is at once manifestation of the sun and the rain.”² For all the pragmatists, the flux of life as it concretely occurs contains already a phenomenological dimension of human thrown-outness onto the universe through a vital intentionality constitutive of the nature of experience as experimental. Thus the being of humans in the natural universe and the knowing by humans of the natural universe are inseparably connected within the structure of experience.

Such a transactional unity is more than a postulate of abstract thought, for it has phenomenological dimensions. The interactive ontological unity of organism-environment transaction is reflected in the phenomenologically grasped features of experience. That which intrudes itself inexplicably into experience is not bare datum, but rather evidences itself as the over-againstness of a thick reality there for my activity. Thus Lewis asserts that independent factuality “does not need to be assumed nor to be proved, but only to be acknowledged”,³ while Dewey observes that experience “reaches down into nature; it has depth.”⁴ This description of the ontological dimension of experience is well evinced

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1. C. I. Lewis, *Mind and the World Order* (New York: Dover Publications, 1929), p.194.
 2. Peirce, 5.283.
 3. Lewis, *Mind and the World Order*, Appendix D, p. 425-426.
 4. Dewey, Experience and Nature, *The Later Works*, vol. 1, 1981., p.12-13.

in Mead's claim that, in becoming an object, something has the character of "actually or potentially acting upon the organism from within itself." He calls this character that of having an inside.⁵ Such an acting upon the organism cannot be understood as passive resistance, but as active resistance, resistance to our organic activity. Peirce captures this ontological dimension of experience in his understanding of the Dynamical Object, which is "the Reality which by some means contrives to determine the Sign to its Representation."⁶ In this way habit creates the immediate object under the constraints of the dynamical object which is its ultimate referent, and provides the vital, living link between signs and the universe.

Pragmatism, in attempting to unite meanings freely created with the coercive thereness from which they have emerged, has at times emphasized meanings freely brought, and at times the speculative examination of what is there to coerce. What must be emphasized and distinguished is the epistemic and ontological unity at the heart of experience as providing the corridor from one to the other. Such an interactional unity contains a two directional openness: the primordial openness of the character of experience itself opens in one direction toward the features of the human modes of grasping the independently real, and in the other direction towards the features of the independently real, for the character of experience emerges from an interaction of these two poles and thus reflects characteristics of each, though it mirrors neither exactly. In the interactional unity which constitutes our worldly experience, both poles are thus manifest: the independently-there otherness onto which worldly experience opens, and the structure of the human way of being within whose purposive activity worldly experience emerges.

Abstract knowledge claims do not constitute our main access to the natural universe; concrete experience does. Yet the beginning infiltrations of meanings as embodied in human activity are immediately present in even the most rudimentary grasp within our natural embeddedness. Conversely, the semiotic relationships embodied in pragmatic meaning are not the products of the free play of linguistic signs, but rather are contoured within limits by the historically grounded dynamic forces operative in that within which we are embedded. At the very heart of the temporal stretch of human behavior as anticipatory is a creativity, expressive of the experimental nature of experience, that is at once unified with an ontological presence but that renders its grasp in terms of any absolute grounding impossible. Experience, as an interactional unity of both poles, reflects characteristics of each but mirrors neither exactly.

The failure to recognize this interactional "reflection" at the heart of all experience, and as a result to substitute for it a mirroring either of the ontologically real alone or of our selective activity alone, leads to the contemporary dichotomies of realism-antirealism, objectivism-relativism, foundationalism-antifoundationalism, a metaphysics of sheer presence or the demise of metaphysics. These alternatives all fail to recognize a sense of primordial experience that is inherently creative yet at the same time opens us onto the character of the thick independent reality in which we are embedded.

5. Mead, *The Philosophy of the Present*, ed. Arthur Murphy (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1959), p. 137.

6. Peirce, 4.536; See also 8.314.

The sense of concrete human existence in its natural ontological embeddedness involves a pervasive sense of temporal passage. As Peirce holds, such continuity is given in perception; that is “. . . we seem to perceive a genuine flow of time”⁷.

The move from temporality as pervasive of meaningful experience to process metaphysics as the basis for understanding its ontological character is operative in all the pragmatists. It is found in Lewis’ claim that “The absolutely given is a specious present fading into the past and growing into the future with no genuine boundaries. The breaking of this up . . . marks already the activity of an interested mind.”⁸ Or, as Mead states in similar fashion, “At the future edge of experience, things pass, their characters change and they go to pieces.”⁹ The role of human constitutive activity in transforming a processive, “independently there” universe into structured things unified in terms of their function within a world is succinctly indicated in Dewey’s claim that “structure is constancy of means, of things used for consequences, not of things taken by themselves absolutely.”¹⁰ Further, the “isolation of structure from the changes whose stable ordering it is, renders it mysterious—something that is metaphysical in the popular sense of the word, a kind of ghostly queerness.”¹¹

For all the pragmatists, the structures of things grasped by the knowing mind do not reach a reality more ultimate than the processive interactions of temporally founded experience, but rather, the lived-through grasp of felt temporality opening onto a processive universe is the very foundation for the emergence within experience of meaningful structure. The two directional openness of experience carries temporality from one pole to the other, from a phenomenology of worldly experience toward a process metaphysics. Thus, when James asks, “How far into the rest of nature may we have to go in order to get entirely beyond” the overflow of experience,¹² his answer is clear. One may “go into the heart of nature”, one may grasp the most pervasive textures of its most characteristic features and one will not get beyond its overflow. Humans are natural beings in interaction with a natural universe. And at the heart of nature is process. Conversely, process metaphysics reinforces the pragmatic understanding of knowledge, for as James observes, “when the whole universe seems only . . . to be still incomplete (else why its ceaseless changing?) why, of all things, should knowing be exempt?”¹³

The temporal structures that belongs to our interpretive processes belongs as well to universe within which they emerge. Human habits of response, which are for the pragmatist the living embodiment of meaning, are precisely “ontologically thick”, temporally grounded anticipatory dynamic tendencies structuring emerging activities in the context of alternative possibilities for ongoing actualization. The vision of a “thick”, “dense”, processive “thereness” not of our making and of an indefinite richness of potentialities for ordering within it, is gained by a sophisticated elaboration of or

7. 5.205

8. Lewis, *Mind and the World Order*, p. 58.

9. Mead, *Philosophy of the Act*, p. 345.

10. Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, p. 64-65.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

12. James, A Pluralistic Universe, *The Works of William James*, 1977, p. 129.

13. James, Essays in Radical Empiricism, *The Works of William James*, 1976, p. 37.

extrapolation from the reference to the primitive experience of anticipatory potentialities and unactualized possibilities as this occurs through the actual functioning of habit as concrete living meaning in the flow of time.

A disposition or habit as a regulative rule is something whose possibilities of determination no multitude of actually generated instances can exhaust. The primordial sense of the unactualized creative potentialities of habit as experienced in the actual temporal continuity of the durational present gives a concrete sense of a real lawfulness which governs unactualized possibilities, of potentialities which can never be exhausted by any number of actualities. Additionally, the sense of unactualized possibilities embedded in dispositions or habits brings a sense of real alternatives—the could do or could be otherwise—into the heart of perceptual awareness, providing a sense of freedom and what Lewis refers to as a “primordial sense of probable events.”¹⁴

Because of this sense of potentiality rooted in meaning as habit, Peirce can proclaim 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.”¹⁵ The concrete functioning of habit provides, epistemically, the conceptual counterpart of the real lawfulness held to exist in the world, and provides, ontologically, an example of this real lawfulness. Further, it would seem at once to provide, for Peirce, an experiential basis for the rejection of deterministic hypotheses, one not presented in “The Doctrine of Necessity Examined”. For, the sense of unactualized possibilities embedded in meaning as dispositional brings a sense of real alternatives, the “could do otherwise” into the very heart of perceptual awareness, providing an experientially meaningful basis for the rejection of deterministic hypotheses, a directly felt sense of possibilities and of the spontaneity of choice among them. This primitive epistemic sense of potentialities and alternative possibilities, as well as the sense of something over against our activity which frustrates or embraces our anticipations, finds its place in the content of Peirce’s phaneroscopic derivation of the categories, and ultimately in his metaphysics. While Peirce’s derivation of the categories, viewed in the context of either his so-called logical deduction or his “official” phaneroscopy have seemed to some to be stilted and forced, yet they do reflect features embedded in the sense of ourselves as active beings, the sense of concrete human existence.

In the immediate flow of humans and that broader context within which they are embedded, these temporally founded traits cannot be uniquely attributed to one or the other. The primordial sense of the pulsations of temporal existence opens in one direction toward the temporal pulsations of cosmic activity and in the other direction toward the structure of the temporal pulsations of the human way of being within whose purposive activity the temporal dynamics of the universe at large manifest themselves at an emergent level of activity. The sense of temporal flow embedded in interpretive activity is at once a sense of the temporal dynamics of a processive universe, with our own dispositional tendencies or “living meanings” as part and parcel of it.

14. Lewis, *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation*, p. 320.

15. 5.212.

These dimensions cannot be understood from the pragmatic framework unless the search for the fully determinate, the fully fixed, the fully discrete yields to the basic pragmatic intuition of the continuity and indeterminacy which pervades a radically temporal universe in the fullness of its space-time concreteness. Thus, Peirce and James alike stress the role of infinitesimals in ridding us of the notions of discreteness and determinacy, be it notions of experiential bits, ontological bits, or temporal bits.¹⁶ As Dewey stresses, the indeterminate, problematic situation is objectively indeterminate and problematic, independently of consciousness.¹⁷ In a similar vein, Peirce, James, and Lewis alike deny that the principles of non-contradiction and excluded middle apply to reality apart from the organizing mind.¹⁸

Neither intelligibility nor truth requires either the ontologically discrete or the ontologically determinate. Neither the ceaselessly "becoming other" of reality nor its inherent indeterminacy leads to unintelligibility and/or the end of metaphysics. The postmodern tendency to so relate the two stems from the refusal to separate intelligibility from discreteness and fixity. The reality of the continuity of becoming other and the indeterminacy this brings with it provides for rational discourse and ongoing inquiry which is rooted in and provides perspectival knowledge about reality, so long as knowledge is not understood as a direct, uninterpreted seizure of what immediately "is", and truth is not understood as conformity or correspondence to the fixed discretions of a fully determinate reality. Underlying the supposedly necessary choice between the groundlessness of Derridian play or Rortyan conversation on the one hand and the grasp of reality in its "pristine purity" on the other is the assumption that without a "place" for the fully determinate, the groundless alternative wins out.

Our perceptual world, which grounds the emergence of facts and objects and provides the foundation for other, more abstract or more imaginative worlds, is ontologically one with the spatio-temporal unfolding of an indeterminate reality. It is, metaphysically, that independently real. Yet, a world is dependent upon the meaning system or interpretive context which grasps in a way in which the full concreteness of spatio-temporal reality is not, for a world is that perspective of the indefinitely rich reality which has been "fixed" or "carved out" by a system of meanings. Knowledge is abstractive and selective. A world, though concrete, is nonetheless selective in the sense that a world, as the concrete content denoted by a system of meanings, is one way in which

16. James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, 153-154. Peirce, 6.109, 6.111, 6.87, 5.282, 6.138. For an integration of these references in terms of the above issue see my *Time, Continuity, and Indeterminacy: A pragmatic Engagement With Contemporary Perspectives* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), Chapters 8 and 9.

17. *The Quest for Certainty, The Later Works*, Vol. 4, 1984, p. 194.

18. James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, p. 117; C.I. Lewis, "A Pragmatic Conception of the A Priori", *Collected Papers of Clarence Irving Lewis*, ed. John Goheen and John Mothershead, Jr. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970), p. 232; Peirce asserts that the general is that to which the law of excluded middle does not apply, while the vague is that to which the principle of non-contradiction does not apply (5.448). He then explicitly identifies continuity with generality. For the way continuity pervades all of reality, see my *Charles Peirce's Pragmatic Pluralism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

the indeterminate concreteness of reality can be delineated or “fixed.” A system, once chosen, limits the alternatives possible within it, but alternative systems may be possible. The indefinite richness of a processive universe is there. Where the conceptual “cuts” are imposed is, in part, our decision. A world is delineated by a system of facts, but facts are not independent of the selective knowledge process, for facts are abstracted portions of interacting continuities.

A world is by definition consistent because a world is the concrete content which is delineated by an interrelated network of consistent meanings. The world answers to the laws of excluded middle and non-contradiction, and thus it represents the ideal of that which can be conceptually articulated – and hence made precise – to its ideal limit. Perhaps it can be said, somewhat metaphorically, that while reality is the infinity of a continuum or ongoing process, the world is the logical fixation of an infinite number of possible cuts within it. The world is the context of meaning within which all other frameworks and objects may be articulated in the sense that the world is the “outermost” content or encompassing frame of reference or field of interest of organism-environment interaction, and hence of the conceptual cuts which can delineate experience consistently within the context of meaningful rapport. This “logical fixation” of possible cuts emerges within prereflective behavioral attitudes as regulative and anticipatory.

Such a world then, opens in one direction toward the structures of a processive, concretely rich universe and the possibilities it presents, and in the other direction toward the structures of our modes of grasping it and the possibilities such modes of grasping allow. What can occur in the world must conform to the possibilities available within the world we have structured — though the world we have structured has arisen through successful interaction with the possibilities offered by the dynamic unfolding of spatio-temporal reality. Our interpretations are, as Derrida holds, rooted in the flux, but the flux is not “free-floating”; the flux is the flux of a temporally indeterminate universe in its ongoing dynamics, an indeterminate universe which renders senseless, indeed literally so, the concept of “mirroring” to which Rorty rightly objects or the supposed grasp of unmediated, decontextualized facts to which Derrida rightly objects.

Throughout many levels, truth is both made and found. The so-called tensions between truth as made and truth as found, between truth as changing and truth as fixed, result from focusing on diverse dimensions operative within the intertwining of human interpretive activity and the temporal unfolding of the processive concrete universe. We create the interpretive frameworks within which beliefs can emerge and be found true or false and within which investigation can tend toward agreement. The creative intelligence involved in radical changes and shifts of interpretive frameworks is influenced by socio-cultural conditions, but is ultimately founded not in a relativistic, perspectively closed historicism, but in an ontologically grounded, perspectively open temporalism. The criterion for adequately cutting into the indefinitely rich matrix of possibilities of experience offered by the dynamics of an indeterminately rich concrete universe is workability, but workability can be established only relative to some meaningful network by which experience is “caught”. Reality answers our questions and determines the workability of our meanings, but what answers it gives are partially dependent on what questions we ask, and what meaning structures work are partially dependent upon the structures we bring.

Thus, underlying the very possibility of empirical knowledge is an intentional relation between humans and their world; what facts our world reveals is partially dependent upon the interrelated structures of the meanings we bring. The dense, concrete

richness there for possible discrimination of uniformities, a concrete richness constituted by the continuity of an indefinitely rich processive universe which, as Peirce puts it, “swims in indeterminacy,”¹⁹ is independent of our conceptualizations and the possibilities they allow. But the manner in which uniformities are delineated is partially determined by the range of interrelationships within which perceived facts can emerge.

The ontological system of intermeshing dispositional tendencies, as indefinitely concrete, is revealable in various ways through various meaning structures, and is universalizable and “intelligible” through the network of such structures, though “in itself” it contains no inherently intelligible order. However, as Dewey carefully point out, this “does not mean that nature has lost intelligibility. It rather signifies that we are in position to realize that the term intelligible is to be understood literally . . . Nature is capable of being understood . . . The devotion we show to the ideal of intelligence determines the extent” to which the universe “is congenial to mind.”²⁰

The pragmatic examination of concrete human existence not only provides the focus for a content of the categories as phenomenological and then as metaphysical, but also provides the direction for understanding the nature of the metaphysical enterprise which utilizes them. Like any system of meanings, the categorial system of meanings that constitutes a metaphysical interpretation conforms to the pragmatic understanding of knowledge as linked to the dynamics of experimental method. It arises out of the richness of experience, provides an organizing perspective that directs the way we approach experience, and in turn must be verified by the intelligibility it introduces into the ongoing course of experience. As Peirce indicates, metaphysical endeavor is like “that of the special sciences”, except that it “rests upon a kind of phenomena with which everyman’s experience is so saturated that he usually pays no particular attention to them.”²¹ Thus, James compares the method of science and metaphysics as ideal systems of thought yet allows for a disparity of content,²² while Dewey points out that philosophy, like science, legitimately theorizes about experience, but can legitimately begin not with the contents of science, but with the “integrity of experience.”²³

Pragmatists as process metaphysicians are led, in accordance with the experimental model of gaining knowledge, to a “speculative, interpretive description”, via a speculative extrapolation from experience, of what independent reality must be like in its character as independent to give rise to the primordial level of experience and to “answer to” the meanings by which it reveals itself to us. And, it should be well noted here that there is a vast difference between the illicit reification by past philosophies of common sense or scientific meanings, and the speculative extrapolation from within experience of the pervasive tones and textures of the thick processive “thereness” which enters into all experience. The categories of metaphysics provide the illumination by which traits of “what is there” can come into focus. Such categories represent the

19. Peirce, 1.171-1.172.

20. Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty*, p. 215.

21. Peirce, 1.282; 6.2.

22. James, *Principles of Psychology*, *The Works of William James*, 2 vol’s., 1981, p. 671.

23. Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, p. 37, 19.

persistent attempt to illuminate and articulate, through a creative scheme or explanatory structure, the processes and textures present within all experience.

The vision of a “thick”, “dense”, processive “thereness” not of our making, and of an indefinite richness of potentialities for ordering within it, is gained by a sophisticated elaboration of or extrapolation from the reference to the primitive experience of anticipatory potentialities and unactualized possibilities as this occurs through the actual functioning of concrete living meaning in the flow of time. Such a processive universe which reveals itself in the pervasive textures of experience is the home of the whole of the sensory, with its richness and spontaneity, the home of the brutes otherness of the independently real with which I interact and to which I respond; the home of the continuities and regularities which pervade by commerce with it and allow me to anticipate the type of presence to be contained within the approaching moment. Thus all the pragmatists, through their respective terminologies, converge toward a process metaphysics of nature which can be characterized in terms of the categories of qualitative richness, diversity, spontaneity, possibility; interaction, over-againstness, shock, presentness; dispositional tendencies, potentialities, lawful modes of behavior. These categories are understood and interrelated in terms of ways in which a thick, natural, dynamic reality functions.

This emerging metaphysics thus envisions a universe in which humans are at home and with which their activities are continuous; a universe in which their lived qualitative experience can grasp real emergent qualitative features of reality and in which their creative meanings, embodying dispositionally generated noetic potentialities, can grasp the real dynamic tendencies of reality to produce operations of a certain type with a certain regularity. A universe, in short, which is both grasped by, and reflected within, the pervasive textures at the heart of all experience and at the foundation of all meaning.

It has been seen that the categorial contents of such a metaphysics are in no way intended as a grasp of being in some spectator vision. But they are also not merely hypothetically supposed at the beginning without our having some experiential awareness of them. The second-level reflections of philosophy must be grounded in lived experience, and be constantly fed by this experience. Such an open system is explanation rooted in and answerable to lived experience, not direct grasp of “being in itself.” Though rooted in the lived level, it is never completely adequate to the lived level. It is open to change and development, just as all claims are open to change and development. Pragmatism gives rise to a new understanding of metaphysical system as an open system or explanatory structure, and to a view of explanation rooted in, rather than opposed to, a history of evolving change.

Here it may be objected that the view of metaphysical system as perspectively and temporally rooted involves relativism and historicism, both for metaphysical claims and for knowledge in general, of which it is a kind. However, such objections again sever experience from its creative, interactive unity with, and openness upon, that which is independently there. As previously indicated, the unity denies the arbitrariness of antifoundationalism, antirealism, relativism, a historicism of present happenstance, the demise of metaphysics. The temporally founded creativity denies the absoluteness of foundationalism, realism, objectivism, the absolute grasp, a metaphysics of pure presence.

Instead of the stultifying self-enclosurement of a relativism in terms of arbitrary conceptual schemes, this pragmatic view houses an open perspectivalism in which

perspectives open onto the common concrete ground of their possibility. Instead of an historicism of present happenstance, it involves a temporalism in which historical rootedness is at once ontological rootedness, and in which the ontological rootedness of perspective emerges within the context of a past that presents itself in the richness of the potentialities and possibilities of a processive present oriented toward a novel and indefinite future. Like all knowledge claims, the metaphysical claims of pragmatic philosophy are fallibilistic, perspectival, and temporal, but nonetheless ontologically grounded.

Such an understanding of the nature of the metaphysical enterprise offers a positive path for the reconstruction of metaphysics which avoids traditional paradigms and the false dichotomies to which they give rise. In this way it is more contemporary than much of what is contained in contemporary debates. For, much of contemporary metaphysical criticism, though operating within the seemingly novel paradigm of language or within other seemingly novel paradigms radically restrictive of the nature and limits of metaphysical pursuits, has yet not succeeded in breaking with the alternatives offered by, and hence the possible solutions allowable by, a long philosophical tradition.

Though the alternative and possible solutions may take distinctively new turns and though seemingly new alternatives and new limitations emerge, they can too often be seen as new paradigmatic twists to old paradigmatic offerings. For, too often the collapse of spectator absolutes, of closed systems, of indubitable foundations, leads to the claims of the demise of metaphysics, and a relativistic, anti-foundationalist turn to conversation or to the play of difference. The pragmatic position has its foundations in the interactional unity of the noetic creativity of humans and the ontological presence which “intrudes” within experience in a way which undercuts the alternatives of foundationalism-antifoundationalism, objectivism- relativism, or realism-antirealism, providing instead an objectively grounded perspectivalism.

In assessing the positive value of metaphysics today, the claim is frequently made that metaphysics provides meaningfulness rather than truth and that it is interpretive rather than cognitive. But the claims of common sense and metaphysics alike provide meaningfulness, a way of orienting oneself to the world, before the issue of truth can emerge. If one does not confine truth to conformity to, correspondence with, or a non-perspectival grasp of, an unchanging, totally structured reality which we merely “find”, then meaningful, creative world orientation and truth as workability go hand in hand. Indeed, though differing philosophies put forth differing positions embedded within, and reflecting the influence of, differing cultural, socio-historical conditions, yet they can do so only because they are further and more deeply rooted in the conditions which make possible the emergence of any reflection, and because the philosopher is rooted in the concrete richness of these conditions which ground the alternative possibilities of formalized articulations.

The contemporary unease with the traditional notion of systematic speculative metaphysics can be seen to be embedded in the very structure of pragmatism as a philosophic system. The history of metaphysical speculation, as embodied in philosophic system, is a history evincing positions that have systematically denied or rejected the sense of temporality, creativity, novelty, fallibilism, pluralism, perspectivalism, vagueness, indeterminacy, and openendedness – in short, the key dimensions of pragmatic philosophy – in favor of the eternal, the fixed, the final, the certain, the absolute grasp, the ultimate completion, the perfected whole, the fully determinate. The supposed

philosophic foundations thus asserted were, according to this pragmatic view, reflective creations grounded in a foundational richness ignored by philosophic thinking. Pragmatism attempts neither to create freely nor to free itself from ontological commitments, but rather to reveal the way in which there is an ontological committedness or rootedness at the very heart of the experience that grounds such alternative attempts.

The categories of a speculative metaphysics within pragmatism thus attempt to draw one toward an awareness of the interactive openness, at the heart of experience, of humans and that which is independently there, and in so doing provide the path for freeing thinking from premature ontological assertions, from illicit reifications, and from a tradition of philosophy which, in its search for supposed foundations, lost the illusive but pervasive experiential-ontological foundations of its search. These latter tendencies of metaphysical thinking, as well as contemporary attempts to throw out the metaphysical baby with the objectionable bath water, ignore the fundamental, creative, indefinitely rich interactive epistemic and metaphysical unity at the heart of lived experience. The language of philosophy is born of a tradition which ignores this interactive unity, and hence it reinforces problems and alternative solutions which the present position eludes.

As long as pragmatic doctrines are understood within, or developed in terms of, one of the family related sets of the very alternatives it has rejected, then though specific aspects of its position may be further developed for specialized purposes, the significance and uniqueness of its systematic vision is lost. Pragmatism, in illuminating the creative interactive unity at the heart of experience through its focus on biologically rooted meanings and experimental activity, develops a position which eludes the false alternatives and misplaced dichotomies which still haunt philosophy today and which tend to form the backdrop for questions concerning the demise of metaphysics. It rejects key elements of the tradition it inherits, not by destroying the enterprise of creative metaphysics, but by reconstructing the pathway for its ongoing development. Though in some ways this pragmatic endeavor manifests the end, as demise, of metaphysics in the traditional sense, yet it also represents its end as newly focused aim. To take a typical Dewey statement out of context, no ending is absolute, but rather every ending is at once at a new beginning.

In conclusion, and as a sort of postscript, a few general, inadequately brief remarks are in order concerning not the justification of systems as understood within this pragmatic framework, but rather the justification of this entire pragmatic framework, though even this will of necessity draw from its own perspective. It of course cannot be self-justifying; no system can justify itself. Any attempt at self-justification already presupposes features of that which it is attempting to justify. However, the philosophical tradition, as a tradition which has articulated itself through a history of incommensurable systems in conflict, seems, like the history of science, to point toward a non-formal evaluative sense of the adequacy of formal conceptions, for it has shown an ability to come to a loose, albeit contingent, consensus concerning a loss of vitality of the most soundly developed systems, of certain lines of questioning and possible types of answers, through a vague sense of lifelessness, even though there is a formal incommensurability among these systems concerning the nature of truth, evidence, justification, and the issue of foundations. Indeed, many of the possible formalizations of philosophy, though emerging with continued logical vigor, are today beginning to emerge as peculiarly devoid of vitality.

The persuasiveness of a system does not lie in a strictly logical force, or in a strictly empirical force, in the sense of pointing out supposed trans-systematic facts that

other philosophical positions must accept, but rather in its forcefulness in arousing basic insights that “ring true to life”, infusing its paradigmatic structure with vitality even as another takes on the lifelessness of artificiality. In the language of pragmatism, a philosophy is ultimately judged not by its roots but by its fruits. Any philosophic system will hold persuasion only if others, through such a system, find that it throws into focus initial pre-philosophical glimmerings that were before vaguely inexpressible or submerged through the weight of distortive structures. The ongoing philosophical tradition itself would seem to indicate that the reflections of reason are ultimately rooted in, and accountable to, a pre-philosophical vitality of life within which is embedded a rich, inexhaustively creative intelligence which underlies, overflows and ultimately deabsolutizes any attempt to impose formalized demands upon it. Thus, James characterizes the process by which one accepts a philosophical view as “life exceeding logic. . . the theoretic reason finds arguments after the conclusion is one there.”²⁴

Indeed, this is the only kind of evaluation that can really keep any system alive, no matter how solid its arguments or how numerous its intrasystematic “facts”. If, however, as pragmatism holds, the pulse of human existence at its very core is, both ontologically and epistemically, creatively and perspectively intertwined with, and thus attuned to, that which reveals itself in various ways both within and among various levels and modes of human activity, then this free, creative, pre-thematic evaluative sense can be at once both a more demanding and more tolerant master than any of the diverse second level articulations to which it gives rise. Pragmatic philosophy gives philosophical legitimacy to this erythematic evaluative sense that is born of our essential interactive unity with a thick dynamic universe which we must engage in fruitful ways. This pragmatic understanding of the nature of metaphysics, and indeed of human experience and knowledge in general as well as the cosmos in which it is embedded, has important implications both for contemporary attempts to “situate” metaphysics in the context of philosophic inquiry and for contemporary attempts to come to grips with the full significance and uniqueness of classical American pragmatism.

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