

# Pragmatism and Psychoanalysis – C.S. Peirce as a Mediating Figure

## *Pragmatismo e Psicanálise – C.S. Peirce como uma Figura Mediadora*

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**Abstract:** The author explores the curious fact that, while roughly contemporaneous intellectual movements with overlapping concerns and critiques, pragmatism and psychoanalysis hardly took account of one another. Indeed, they still hold each other at arm's length: rarely do representatives of one movement engage the texts, theories, or hypotheses of the other, indeed, rarely do they exhibit even an informed familiarity with the other movement. The author argues that this is to the mutual disadvantage of each movement. Moreover, he recounts a critical historical event (Sigmund Freud's encounter with William James) as both a missed opportunity and an illuminating metaphor for the continuing aloofness of the two movements from one another. Finally, he indicates how C. S. Peirce can be seen as a mediating figure, one whose understanding of mind allows for a fruitful exchange between these two "upstart" traditions.

**Keywords:** Unconscious. Mind. Consciousness. Experience. Mourning. Habit. Contemporaneity.

**Resumo:** *O autor explora o fato curioso de que, embora sejam movimentos intelectuais mais ou menos contemporâneos, com preocupações e críticas que se sobrepõem, pragmatismo e psicanálise levaram-se muito pouco em consideração um ao outro. É certo que ainda mantêm uma distância segura entre si: raramente representantes de um movimento enfrentam os textos, teorias ou as hipóteses do outro; e que raramente exibem até mesmo certa familiaridade desinformada com o outro movimento. O autor argumenta que tal fato contribui para a desvantagem de ambos os movimentos. Além do mais, ele reconta um evento histórico crítico (o encontro de Sigmund Freud com William James) como se fosse tanto uma oportunidade desperdiçada quanto uma metáfora iluminadora para o distanciamento que continua a existir entre um e outro movimento. Finalmente, ele indica como C.S. Peirce pode ser visto como uma figura mediadora, alguém cuja compreensão da mente permite uma troca frutífera entre essas duas tradições "arrogantes".*

**Palavras-chave:** *Inconsciente. Mente. Consciência. Experiência. Luto. Hábito. Contemporaneidade.*

Pragmatism and psychoanalysis are roughly contemporaneous movements.<sup>1</sup> They stretch from the closing decades of the nineteenth century to the opening years of the twenty-first. Though younger than Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914) and William James (1842-1910) and only slightly older than John Dewey (1859-1952), Sigmund Freud's (1856-1939) intellectual career spans roughly the period in which we see the emergence and ascendancy of pragmatism (FISCH 1986; KUKLICK 1977; MENAND 2002). The numerous and deep differences between Vienna and Boston (or, more specifically, Cambridge, Massachusetts) at the time of the origin of these movements certainly cannot be discounted,<sup>2</sup> but they are not of such a character as to render insignificant the contemporaneity of these movements. *Contemporaneity* here signifies not an abstract historical coincidence but overlapping inheritances and preoccupations (for example, the need to come to terms with the intellectual revolutions in such fields as cosmology, geology, and biology). That is, these movements are contemporaneous in a thick, complex historical sense (cf. ROTH).

Moreover, both pragmatism and psychoanalysis are upstart movements. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that the earliest representatives of these two traditions are properly seen, in psychoanalytic terms, as *acting out* their frustration and dissatisfaction with various forms of cultural authority,<sup>3</sup> but as a way of establishing themselves as reconfigured forms of such authority. They are seen by their advocates as extending the experimental method into fields historically dominated by other methods. They are in effect instituting the authority of experience and experimentation as the most reliable form of authority. In their attempts to institute experience as authoritative,<sup>4</sup> however,

<sup>1</sup> What John Dewey asserts in "Philosophy and Civilization" is worthy of recollection here: "philosophy, like politics, literature, and the plastic arts, is itself a phenomenon of human culture. Its connection with social history, with civilization, is intrinsic" (LW 3: 3). "Philosophers are parts of history, caught up in its movements; creators perhaps in some measure of its future, but also assuredly creatures of its past" (LW 3: 4). The same can be said of psychology and, more specifically, psychoanalysis.

<sup>2</sup> See Carl E. SCHORSKE's *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (NY: Vintage Books, 1981), Bruno BETTELHEIM's *Freud's Vienna and Other Essays* (NY: Vintage Books, 1989), Louis MENAND's *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (NY: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2002). In: *Psycho-Analysis as History: Negation and Freedom in Freud* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), Michael S. Roth persuasively argues that psychoanalysis is itself "a theory of history," "a framework through which we can make sense of our pasts" (p. 9).

<sup>3</sup> In: *Praxis and Action* Richard J. BERNSTEIN suggests: "Most contemporary philosophers have been in revolt against the Cartesian framework. Descartes is frequently called the father of modern philosophy. If we are to judge by philosophy during the past hundred years, this title can best be understood in a Freudian sense. It is a common characteristic of many contemporary philosophers that they have sought to overthrow or dethrone the father" (1971, p. 5).

<sup>4</sup> One of the best formulation of this is offered by DEWEY in "Beliefs and Existences": "all such fixities, whether named atoms or God, [...] have existence and import only in the problems, needs, struggles, and instrumentalities of conscious agents and patients. For *home rule may be found in the unwritten efficacious constitution of experience*" (MW 3, p. 87; emphasis added). "It all comes down to experience personally conducted and personally consummated" (p. 94).

they (especially the pragmatists) are altering the meaning of experience.<sup>5</sup> The appeal to experience here, pragmatically means (among other things), the continuous revision of inherited beliefs, the interminable task of reconstructing our received understanding, in light of what experience discloses.

Despite this, pragmatism and psychoanalysis hardly took account of one another. Indeed, they barely acknowledged the existence of each other. Though they shared far more in common than even their most informed and generous representatives acknowledged, they went their separate ways.

From a Freudian perspective, one might wonder if this is an instance of the “narcissism of small differences.”<sup>6</sup> From a pragmatist perspective, one might ask whether the differences between the two approaches are always and everywhere truly (i.e., practically) differences that make a difference, except there seem to be all too few pragmatists disposed to raise, let alone to press, this question (see, however, RORTY; also COLAPIETRO). Thus, despite their numerous affinities and evident complementarity, the two perspectives remain detached from one another. Psychoanalytically speaking, there is an unresolved or unacknowledged ambivalence here (SEGAL). Pragmatically speaking, there are in many instances merely verbal differences masking both substantive and methodological agreement. The resources and insights of each movement are thereby denied the refinements and correctives of the other movement. The opening years of the present century, much like those of the previous one, give numerous indications that these movements are vital, though deeply controversial and contested, ones. Expressions such as the “resurgence” (BERNSTEIN) or “revival” (DICKSTEIN) of pragmatism are today all but commonplaces, whereas the resurrection of Freud upon the 150th anniversary of his birth is being announced in the popular media and reaffirmed (but also strenuously denounced) in scholarly contexts. Unlike the transition to the twentieth century, however, that to the twenty-first offers some signs that these two movements will not remain locked in studied neglect of each other.

One striking, if disputable, example of this is found in Giles Gunn’s *Beyond Solidarity: Pragmatism in a Globalized World* (2001). “Problems arise for pragmatism,” Gunn contends, “chiefly when particular cultural perspectives prove impervious or inimical to one another or, almost worse, incommensurable with each other” (p. 17). In the present context, the tragicomic irony is that pragmatism has historically proven itself to be impervious to psychoanalysis, its defenders priding themselves on the incommensurability of pragmatic and psychoanalytic categories and concepts. Though the focus of his concern is the political arena, Gunn understands this in a psychoanalytically inflected manner: it is an arena in which questions of identity are inescapable and indeed central, hence one in which the experience of loss or merely the threat of such experience tends to trigger an urgent mobilization of all one’s psychic resources against the perceived

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<sup>5</sup> See John DEWEY’s “An Empirical Survey of Empiricism” (LW 11, p. 69-83); John E. SMITH’s “The Reconception of Experience in Peirce, James and Dewey” (first published in *The Monist*, v. 68, n. 4 [1985], p. 538-54, and reprinted as Chapter 1 of *America’s Philosophical Vision*).

<sup>6</sup> FREUD used this expression for the first time in a paper entitled “The Taboo of Virginity” (1917).

source of such a radical threat (a threat to one's identity and, hence, to one's very sense of being). Though easily recruited into the cause of countering such a threat, pragmatism is at its best when it ceases to be a strategy of resisting such loss and becomes a process of *working through* this loss of identity, of self *and* world (of the world in which we are at home, the self with which we have to this juncture identified).<sup>7</sup> For this and possibly other reasons, Gunn suggests, pragmatism "is to be associated with those interpretive strategies that, like psychoanalysis, cultivate [...] 'the ability to mourn'" (p. 17). In light of such critics as Stanley Cavell, it will certainly strike some readers as erroneous to associate pragmatism with psychoanalysis in this way. For them, pragmatism is virtually definable as the perspective that eschews the necessity to mourn: the very notion of devastating loss allegedly is no part of the pragmatist lexicon. As Cavell puts it, whatever the pragmatists mean by "work," they do not mean what Freud signified by *Trauerarbeit*, the task or process of *working through* the loss of that which one has incorporated into one's identity (CAVEL 1998, p. 73).<sup>8</sup> But, if Gunn is correct, the pragmatist conception of work is inclusive and elastic enough to be stretched to include, among countless other cultural and personal practices, the ability to mourn. I am inclined to go so far as to suggest that classical pragmatism is a protracted process of cultural mourning in which diversely situated representatives of a self-consciously "modern" epoch are struggling to come to terms with a widely experienced, deeply felt loss.<sup>9</sup> In brief, pragmatism is itself a process of mourning, albeit one in which its own character as such is only fleetingly and uncertainly glimpsed. If this is true, then pragmatism needs psychoanalysis simply to understand itself. In turn, the critical *experiences* on which psychoanalytic practice focuses are social transactions in and through which human identities are formed, deformed, and possibly reformed.<sup>10</sup> If *this* is true, then psychoanalysis needs pragmatism in order to understand itself better.

<sup>7</sup> For an informative, insightful account of how the processes of *working-through* and *acting-out* intersect and qualify each other, see Dominick La CAPRA's "Reflections on Trauma, Absence, and Loss" in *Whose Freud? The Place of Psychoanalysis in Contemporary Culture* (New Haven: Yale, 2000), edited by Peter Brooks & Alex Woloch, p. 178-204.

<sup>8</sup> In a dark poem entitled "A Servant to Servants," Robert Frost has the narrator of the work recall the claim made by a character named Len:

He says the best way out is always through.  
And I agree to that, or in so far  
As that I can see no way out but through –  
Leastways for me ... (p. 66-7)

Before calling this, the narrator confesses:

It's rest I want – there, I have said it out –  
... from doing  
Things over and over that just won't stay done. (p. 66)

<sup>9</sup> I [COLAPIETRO] develop this point in "In the Wake of Darwin," an essay included in *In Dewey's Wake* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2003), edited by William J. GAVIN, p. 213-41.

<sup>10</sup> FREUD insisted that his theoretical constructions made little or no sense apart from their reference to the clinical *experience* in terms of which he crafted his various conceptions. This point is emphatically made in a number of texts, nowhere more forcefully than in "The Unconscious" (see, e.g., *The Freud Reader*, edited by Peter GAY, p. 575).

These movements emerged, significantly, in the second half of the nineteenth century and received in the first decade of the twentieth century some of their most important articulations. They did not so much mark the *fin de siècle* as they announced a radical reorientation toward the historical present (SCHORSKE; ROTH), defined in large part by their positive assessment of temporality and history, transience and transition, translation<sup>11</sup> and transmutation.<sup>12</sup> As I have already noted, the chronology of their origin and development itself clearly suggests the contemporaneity of these movements. Let me highlight more specifically than I have thus far some of the most important events in this chronology. Sigmund Freud traced the origin of psychoanalysis to the work of “another Viennese physician, Dr. Josef Breuer.” In the case of Fräulein Anna O., Breuer first (1880-82) made use of the procedure of psychoanalysis “on a girl who was suffering from hysteria” Five Lectures, 3).<sup>13</sup> Several years before Breuer developed these procedures, Charles S. Peirce published in *Popular Science Monthly* the founding essays of the pragmatist movement, “The Fixation of Belief” (1877) and “How to Make Our Ideas Clear” (1878).<sup>14</sup> Whereas psychoanalysis grew out of the clinical practice of medical doctors, pragmatism grew out of methodological reflections on the actual practice of

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<sup>11</sup> In “Psychoanalysis as a Hermeneutic Science,” in: *Whose Freud?* (edited by Brooks & Woloch), Peter LOEWENBERG suggests: “Psychoanalysis is intrinsically interpretation and translation, and the problem of translation is coextensive with the problem of meaning” (p. 99). Peirce seems also to have taken the problem of meaning to be coextensive with that of translation, going so far as to claim that “The meaning of a sign is the sign into which it has to be translated into” (CP 4.132; see, however, T. L. SHORT’s “Peirce on Meaning and Translation”). Specifically in reference to pragmatism, it is illuminating to recall here that the originator of this doctrine was by means of it trying to answer just this question: “But of the myriads of forms into which a proposition may be translated, what is that one which is to be called its very meaning?” (CP 5.426). Peirce’s pragmatism is essentially an answer to this question: The very meaning of a proposition into which it must be translated in order to attain the highest level of clarity or perspicuity is “that form in which the proposition becomes applicable to human conduct, not in these or those special circumstances, nor when one entertains this or that special design, but that form which is most directly applicable to self-control under every situation, and to every purpose” (CP 5.427).

<sup>12</sup> In *Pragmatism*, JAMES declared: “The really vital question for us all is, What is this world going to be? What is life eventually to make of itself? The centre of gravity of philosophy must therefore alter its place. The earth of things, long thrown into shadow by the glories of the upper ether, must resume its rights” (p. 62).

<sup>13</sup> In “A History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement” (1914), however, FREUD assumed “the entire responsibility for psycho-analysis” (p. 4, note 1).

<sup>14</sup> PEIRCE claimed: “The ancestry of pragmatism is respectable enough” (CP 5.12), including such figures as Socrates, Aristotle, Spinoza, Locke, Berkeley, Kant, and Comte (CP 5.11). But he immediately added: “the more conscious adoption of it as a *lanterna pedibus* in the discussion of dark questions, and the elaboration of it into a method in aid of philosophic inquiry came, in the first instance, from the humblest *souche* imaginable” – a knot of young men, in Old Cambridge, called themselves “half-ironically, half-defiantly, ‘The Metaphysical Club’” (CP 5.12). “Our metaphysical proceedings had all been in winged words (and swift ones, at that, for the most part), until at length, lest the club should be dissolved, without leaving any material *souvenir* behind, I drew up a little paper expressing some of the opinions that I had been urging all along under the name of pragmatism.

experimental inquirers. In one formulation, psychoanalysis conceived its goal to be the transformation of human misery into ordinary human unhappiness or dissatisfaction.<sup>15</sup> In its original articulation, pragmatism took its objective to be a transformation of our understanding of inquiry.

Because of this difference of concern, also because of the apparently introspective character of psychoanalytic procedures (see, e.g., DEWEY) and, in turn, the at least apparently behavioristic leanings of the paradigmatic pragmatists, we are likely to miss an important affinity between these two movements. For pragmatism no less than for psychoanalysis, human experience and action are not explicable solely in reference to conscious, voluntary agency. As an orienting insight for both theoretical approaches, we might take the words of the thinker to whom one of these movements (pragmatism) traces its origin: “The deeper workings of spirit [or psyche] take place in their own slow way, without our contrivance” (CP 6.301) and, typically, without our awareness. Direct conscious, voluntary effort “can achieve almost nothing”; but the little it is able to achieve is all the more precious because of this. In philosophy no less than analysis, the point of departure must be the actual situation of implicated agents, that is, human beings implicated in a vast array of social practices in and through which their precarious strivings assume singular shape. In particular, “[w]e must not begin by talking of pure ideas, – vagabond thoughts that tramp the public roads without any human inhabitation – but must begin with men and their conversations” (CP 8.111; circa 1900). We must begin with what men and women say and do, what they are *doing* when they say this and what they *mean* when they do – or fail to do – that. We do not know what we ourselves mean except in reference to what we are disposed to do. Such is the grounding insight of the pragmatist movement. But often our dispositions to act are themselves sources of perplexity, confusion, frustration, and indeed anguish, not the means by which to clarify the meaning of our ideas. At least some of our actions indicate that our motives are far less straightforward and transparent than we typically suppose. In turn, this points to the necessity of probing the somewhat tangled, hidden roots of human motives and desires.<sup>16</sup> Such is the grounding insight of the psychoanalytic movement. For pragmatism,

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This paper was received with such unlooked-for kindness, that I was encouraged, some half dozen years later, on the invitation of the great publisher, Mr. W. H. Appleton, to insert it, somewhat expanded, in the *Popular Science Monthly* for November, 1877 and January, 1878” (CP 5.13).

<sup>15</sup> In “Studies in Hysteria” (1895), FREUD wrote of the person suffering from hysteria: “much will be gained if we succeed in transforming your hysterical misery into common unhappiness. With a mental life that has been restored to health you will be better armed against that unhappiness” (2, p. 351).

<sup>16</sup> Ironically, DEWEY, who was so characteristically critical of psychoanalysis, stresses this important point in his critique of traditional liberalism: “Desire and pleasure were [from the perspective of this liberalism] open and above-board affairs. The mind was seen as if always in the bright sunlight, having no hidden recesses, no unexplorable nooks, nothing underground. Its operations were like the moves in a fair game of chess. They are in the open; the players have nothing up their sleeves; the changes of position take place by express intent and in plain sight; they take place according to rules all of which are known in advance. Calculation and skill, or dullness and inaptitude, determine the result. Mind was ‘consciousness,’ and the latter was a clear, transparent, self-revealing medium in which wants, efforts and purposes were exposed without distortion” (LW 2: 299).

then, the meaning of our words and other signs is most adequately clarified when it is translated into disposition to action. For psychoanalysis, however, some of our dispositions or tendencies to act confuse and disconcert, even deeply pain, us. Accordingly, these dispositions are sources not of illumination and clarification, but of pain and confusion. This suggests the complementary character of the two theoretical orientations under consideration in this essay.

Pragmatism and psychoanalysis were not only post-Darwinian developments but also consciously so. In their different ways they were attempts to rethink virtually everything in the light of Charles Darwin's intellectual revolution.<sup>17</sup>

Like the Darwinian revolution itself, both pragmatism and psychoanalysis were virtually, at their origins, more than narrowly intellectual movements. They were integral parts of an encompassing cultural upheaval (ERE, 23).<sup>18</sup> They both reflected and, to some degree, channeled the currents of this transition. Life came to be seen as "confused and superabundant"; and the temperament of life, not least of all "*the dramatic temperament of nature*" (MT, 215), was felt especially by the young to be an indispensable part of any adequate approach to human existence.<sup>19</sup> The sense of *agon*, of struggle against potentially overwhelming forces, needed to be woven into the very fabric of any theory bearing upon distinctively human forms of experience, meaning, and striving.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> For one side of this, see Lucille B. RITVO's *Darwin's Influence on Freud: A Tale of Two Sciences* (New Haven: Yale, 1990) and also Frank L SULLOWAY's *Freud, Biologist of the Mind: Beyond the Psychoanalytic Legend* (Cambridge, 1979). For the other, MENAND's *The Metaphysical Club* and an older yet still useful study, Cynthia Eagle Russett's *Darwin in America: The Intellectual Response 1865-1912* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman & Co., 1976).

<sup>18</sup> William JAMES went so far as to compare the pragmatist movement with the Protestant Reformation (see, e.g., *Pragmatism*, p. 62). Also see a letter to his brother Henry James.

<sup>19</sup> This must certainly seem to privilege the Jamesian strain in the pragmatist tradition, especially in reference to the Peircean (or pragmaticist) strain. But Peirce himself is, for all of his commitment to logical rigor and conceptual clarity, a philosopher keenly sensitive to the *life* inherent in signs and, more generally, questions bearing upon vitality. Indeed, one of his most important characterizations of pragmatism contains this emphasis: "What the true definition of Pragmatism may be, I find it very hard to say; but in my nature it is a sort of instinctive attraction for living facts" (CP 5.64). It is not irrelevant also to recall here Peirce's claim that: "Logic teaches us to expect some residue of dreaminess in the world, and even self-contradictions" (CP 4.79). In the judgment of Joseph Esposito, one of the best informed and most insightful expositors of Peirce's pragmaticism, Peirce eventually came "to see pragmatism, not as a method whereby ideas became clarified in the practice of inquiry, but as a method whereby inquirers become subject to the controlling influence of 'living' Ideas" (*Transactions*, XV, 1, p. 60). All of this suggests, to me at least, that in his own way Peirce too was appreciative of the need to incorporate in his philosophy a sense of the superabundance and (in a way) the confusion of life itself.

<sup>20</sup> In *Freud: The Mind of the Moralizer* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), Philip RIEFF insightfully suggests: "The permanence of conflict is Freud's leading theme, and part of his hostility to religion stems from an awareness that religion somewhere assumes a fixed point – in Christianity, the figure of Christ – at which conflict is resolved. In contrast, Freud maintains an intractable dualism; self and world remain antagonists, and every form of reconciliation must fail" (p. 292). See, however, James J. Di CENSO's *The Other*

“If this life be not a real fight,” one in which something momentous precariously hangs in the balance, it is,” as William James famously asserted, “no better than a game of private theatricals, from which one may withdraw at will.” “But,” he was quick to add, “it *feels* like a real fight as if there were something really wild in the universe which we [...] are needed to redeem.” Psychoanalysis no less than pragmatism sought to re-focus critical attention on the human drama of an inescapable struggle in which the meaning and worth of human life alone assume sustaining forms. For both, antecedently established meanings and ideals were eclipsed by historically emerging forms of significance and ideality: meanings already *made* provided at most resources for meanings still *in the making*.

Historically, then, pragmatism and psychoanalysis were – and continue to be – bound up with questions of meaning, interpretation (or clarification), and the validation of claims about the import and upshot of our experience (above all, claims regarding the relationship between self and world). More controversially, both movements trace their origin to figures whose own theories of meaning preclude the kind and degree of mastery over the meaning of words and other signs that these figures themselves sought. Both Peirce’s pragmaticist theory of signs and Freud’s psychoanalytic approach to the traces of the unconscious would appear to make meaning far less tractable than either theorist seems to have realized (COLAPIETRO 2004). Both are especially preoccupied with those impasses where human agents are at a loss regarding how *to go on* (cf. WITTGENSTEIN, *PI*, I, #149, #151, & #153), how to remove or circumvent the obstacles in their path. The *experience* of the frustrations and fulfillments of situated, improvisational actors provides pragmatists and psychoanalysts the clues for identifying the melioristic measures and strategies enabling such actors to twist free from their present *stasis* (or arrest).<sup>21</sup> The tangled, confused, and superabundant character of human experience can never be transcended, only more intelligently or insightfully probed.<sup>22</sup> Our guiding sense of self and all else is to be found nowhere else than the delicate folds of the shifting

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*Freud: Religion, Culture, & Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1999), for how in reference to religion Freud might be read against Freud (a reading in which the ineliminability of conflict is made integral to religion).

It might appear that, in reference to conflict, pragmatism stands in stark contrast to psychoanalysis. But the emphasis on mediation and, more narrowly, overcoming the divided condition of genuine doubt needs to be seen against a background of inescapable conflict. Secondness or opposition is never eliminated, only dealt with more intelligently and insightfully.

<sup>21</sup> Another way of making this point is to say that both pragmatism and psychoanalysis are anti-utopian. They concern how to bear seemingly unbearable losses and, moreover, how to mediate between (or among) intractably antagonistic forces in such a way as to reduce the destructiveness of conflicts. It is certainly not insignificant that both James and Freud were keen to understand the bellicose tendencies of human beings.

<sup>22</sup> In *Art as Experience*, DEWEY captures this point when he suggests: “Ultimately there are but two philosophies. One of them accepts life and experience in all its uncertainty, mystery, doubt, and half-knowledge and turns that experience upon itself to deepen and intensify its own qualities ...” (LW 10: 41). By implication, the other takes flight from life and experience, seeking refuge in a world beyond this one (cf. PEIRCE, CP 1.673; also James’s *Pragmatism*, p. 17-8, 23). Uncertainty, mystery, doubt, and half-knowledge are



nuances of everyday life. The transient, the precarious, the vague, the ambiguous, the extemporaneous, the quotidian, and an innumerable host of allied phenomena are accorded by pragmatists and psychoanalysts a status and importance these phenomena have rarely enjoyed, at least in Western thought. As helpful as such a thematic characterization of these distinctive movements might be, an historical incident (one important enough to be recorded in Freud's *Autobiographical Study*) offers a valuable lens through which to look at the conjunction of pragmatism and psychoanalysis. Near the end of his renowned life James met Freud, who was himself at this juncture not much beyond the belated beginning of a life soon destined to attain international prominence.<sup>23</sup> Though roughly contemporaneous movements, when William James met Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Sandor Ferenczi, and Ernest Jones at Clark University (Worcester, Massachusetts) in 1909 pragmatism had more solidly established itself than had psychoanalysis. Indeed, Freud's visit to the United States, at the invitation of G. Stanley Hall in his capacity as President of Clark University, was a pivotal event in the cultural recognition of the psychoanalytic movement.<sup>24</sup> Despite his antipathy toward America (GAY 1988, p. 208, 210-1, 562-70, & especially 569), Freud acknowledged as much in his *Autobiographical Essay*:

At that time [1909] I was only fifty-three. I felt young and healthy, and my short visit to the new world encouraged my self-respect in every way. In Europe I felt as though I were despised; but over there I found myself received by the foremost men as an equal. (1925 [1989], p. 58)

His reception was nothing less than the conscious, exhilarating fulfillment of the dream with which his intellectual identity was bound up:

As I stepped on to the platform at Worcester to deliver my *Five Lectures upon Psychoanalysis* it seemed like the realization of some incredible dream: psychoanalysis was no longer a product of delusion, it had become a valuable part of reality. (p. 58)

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not features which can be eliminated. Hence, like psychoanalysis, pragmatism can be seen as a protracted attempt to come to more honest terms with the actual conditions of human existence, including the finite character of the human mind (human beings are, Peirce argued, so completely circumscribed by the bounds of their "possible practical experience, their minds are so intimately associated with being instruments of their needs and desires, that they cannot, in the least, *mean* anything transcending those bounds or limits [CP 5.536]).

<sup>23</sup> Both James and Freud were late in their fourth decade when they began to make their mark. Moreover, both began truly to make their mark only after the deaths of their fathers.

<sup>24</sup> In *Freud, Jung, and Hall the King-Maker: The Expedition to America* (1909), Saul ROSENZWEIG offers a vivid and rich account of not only this international gathering but also the circumstances surrounding this conference. Especially Chapter IX ("James Day at the Clark Conference") has greatly aided me in this essay. The title of Rosenzweig's book alludes to a remark in Freud's autobiography: "Hall was justly esteemed as a psychologist and educationalist, and had introduced psychoanalysis into his courses some years before [the gathering in 1909]; there was a touch of the 'king-maker' about him, a pleasure I [in?] setting up authorities and in then deposing them" (p. 57).

James heard only one of the five lectures that Freud presented, the one on dreams (Lecture Three).<sup>25</sup> In all likelihood, Freud re-arranged the order of the lectures in order to insure that James be present for just this lecture. Though Freud's approach to dreams failed to win James's assent or sympathy, the author of the *Principles of Psychology* was not unqualifiedly opposed to the psychoanalytic approach to human life. In a letter at the time of his encounter with Freud, James reported: "Clark University, of which Stanley Hall is president, had a little international congress the other day in honor of the twentieth year of its existence. I went there for one day *in order to see* what Freud was like, and met also Jung of Zürich, who [...] made a very pleasant impression" (PERRY, II, p. 122; emphasis added). Then he immediately added: "I hope that Freud and his pupils will push their ideas to their utmost limits, so that we may learn what they are. They can't fail to throw light on human nature; but I confess that he made on me personally the impression of a man obsessed with fixed ideas." Tellingly, he confessed further: "I can make nothing *in my own case* with his dream theories ..." (PERRY, II, p. 122; emphasis added). That is, Freud's theory of dreams failed to illuminate James's *experience* of dreams.

But the root of the difference between James and Freud, as psychologists, most likely concerned religion. In this same letter, James noted: "A newspaper report of the congress said that Freud had condemned the American religious therapy (which has such extensive results) as very 'dangerous' because so 'unscientific.' Bah!" (p. 122-3; GAY 1988, p. 129; 211-2; 458; 565). In his unrestrained pronouncement ("Bah!") we have one of those summary epithets in which ultimate attitudes toward even complex affairs are distilled (*Pragmatism*, p. 24-5). In any event, the use of psychology and, more generally, science as a weapon to fell religion was one for which James had no sympathy. On the other side, James's interest in psychical research, especially in its bearing on religious questions (such as personal immortality), made Freud suspicious of this genial genius.

The relationship between pragmatism and psychoanalysis is of course not reducible to the relationship between James and Freud. The face-to-face encounter of these figures is in a crucial respect more misleading than revealing, since it can too readily be taken to imply a confrontation between these two movements, not simply an incidental intersection (memorable yet brief) of two lives. "The world is," James noted, "full of partial stories that run parallel to one another, beginning and ending at odd times. They mutually interlace and interfere at points, but we cannot unify them completely in our minds" (*Pragmatism*, p. 71). But the story of pragmatism and that of psychoanalysis seem to have run alongside of one another, hardly ever interfering or connecting with each other.

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<sup>25</sup> In *Psychoanalysis: The Impossible Profession* (NY: Vintage Books, 1982), Janet MALCOLM writes: "When Freud was invited to Clark University [...] he gave a lecture series that was an excited celebration of the new science of psychoanalysis. A radiance and a buoyancy run through the Clark lectures (Freud reconstructed them from memory – they had been given extemporaneously – and published them shortly after his return to Vienna), which were to fade from later accounts of the same events. [...] These lectures remain the most concise and lucid account in and out of Freud's writings of the birth of psychoanalysis; nowhere is the complicated story more effortlessly told" (p. 10-1).

This is all the more surprising since the founder of pragmatism is no less committed to recognizing *unconscious* mind than is the founder of psychoanalysis.<sup>26</sup> Though William James and John Dewey shied away from using the term *unconscious* in its strictly dynamic sense (FREUD; LEVY), Charles S. Peirce did not. Like James and Dewey, he acknowledged the *unconscious* in its descriptive sense; but, unlike them, he also endorsed it in its dynamic sense. This is nowhere clearer than in his claim that:

Men many times fancy that they act from reason when, in point of fact, the reasons they attribute to themselves are nothing but the excuses which unconscious instinct invents to satisfy the teasing 'whys' of the ego. The extent of this self-delusion is such as to render philosophical rationalism a farce. (CP 1.631)

In this and other texts, Peirce unquestionably reveals an awareness of a dimension or level of mind akin to the dimension on which Freud so obsessively focused. At around the time he wrote his lectures on pragmatism, delivered in 1903, Peirce claimed: Psychologists "have not yet made it clear what Mind is. I do not mean its substratum; but they have not yet even made it clear what a psychical phenomenon is" (CP 7.364). In opposition to the tendency of psychologists at the time to equate mind with consciousness, he confessed: "to my apprehension Hartmann has proved conclusively that unconscious mind exists."<sup>27</sup> While James in *The Principles* took great pains to refute Eduard von Hartmann's arguments, Peirce accepted them, thereby arguably proving himself to be a more astute student of mental phenomena than his slightly younger colleague whose contributions to psychology remain celebrated.<sup>28</sup> He was aware of how presumptuous it was to tell a community of inquirers they were mistaken about the very object of their inquiry (CP 7.367). But, despite the outrage likely to be caused by such presumption he held his ground. "For if psychology were restricted to phenomena of consciousness, the established of mental associations, [in more clearly pragmatist language] the taking of habits, which is the very market place of psychology, would fall outside its boulevards" (CP 7.367).

An important step in the direction of staging a direct confrontation between these pragmatist and psychoanalytic approaches to the human psyche is, accordingly, a deeper appreciation of a defining feature of Peircean pragmatism than has yet been attained

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<sup>26</sup> It is illuminating that, in his review of James's *Principles of Psychology*, PEIRCE focuses on what is likely to strike most readers as a comparatively minor topic – James's rejection of the view that perception is a process of unconscious inference.

<sup>27</sup> In this regard, Peirce was influenced by Samuel BUTLER's *Unconscious Memory* as well as HARTMANN's *The Philosophy of the Unconscious* (see, e.g., CP 7.395). It may even be the case that Peirce was aware of Hartmann's arguments mainly through the inclusion of this author's texts in Butler's work.

<sup>28</sup> In his excellent study of *Freud among the Philosophers: The Psychoanalytic Unconscious and Its Philosophical Critics* (New Haven: Yale, 1996), Donald LEVY painstakingly examines James's arguments against Hartmann and other defenders of the unconscious, in my judgment showing them to be far from fatal. For the constructive or positive case for the unconscious, I know of no more lucid, nuanced, informed, or persuasive work than Sebastian GARDNER's "The unconscious" in: *The Cambridge Companion to Freud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 136-60.

(see, however, COLAPIETRO 1995, p. 2000) – the emphatic recognition of unconscious mind. Without question, the Peircean conception of the unconscious diverges from the Freudian conception, but the two overlap to a remarkable degree. The very appreciation of this fact constitutes a step in the direction of overcoming the distance between these two movements.

In the person of Peirce, pragmatism exhibits an articulate consciousness of the unconscious. From the writings of Freud, psychoanalysis inherits a nuanced conception of work. In Peirce's philosophy of mind, thus, we are offered an approach able to incorporate within itself the insights of Freud and, more generally, psychoanalysis. In Freud's account of the workings of the psyche, we are in turn offered an account for which the pragmatist conception of experience as an ongoing transaction and, in addition, the Peircean theory of signs seem valuable resources.

At the very least, the anti-Cartesianism of pragmatism (in the case of Peirce, Dewey, and Mead, if not clearly in that of James) includes a refusal to equate mind with consciousness. Indeed, mind is for Peirce, Dewey, and Mead wider and deeper than consciousness (PEIRCE; DEWEY; MEAD). The substance and implications of this claim need to be pragmatically clarified.

But, then, some of the dimensions of mind extending beyond consciousness need to be psychoanalytically formulated. The allegedly radical discontinuity between the primary processes characteristic of unconscious mind (condensation and displacement) and the secondary processes definitive of conscious mind might need to be rethought along formally semiotic lines, such that the operations (or workings) of mind at all levels are explained in terms of the functioning of signs.<sup>29</sup> This need not be taken to imply a rejection of the unconscious in the strictly Freudian sense. Rather it points to the necessity of reconceptualizing this unconscious in such a way as to avoid the snarl of confusions, contradictions, and aporias resulting from the less careful conceptualizations abounding in discussions of this topic. The typically inverse relationship between consciousness and habit (or habituation) includes a somewhat peculiar relationship in which some dispositions or tendencies are identifiable in terms of their drive to exclude from consciousness some factor of experience. The recognition of the adaptive unconscious (WILSON 2003) does not preclude the acknowledgment of the maladaptive unconscious. Dewey may certainly be right when he asserts:

It is not true that we 'forget' drop out of consciousness only alien and disagreeable things. It is even more true that the things we have most completely made a part of ourselves, that we have assimilated to compose our personality and not merely retained as incidents, cease to have a separate conscious existence. (LW 10, 77-78; cf. LW 1: 227-28; 239)

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<sup>29</sup> This becomes painfully clear when reading Agnes PETOCZ's *Freud, Psychoanalysis and Symbolism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). She is groping for "a unified theory of the symbol" with no awareness a comprehensive theory of signs is to be found in Peirce's writings. As insightful as her study of Freud is, it is impossible for me to suppose it would not have been far more instructive had a familiarity with Peirce informed the account of Freud.

But the existence of dispositions to repress troubling or disconcerting facets of experience might possess an importance unmeasured by its comparative slightness. Even if the overwhelming bulk of our unconscious habits insures an incredibly vast array of practical competencies,<sup>30</sup> some unconscious habits work in such a way as to make agents complicit in their own undoing or unhappiness. When they do so to such a degree that they undermine the ability of individuals to live vibrant, fulfilling lives, as judged by these individuals themselves – especially when these unconscious tendencies contribute to the misery of these individuals, (again) as felt and reported by them – they need to be identified and eradicated (or, at least, neutralized). Unquestionably, the efficacy of psychoanalytic procedures continues to be a hotly contested topic. But the existence of a maladaptive unconscious hardly seems to be a topic worthy of informed disputants. The species of bad habits might be various and innumerable. Who can reasonably deny that, among such habits, self-thwarting ones are detectable or discoverable?<sup>31</sup>

Of the classical pragmatists, Peirce articulated an understanding of mind that most readily lends itself to being fruitfully conjoined to the legitimate insights of the psychoanalytic approach.<sup>32</sup> For pragmatists, especially pragmaticists or Peirceans, to continue resisting an informed, critical engagement with psychoanalytic theories amounts to nothing less than a betrayal of experience. “We are,” as Peirce notes, “blind to our own blindness” (CP 6.560). This is as true of us as philosophers and theorists as it is of us simply as human beings. The *work* of coming to understand ourselves better entails working to overcome in some measure our blindness to our own blindness, to attaining to some degree a consciousness of the workings of our unconscious in its various guises, not least of all, in its maladaptive form. It is ironic that the pragmatist who judged himself to be weakest in psychology (1898 [1992], p. 268) might just be the one whose conception of mind proves to be more viable than the conceptions of those pragmatists who devoted themselves in a more sustained, systematic way to the experimental study of mental phenomena. However ironic, it is likely true. Such is, at least, my judgment after exploring these topics and authors for over three decades.

On the one hand, the insights of psychoanalysis, especially regarding the various kinds of unavowed *work* undertaken by the unconscious mind (e.g., *Trauerarbeit* or

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<sup>30</sup> For an illuminating account of this and other features of the unconscious, see Thomas MIES’s “The cognitive unconscious: Recalling the history of the concept and its problems” in: *Activity & Sign*, edited by Michael H. G. HOFFMAN *et al.* (NY: Springer, 2005, p. 203-14).

<sup>31</sup> One of the best defenders of this approach to understanding psychoanalysis is Jonathan LEAR. In: *Open Minded* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), he contends: “at his best, Freud is a deep explorer of the human condition, working in a tradition which goes back to Sophocles and which extends through Plato, Saint, Augustine, and Shakespeare to Proust and Nietzsche. What holds this tradition together is its insistence that there are significant meanings for human well-being which are obscured from immediate awareness” (p. 18). Like pragmatism, psychoanalysis endeavors to enlarge and deepen the realm of meanings, also to clarify the meanings of actions, gestures, moods, and a vast array of other matters by relating them to concrete, specific experiences.

<sup>32</sup> There is much in Freud’s writings and, more generally, in the psychoanalytic tradition that is erroneous and perhaps even nonsensical.

grief-work, the task of working through loss), pressure pragmatists to confront more imaginatively the varieties of human experience. That is, these insights pressure pragmatists to be better pragmatists. On the other hand, the insights of pragmatism and especially pragmaticism (Peirce's version of this outlook) pressure psychoanalysis to conceive human experience more explicitly and consistently as a transactional affair. In addition, Peirce's semiotics<sup>33</sup> provides the resources for identifying, describing, and analyzing the diverse modes of human symbolization. That is, these insights and resources enable psychoanalysts to be more articulate interpreters of the unconscious – in sum, better, psychoanalysts.

Peirce is the pivotal figure here, since around him (more than any of the other pragmatists) matters can most smoothly and quickly turn. He is the potentially mediating force. He would in effect be a sign, in its most pragmatic sense, rendering “inefficient relations efficient” (CP 8.332), enabling traditions isolated from one another to be conjoined in a transformative exchange. He would connect what otherwise would remain disparate and disjointed.

To date, as we have stressed through this paper, the contemporaneity of these movements has done little to aid them in overcoming their mutual neglect. At present, however, the intellectual world is even more than the one in which both pragmatism and psychoanalysis first took shape a scene of intense cross-fertilization.<sup>34</sup> This world thus holds the possibility that representatives of two influential, tenacious movements which have deepened our understanding of dialogue,<sup>35</sup> not least of all by conceiving experience itself as a dialogue between self and world, might soon undertake a genuine, informed, and sustained exchange. Such a dialogue will almost certainly be mutually beneficial. If I have in this paper facilitated even in a small way such an exchange, then my aim will have been achieved.

<sup>33</sup> In a letter to Lady Victoria Welby, Peirce proclaimed he was “a convinced Pragmaticist in Semeiotic” (SS, p. 78). In “Toward a truly pragmatic theory of signs,” included in *Dewey, Pragmatism, & Economic Methodology* (London: Routledge, 2004), edited by Elias L. KAHILL, p. 102-29, I try to establish that Peirce's semiotics is truly pragmatic while his pragmatism is formally semiotic (i.e., its strengths and character are only apparent when it is articulated in explicitly or formally semiotic terms).

<sup>34</sup> JAMES opens “A World of Pure Experience” by observing: “It is difficult not to notice a curious unrest in the philosophic atmosphere of the time, a loosening of old landmarks, a softening of oppositions, a mutual borrowing from one another on the part of systems anciently closed, and an interest in new suggestions, however vague, as if the one thing sure were inadequacy of the extant school solutions. The dissatisfaction with these seems due for the most part to a feeling that they are too abstract and academic. Life is confused and superabundant, and what the younger generation appears to crave is more of the temperament of life in its philosophy, even though it were at some cost of logical rigor and of formal purity” (ERE, 23). If anything, the intellectual atmosphere of *our* time displays to an even great degree just these features.

<sup>35</sup> For persuasive accounts of the psychoanalytic exchange as a *dialogical* process, see Christopher BOLLAS's *The Mystery of Things* (London: Routledge, 1999), Thomas OGDEN's *Subjects of Analysis* (Northvale, NJ: Json Aronson, Inc., 1994), and Roy SCHAFER's *Retelling a Life: Narration & Dialogue in Psychoanalysis* (NY: Basic Books, 1992).

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