

Chapter 3

Pluralism and Perspectivism in the American Pragmatist Tradition



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Abstract This chapter explores perspectivism in the American Pragmatist tradition. On the one hand, the thematization of perspectivism in contemporary epistemology and philosophy of science can benefit from resources in the American Pragmatist philosophical tradition. On the other hand, the Pragmatists have interesting and innovative, pluralistic views that can be illuminated through the lens of perspectivism. I pursue this inquiry primarily through examining relevant sources from the Pragmatist tradition. I will illustrate productive engagements between pragmatism and perspectivism in three areas: in the pragmatists' fallibilistic theories of inquiry and truth, in their pluralistic metaphysics, and in their views on cultural pluralism. While there are some potential sticking points between pragmatism and perspectivism, particularly around the visual metaphor of perspective, these philosophical approaches nonetheless have much to learn from each other. Perspectivism is in danger of falling between the horns of pernicious relativism and a platitudinous view of the limits of human perception and cognition. The pragmatists accounts of truth and reality open the possibility of a more thoroughgoing perspectivism. I will follow this thread through Charles S. Peirce's, William James', and John Dewey's theories of inquiry and truth, Peirce's evolutionary metaphysics, James' radical pluralism, Dewey's cultural naturalism, Richard Rorty's anti-essentialism, Jane Addams' standpoint epistemology, W.E.B. Du Bois' theory of race consciousness, Horace Kallen's and Alain LeRoy Locke's cultural pluralism, and Mary Parker Follett's account of pluralistic integration.

Keywords American pragmatism · Perspectivism · Fallibilism · Inquiry · Truth · Standpoint epistemology · Race consciousness · Double consciousness · Cultural pluralism · Metaphysical pluralism · Integrative pluralism · Charles Peirce · William James · John Dewey · Richard Rorty · Jane Addams · W.E.B. Du Bois · Alain Locke · Mary Parker Follett · Horace Kallen

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3.1 Introduction

The American pragmatist tradition, the central movement of the American philosophical tradition from the late nineteenth until the mid-twentieth century, is a diverse and complex philosophical tradition independent from, though in dialogue with, the dominant, so-called ‘analytic’ and ‘continental’ philosophical traditions. One core commitment of nearly all the pragmatists is to conceive of knowledge ‘from a human point of view’, and to see the ramifications of that epistemic stance also for our ethical, political, and metaphysical views. In this paper, I will trace a variety of perspectivist themes, or philosophical ideas that perspectivism can illuminate, through pragmatists from Charles Peirce to Richard Rorty, taking a broad and inclusive view of the membership of that tradition. I will attempt to draw out paradigmatic pragmatist views and what they tell us about perspectivism and pluralism.

Perspectivism involves a problematic metaphor from the point of view of the pragmatist tradition. At heart, perspectivism provides a *visual* metaphor, which in turn suggests two ideas that the pragmatists took great pains to refute and replace. The first idea is *the spectator theory of knowledge*, according to which vision (traditionally understood) is the best metaphor for knowledge in general. The knower is understood to be a passive receiver of information about the known, as the spectator passively receives visual impressions of that which is viewed. The second idea is the dichotomy between appearance and reality, which posits general, philosophically significant distinctions between the real and the merely apparent. Perspectivism suggests a situation in which we each ‘stand’ in a different place, with a partial view of one and the same ‘real’ object, receiving partial and limited knowledge about it *from our point of view*.

I shall discuss the difficulties involved below in much greater detail. But there remain a variety of resonances between the American pragmatist tradition and contemporary perspectivist philosophy: a commitment to some form of pluralism and to the recognition of the limits of human knowledge that could be described alternatively as anti-absolutism, anti-objectivism, or anti-fundamentalism. Furthermore, the pragmatists have valuable resources to offer the perspectivists, including a simpatico metaphilosophical orientation, a pluralistic and anti-reductionist metaphysics, a sophisticated contextualism and fallibilism, and non-dominationist and pluralistic ideas about building bridges and relations of reciprocity between diverse perspectives.

Pragmatism is best known, perhaps, as a suite of connected views on the nature of belief, meaning, inquiry, and truth, and especially the latter. Most philosophers will have at least encountered a certain cartoon version of the pragmatist theory of truth, on the basis of which they widely but entirely mistakenly believe it to be an untenable approach to truth. Some are likely to know the pragmatist theory of meaning, also known sometimes as “the pragmatic maxim”, according to which the meaning of a concept or claim is to be elucidated by how it plays out in *practice*, its practical connections and implications, broadly construed. The pragmatist views of belief and inquiry that some philosophers, especially philosophers of science, might

be familiar with are part of a powerful fallibilist, contextualist epistemology that attends to the roles of values or purposes in knowledge. These views are reflections of, or perhaps generalize to, a metaphilosophy: philosophical questions are to be answered not *sub specie aeternitatis*, but by looking to the role they play in what is variously called practice, experience, life, or culture. That is, philosophical questions can only be answered *from a human point of view*.

Other, less well-known philosophical views relevant to perspectivism and to philosophy from a human point of view also occupy an important place in the American pragmatist tradition. Pragmatists have tended to be lumped among other anti-metaphysical philosophers of their time, but many pragmatists have their own positive, interesting metaphysical views that come out of their broader pragmatist metaphilosophy. These views reinforce the pragmatists' fallibilist epistemology and their views on truth. Even less well known are the ways in which the pragmatists were sensitive not only to the plurality of human experiences, practices, and cultures, but the sensitivity of some of them to issues of power intersection of those differences, and their commitment to non-dominationist, reciprocal encounters across differences.

The pragmatists are far from univocal; there is no single pragmatist philosophical system. On substantive issues in all of these areas, major pragmatist thinkers have disagreed. Rather than oversell the amount of consensus among the American pragmatist tradition, I will from here on treat their diverse but interconnected body of thought as a toolbox from which the contemporary perspectivist might find several tools for thinking about knowledge from a human point of view. I will organize my discussion into three parts: epistemological views about inquiry and truth, views about the metaphysical background, and accounts of cultural diversity, pluralism, and integration.

3.2 The Pragmatists' Fallibilistic Theories of Inquiry and Truth

One of the most well-known elements of the classical pragmatist philosophy is the theory of inquiry. From Charles Peirce's doubt-belief scheme in his writings on "the logic of science", to William James's discussion of "the will to believe", to John Dewey's writings on education, intelligence, and logic, the account of belief-formation and inquiry is a key element of the tradition, though each writer emphasizes different elements. Each focusses on different ways in which knowledge is constructed from a human point of view. Peirce is particularly interested in the way that science represents a *communal* way of settling belief, while James wants to also accommodate personal belief, including religious belief. Dewey's theory of inquiry attempts to take the larger bio-cultural environment into account in order to provide a contextual theory of inquiry.

Each of these thinkers attempted to carefully tie truth to their theories of inquiry. Rather than thinking of truth as a semantic or metaphysical notion, the pragmatists attempt to analyze the role of truth in our practices of inquiry. This is not the same as providing an epistemic theory of truth like verificationism or ideal assertibility. As Cheryl Misak has argued, the pragmatists instead provide a ‘pragmatic elucidation’ of the concept of truth, i.e., an explanation of the role that the concept plays in our practices and lived experiences, rather than an analytic definition or criterion of truth (Misak 2004). The pragmatists had no particular quarrel with correspondence as an analytic definition of truth; they merely saw it as formal and empty, revealing little of our uses of the concept, and as tending to lead to bad metaphysical dualisms (Capps 2019).

3.2.1 Charles Peirce’s Doubt-Belief-Inquiry Schema

Charles Sanders Peirce’s account of inquiry focuses on the fixation of belief in response to doubt. Peirce and the other pragmatists follow Alexander Bain in defining beliefs as “habits of action” (Bain 1859; Fisch 1954; Haack 1982). Doubt is the result either of the thwarting of a belief by experience, the lack of a belief providing a habitual response to a situation, or the conflict between one’s belief and the beliefs of others; it results in hesitancy and irritation. Inquiry is the overcoming of doubt by forming a new belief. Where no real and living doubt exists, on the other hand, no inquiry is possible—an argument that Peirce deployed against Descartes.

For Peirce, convergence towards what he called the “final opinion” on any specific question is a regulative ideal of inquiry, and we understand *truth* in terms of that final opinion. In the most well-known formulation, “[t]he opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate, is what we mean by truth, and the object of this opinion is the real” (Houser and Kloesel 1992, 1:139). That is, a belief is true if it is “unassailable by doubt” (Peirce Edition Project 1998, 2:336). This is not a prophecy about the future of inquiry, but a counterfactual claim: whatever view would be the considered belief of indefinitely extended inquiries is what we ultimately mean by ‘the truth of the matter’.

Nonetheless, there is room for pluralism and a kind of perspectivism in Peirce’s view. Peirce’s accounts of doubt, scientific method, and convergence all depend on the idea of a *community of inquiry*. “We individually cannot reasonably hope to attain the ultimate philosophy which we pursue; we can only seek it, therefore, for the *community of philosophers*” (Houser and Kloesel 1992, 29). And again:

The real, then, is that which, sooner or later, information and reasoning would finally result in, and which is therefore independent of the vagaries of me and you. Thus, the very origin of the conception of reality shows that this conception essentially involves the notion of a COMMUNITY, without definite limits, and capable of an indefinite increase of knowledge. And so those two series of cognitions—the real and the unreal—consist of those which, at a time sufficiently future, the community will always continue to reaffirm; and of those which, under the same conditions, will ever after be denied. Now, a proposition whose

falsity can never be discovered, and the error of which therefore is absolutely incognizable, contains, upon our principle, absolutely no error. Consequently, that which is thought in these cognitions is the real, as it really is. There is nothing, then, to prevent our knowing outward things as they really are, and it is most likely that we do thus know them in numberless cases, although we can never be absolutely certain of doing so in any special case (Houser and Kloesel 1992, 1:52, capitalization in original.)

This communal notion is important in part because it is the beliefs of others differing from your own that provide one of the positive reasons to doubt that occasions inquiry in the first place. If in the long run, inquiry should lead to convergence, on the way there, it depends on inquirers coming at problems from different perspectives.

3.2.2 *William James's Liberalization of Peirce*

James did not differ in the basics from Peirce. He emphasized two points already nascent in Peirce's account: the purposive nature of human belief and the contingency of present belief as compared to the destined or final opinion. The difference of emphasis within broadly shared ideas about belief and inquiry led James to a more pluralistic and permissive theory of knowledge and to a quite different theory of truth.

James combined the view that beliefs were habits of action, as Peirce had held, with the recognition, drawn from his psychological work, that humans have many purposes for which they act. It follows from this combination that, for James, how inquiry proceeds to settle belief would concern human purposes. James furthermore emphasized the contingency of belief. We see with Peirce already the idea that one's current belief depends on the range of experiences and interactions one has had that would cause one to doubt it. In the absence of a positive reason to doubt, belief for Peirce is settled; what one is prepared to believe and to doubt is thus conditioned by one's history and experience. James expands this sort of contextualism to the great variety of human purposes beyond the narrowly scientific.

These views of James lead to his famous argument in *The Will to Believe* (James 1896). There James considers the tension between two epistemic "laws"—"Believe truth! Shun error!". That is, he considers the trade-off between false positive and false negative errors (Magnus 2013). In cases where we face options between what to believe, the options are genuine ones, believable based on what we know and our existing epistemic commitments, where we cannot put off the question indefinitely, and we do not have sufficient evidence to decide the question, we must decide what to believe based on our "passional nature". One natural interpretation is that we must decide based on what our purposes or our values tell us about the trade off between the two types of errors, an early statement of the argument from inductive risk (see Magnus 2013 on the "James-Rudner-Douglas thesis"). When different people have different goals and values, we should expect in this situation that they will come to believe different things.

Contrary to Peirce's focus on convergence, James thus emphasized epistemic pluralism. And at least on one place, James articulates a form of pluralistic tolerance highly in tune with more recent pluralist and perspectivist ideas—"Hands off: neither the whole of truth, nor the whole of good, is revealed to any single observer, although each observer gains a partial superiority of insight from the peculiar position in which he stands" (James 1899).

James was more liberal than Peirce in applying the term "truth". He wanted to recognize not only the opinion that would prove unassailable in the long run (about which we may have little use), but also those beliefs that had proved particularly successful in more immediate contexts as being "true" in some sense. He based his thinking on truth on the gap between present need and the imagined future opinion of Peirce, distinguishing "temporary truth" in his sense from "absolute truth" in Peirce's sense. James sometimes speaks of truth as what is expedient, or useful, or good to believe for definable reasons. In another passage, he writes about truth:

It means, they say, nothing but this, *that ideas (which themselves are but parts of our experience) become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience*, to summarize them and get about among them by conceptual short-cuts instead of following the interminable succession of particular phenomena. Any idea upon which we can ride, so to speak; any idea that will carry us prosperously from any one part of our experience to any other part, linking things satisfactorily, working securely, simplifying, saving labor; is true for just so much, true in so far forth, true *instrumentally* (James 1907, 58).

And elsewhere in the same text, James claims that, "[t]rue ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify" (ibid., 201). Here, not just belief but truth itself is dependent upon the activities (and thus the purposes) of human actors.

3.2.3 *John Dewey's Situational Theory of Inquiry*

John Dewey took this view of things further. Dewey embedded Peirce's and James's conception of belief within a biological and psychological picture of an active creature navigating an uncertain and changing world. The original need for inquiry derives from the need for the creature to respond to situations where it is in disequilibrium with its environment, to remake both its habits and its environment such that the creature could draw support from the environment. To this, he added the point that the environment for human inquirers is cultural as well as physical. Inquiry thus transforms not only (or primarily) individual beliefs and habits but also cultural representations, tools, practices, and institutions. This is the position Dewey refers to in *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* as "cultural naturalism" (Dewey 1938, 12:28).

These additions create a richer, but also more contextualist account of inquiry. Dewey highlighted this by describing *inquiry* not as the fixation of belief but as the settling of a "problematic" or "indeterminate *situation*", what Dewey also called, following Jane Addams, a "perplexity" (Addams 1902; Dewey 1933). Situations become indeterminate or problematic when the activities of the organisms or actors

fail to function as expected; habits and values in that case no longer guide the activity coherently. The situation is resolved by transforming it so that it is more “unified”, i.e., so that the inquirer and their natural and cultural environment interacts in such a way that is no longer problematic. Dewey here replaces the individualistic, psychological language of “doubt” and “belief” with an account that is both more general (allowing, for example, for group or social inquiry) and more ecological, decentering the mind of the believer.

As inquiry is directed at resolving situations, its results are likewise situational. From the perspective of one group of inquirers in a particular natural and cultural environment, given certain practices and aims, in response to particular problems that arise, one judgment may be correct; from the perspective of differently-situated inquirers, it may not be. At least, further inquiry in the new situation would be required to determine whether it was.

Dewey was more wary of using the term “truth”, especially after uncharitable interlocutors like Bertrand Russell persistently misinterpreted what he had to say about the matter. If Dewey had a theory of truth, or at least a pragmatic *elucidation* of the concept of truth (see Capps 2018; Misak 2004), it is this: to call a judgment “true” is just to say in retrospect that it successfully resolved the problematic situation that the inquiry that produced it was occasioned by. This account fits with Dewey’s quite enigmatic statement about truth:

In contrast with this view, my own view takes correspondence in the operational sense it bears in all cases except the unique epistemological case of an alleged relation between a ‘subject’ and an ‘object’; the meaning, namely, of *answering*, as a key answers to conditions imposed by a lock, or as two correspondents “answer” each other; or, in general, as a reply is an adequate answer to a question or a criticism—as, in short, a *solution* answers the requirements of a *problem*...

In the sense of correspondence as operational and behavioral (the meaning which has definite parallels in ordinary experience), I hold that my *type* of theory is the only one entitled to be called a correspondence theory of truth (Dewey 1941, 178–79).

Dewey’s account of truth is, like James’, sensitive to human values and purposes, and even more thoroughly contextual than James’.

3.2.4 *Epistemological Lessons for and from Perspectivism*

According to these pragmatists, inquiry, belief-formation, or knowing are responses to doubts or problems that arise in the course of human practices and activities. Not only are they thoroughly grounded in a human point of view, they are grounded in human need, experience, values, and culture. Not only is belief or knowledge in some sense contextual or perspectival, but so is truth itself, at least for James and Dewey. The context is an active one belied by visual metaphors for knowledge; belief, knowledge, and truth have as much to do with how we make and re-make the world as with what we find there when we look.

These pragmatist theories of inquiry and truth are thoroughly fallibilistic. According to Hilary Putnam, “[t]hat one can be both fallibilistic *and* antiskeptical is the basic insight of American pragmatism” (Putnam 1992, 29). Fallibilism suggests that knowledge is incomplete or revisable, that what we take as truth may be partial or replaced entirely. In the case of Peirce, James, and Dewey, fallibilism is defended not merely as a prudent attitude in the face of the limits of human knowledge, but also as supported by a basic metaphysical worldview. It is thus to the much less well-known and well-appreciated pragmatist metaphysical views that I now turn.

3.3 Pluralism and Perspectivism in Pragmatist Metaphysics

The pragmatists did not see a need to *ground* their fallibilist, contextualist epistemology in a metaphysical picture, nor vice versa. Rather, they saw their basic metaphilosophical orientation as that of seeking the answer to philosophical questions in human practice, as leading to new insights in metaphysics. These insights in turn undermined many of the critiques of pragmatist epistemology deriving from varieties of idealist and realist commitments. Indeed, they were able to situate the pragmatists’ epistemic insights in a broader context, and so, despite not being tightly coupled in a philosophical “system”, their metaphysical and epistemological approaches tended to support one another.

The pragmatists’ metaphysical views are in many ways unorthodox by contemporary lights, but they provide potential avenues for perspectivists and others focused on working out a theory of knowledge from a human point of view for escaping certain metaphysically-grounded criticisms. They provide an alternative picture to the dualistic metaphysics often erroneously drawn out of thinking about the definition of truth and representationalist theories of knowledge.

3.3.1 Peirce’s Triadism and Evolutionary Metaphysics

Peirce’s philosophical works are full of three-way distinctions. We’ve already seen one: belief, doubt, and inquiry. His logic described three fundamental forms of inference: deduction, induction, and abduction. His version of pragmatism is presented as a third degree of clarity, i.e., a third way of clarifying the meaning of an idea: to tacit familiarity and abstract definition he added pragmatic clarification—tracing the consequences of an idea or concept for our habits of conduct. “Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object” (Houser and Kloesel 1992, 1:32). Could it just be a coincidence, or a quirk of Peirce’s psychology, that he saw things in terms of threes?

No, indeed, Peirce saw three universal categories—“categories” in the Aristotelian or Kantian sense—underlying all human knowledge and reality itself. The three

categories in the abstract are named *firstness*, *secondness*, and *thirdness*, and one simple way to think of them is in connection with monadic, dyadic, and triadic predicates in logic.¹ *Firstness* concerns being or quality; *secondness* concerns relation or reaction; *thirdness* concerns mediation.

The centrality of triads to Peirce's philosophy means that *mediation* is central to Peirce's philosophical analyses. For instance, consider Peirce's semiotics (theory of signs). The meaning of a sign is not reducible, for Peirce, to a dyadic relation between a sign and the object it refers to. This relation is mediated by what Peirce calls the "*interpretant*", which can be understood in terms of the effect the sign has on the one who interprets it, their understanding of or translation of the sign. This makes Peirce's theory of meaning irreducibly *perspectival*, dependent upon the interpreter of the sign. Peirce understands thought, language, mind, knowledge, and even the metaphysical nature of reality in terms of these mediational, often perspectival, processes.

Peirce's speculative metaphysics is also founded on a triad. First, there is pure chance or spontaneity, then there is mechanical determinism, and the mediating third is what Peirce calls "habit-taking". In his view, our experience and our science justify belief in the existence of real chances, a doctrine he called "*tychism*". But there were also phenomena that showed more or less mechanical orderliness. While he held that determinism was false (and radically, for someone living prior to the development of quantum physics, he rejected determinism on *scientific* grounds), he did not believe in complete disorder. The mediating factor, for Peirce, was the tendency of stuff to become more orderly, to take on habits. Peirce thought the fundamental stuff of the universe was mind-like in nature, precisely in its tendency to form intelligible patterns. Matter, for Peirce, was just "effete mind", mind-stuff that had become so fixed in its habits as to largely lack spontaneity.

Peirce's cosmology involved an evolution of the universe from a state of pure chance or spontaneity, though the process of habit-taking, towards an end-state of pure order, a view Peirce called "*agapism*" (the process of habit-taking, for Peirce, being connected with a general principle of growth and with *agape* or self-sacrificing love). Given that we live somewhere in the middle of this process, we are never justified in believing that we have converged on the ultimate truth or in treating any fact as ultimate (McKenna and Pratt 2015, 66). Ours is a universe where fallibilism is the necessary attitude.

¹Peirce held that higher-order n-place predicates were reducible to the first three, but that the first three were irreducible; he provided a formal argument to this effect.

3.3.2 *James's Pluralistic Universe*

William James's metaphysical writings are based in two fundamental commitments: *radical empiricism* and *melioristic pluralism*. Radical empiricism has three faces: methodological, psychological, and ontological. Methodologically, radical empiricism is a thesis about what we must regard as real: "Everything real must be experienceable somewhere, and every kind of thing experienced must somewhere be real" (James and Perry 1912, 3:81). As with classical empiricism, James *excludes* metaphysical posits that cannot be founded in experience; more radically, he suggests that every kind of experience must be *included* in our metaphysical picture. This becomes truly radical in his discussions of religious experience and divine existence.

Psychologically, radical empiricism is a thesis about the contents of experience; contra classical empiricism, James argues that experience is not atomistic. That is, we directly experience not only individual sensory qualities but also *connections* and *relations* between those qualities. Causal and logical relations, tendencies and processes of change are found in experience, not posited to explain the succession of separate experiential qualities. They are directly felt as part of what James calls "The Stream of Thought" (James 1890) or "The Stream of Consciousness" (James 1892). The metaphor of a stream is meant by James to indicate the fundamental continuity of experience, as opposed to the Lockean-Humean atomistic account.

Radical empiricism, in its final form, also involves a metaphysical thesis. James takes "pure experience" as the basic *stuff* out of which reality is made. "Experience" here is playing a different role than in psychology, where it is something had by an individual mind. Here, experience is taken as metaphysically basic, and whether some experience is qualified as matter or mind is more a matter of the relations it bears to other experiences than some inherent property in it. In "How Two Minds Can Know One Thing", James argues that the same experience (e.g., of one physical object) can be known to two different people by coming into relation to their different conscious experiences (James and Perry 1912, 61ff). We can see this as a kind of non-representationalist perspectival knowledge.

The metaphysical thesis of radical experience has sometimes been awkwardly labeled "neutral monism", and it has also been understood as a kind of panpsychism. But we must square this with the fact that James frequently wrote in opposition to what he called "monism" and defended a view he called "pluralism". For James, monism was the idea that everything was connected and subsumed into a single whole. The prominent form of monism in James's day was absolute idealism, deriving from Hegel. According to James, monism did not respect the reality of finite human experience, could not explain the evil and irrationality of the world, and was fatalistic or deterministic in a way that denied the reality of human freedom.

James's pluralism was the negation of monism, the idea that there is no all-encompassing, top-down whole. According to James, the particular is more basic than the general, and there are real disconnections, tensions, fluxes, incommensurabilities, novelties, and spontaneities in the world. Of course, James's pluralism is

not absolute: there are real connections, but there are also experiences that lack any definite connections. What's more, James's pluralism is melioristic in that new connections can always be made. Echoing Peirce, James says, "[a]nd finally it is becoming more and more unified by those systems of connexion at least which human energy keeps framing as time goes on" (James 1907, 156).

3.3.3 *John Dewey's Immediate Empiricism and Cultural Naturalism*

Similar to James's radical empiricism, John Dewey defends a view that he calls '*immediate empiricism*'. According to Dewey, "[i]mmediate empiricism postulates that things—anything, everything, in the ordinary or non-technical use of the term 'thing'—are what they are experienced as" (Dewey 1910, 227). This account of reality is inherently perspectival. Dewey continues,

Hence, if one wishes to describe anything truly, his task is to tell what it is experienced as being. If it is a horse that is to be described, or the *equus* that is to be defined, then must the horse-trader, or the jockey, or the timid family man who wants a 'safe driver', or the zoologist or the paleontologist tell us what the horse is which is experienced. If these accounts turn out different in some respects, as well as congruous in others, this is no reason for assuming the content of one to be exclusively 'real', and that of others to be 'phenomenal'; for each account of what is experienced will manifest that it is the account *of* the horse-dealer, or *of* the zoologist, and hence will give the conditions requisite for understanding the differences as well as the agreements of the various accounts. And the principle varies not a whit if we bring in the psychologist's horse, the logician's horse or the metaphysician's horse (Dewey 1910, 393-94).

One and the same horse may be experienced as, from different perspectives, a mode of transportation, an item of commerce, a beloved pet, a thing of beauty, or a biological specimen.

Dewey is at pains to distinguish his point from the claim that things are all and only what they are *known* to be. He rejects any simple equation of experience with knowledge, "[f]or this leaves out of account what the knowledge standpoint is itself *experienced as*" (Dewey 1910, 229–30). That is, knowing is a particular kind of experience, but not one that is closer to things as they *really* are than any other experience. Dewey everywhere resists sorting experiences into the really-real and mere appearance:

... the chief characteristic trait of the pragmatic notion of reality is precisely that no theory of Reality in general, *überhaupt*, is possible or needed. It occupies the position of an emancipated empiricism or a thoroughgoing naïve realism. It finds that 'reality' is a *denotative* term, a word used to designate indifferently everything that happens. Lies, dreams, insanities, deceptions, myths, theories are all of them just the events which they specifically are. Pragmatism is content to take its stand with science; for science finds all such events to be subject-matter of description and inquiry—just like stars and fossils, mosquitoes and malaria, circulation and vision. It also takes its stand with daily life, which finds that such things really have to be reckoned with as they occur interwoven in the texture of events (Dewey 1917, 55).

Dewey's view is not a form of subjective relativism or even of the panpsychism that James seems to be suggesting. Dewey does not identify experience as something *subjective* or even something purely *mental*. The horse is part of our experience because (and insofar as) we physically interact with the horse when we experience it, by looking at it, riding it, brushing it out. The ways we experience it are modes of activity. About the term experience, Dewey says,

Its nearest equivalents are such words as 'life', 'history', 'culture' (in its anthropological use). It does not mean processes and modes of experiencing apart from *what* is experienced and lived. The philosophical value of the term is to provide a way of referring to the unity or totality between what is experienced and the way it is experienced... (Dewey 1922, 351; see Alexander 2014)

This is the broader metaphysical version of Dewey's *cultural naturalism*. The recognition here is that human experience encompasses everything that the anthropologist might refer to as "cultural practices".

3.3.4 Richard Rorty's Anti-Essentialism

In "A World without Substances or Essences" (1999), Richard Rorty describes his form of pragmatism as a type of *anti-essentialist panrelationalism*. On Rorty's view, nothing has an essence or essential properties; everything is constituted by its relations to other things, and there is no way to demarcate intrinsic from extrinsic relations. He motivates this view as the way of thinking shared by many Anglophone and non-Anglophone philosophers, despite the so-called 'analytic'-'Continental' split:

The quickest way of expressing this commonality is to say that philosophers as diverse as William James and Friedrich Nietzsche, Donald Davidson and Jacques Derrida, Hilary Putnam and Bruno Latour, John Dewey and Michel Foucault, are antidualists... they are trying to shake off the influences of the peculiarly metaphysical dualisms which the Western philosophical tradition inherited from the Greeks: those between essence and accident, substance and property, and appearance and reality. They are trying to replace the world pictures constructed with the aid of these Greek oppositions with a picture of a flux of continually changing relations (Rorty 1999, 47).

Rorty describes this sort of view as "anti-metaphysical" because, following Heidegger, he regards all metaphysics as concerned with essences: "all Platonism is metaphysics and all metaphysics is Platonism" (ibid., 48). But notice how strongly Rorty's view echoes James's radical empiricism and Peirce's triadism. Rorty urges that we reject the metaphysical distinction between "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" properties or relations. Contra Rorty, I would argue that this amounts to a *metaphysical anti-essentialism*.

In turn, Rorty argues that this anti-essentialist move has consequences for how we think about language, thought, and perception. On his view, language and thought do not represent objects (or their essences), but are simply ways of getting into relations with those objects. Sentences about those objects are not to be

distinguished as “true” or “false” but rather as more or less useful tools for acting with those objects.

3.3.5 *Metaphysical Lessons for and from Perspectivism*

Returning to the point discussed in the introduction: perspectivism starts from what the pragmatist might consider a problematic metaphor—that of vision, passively looking at something from a certain viewpoint. From this way of thinking about it, perspectives are inevitably partial, limited views of *the real thing*. The very underlying metaphor presupposes an aperspectival underlying reality, in which the real object exists in view of the various perspectives at hand. Not surprisingly, then, the metaphysical realist reacts to the perspectivist by pointing out that perspectivally partial knowledge is either merely partial knowledge, or no knowledge at all.

The pragmatist gives us an alternative to the metaphysical realist background which does not amount to mere quietism. And indeed, the pragmatist also offers us a way of thinking about perception and cognition that evades the spectator theory of knowledge and the centrality of the appearance/reality distinction. In “The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology” (1896, EW 5:96ff), Dewey provides a powerful alternative to stimulus-response psychology, a precursor to modern-day ecological and enactive theories of perception (Gallagher 2014). According to this view, perception is not a matter of passive spectating, but actively engaging. It does not create a partial copy (an “appearance”) of the real object in the mind, but is part of an ongoing circuit of sensorimotor engagement in the world. At every moment, the object, environment, and agent are interacting and reconstructing each other. Such a theory of perception could suitably recover the metaphor of “perspective” at the heart of perspectivist epistemology.

3.4 Pragmatist Standpoint Theories and Cultural Pluralism

Unfortunately neglected in much of the perspectivist literature is the range of human, social, and cultural difference we find in the world. Many perspectivists have, implicitly or explicitly, limited the range of perspectives to a “safe” subset, such as alternative scientific measurement techniques or scientific paradigms (e.g., Giere 2006). What’s more, the examples are drawn from mainstream, modern, *Western* (or *Northern*) science. They ignore whether existing or possible, culturally distinctive, knowledge-making projects and practices might really count as *knowledge* or even as *science* (Harding 1994, 1998).

Perspectivists have yet to deeply consider how to incorporate a wider range of perspectives into science or what we are willing to regard as knowledge, such as women’s perspectives, non-white perspectives, working class or economically disadvantaged perspectives, non-Western or non-Eurocentric perspectives, traditional

religious perspectives, postcolonial perspectives, indigenous perspectives, and so on. Some of the American pragmatists, because they were reckoning with problems of public knowledge and social action in the context of America's highly pluralistic democracy, wrestled directly with how to approach such perspectives, think about their role in our knowledge system, and think about how to cooperate and integrate perspectives where needed.

3.4.1 *Addams' Pluralistic Standpoint Epistemology*

Departing from the more metaphysical ideas of the classical pragmatists, we can return to epistemic concerns, focusing on Jane Addams' version of standpoint epistemology, which also takes us into social and political concerns. Addams was a founding figure in the social settlement movement, where progressive social activists and reformers moved into "settlement houses" in poor, immigrant, or otherwise oppressed urban communities and provided services to the neighborhood. Addams co-founded Hull House in Chicago, and her experiences here formed a basis for her work as a public philosopher, a sociologist, a social worker, and a peace activist, for which she won the Nobel Peace Prize. Addams was born into a life of relative wealth and privilege, and her experiences in the neighborhood of Hull House formed an important part of her thinking about standpoint epistemology.

Addams based much of her philosophical and popular thought on her firsthand experience through Hull House. She was also sensitive to the ways that her understanding of those experiences might differ from the other people in the neighborhood whose social position was so different from her own. She adopted a strategy to address this problem:

I never addressed a Chicago audience on the subject of the Settlement and its vicinity without inviting a neighbor to go with me, that I might curb my hasty generalization by the consciousness that I had an auditor who knew the conditions more intimately than I could hope to do (Addams 1910, 96).

As Maurice Hamington says in reference to this practice, "Addams did not try to arrive at universal moral truths but recognized that the standpoint of Hull House neighbors mattered" (Hamington 2018). More generally, in her writings on problems of labor, charity, poverty, and oppression, she constantly gave voice to the concerns and experiences of the oppressed people she encountered, recognizing that the standpoint of the oppressed was often more revealing about social conditions than the theories of privileged academics: "no one so poignantly realizes the failures in the social structure as the man at the bottom, who has been most directly in contact with those failures and has suffered most" (Addams 1910, 183).

Addams also held that it was crucial to bridge different standpoints through *sympathetic understanding* and *reciprocal responsibility* for the well-being of others. Addams points to the flaw in the charity-worker or the employer, "...when he is good 'to' people rather than 'with' them, when he allows himself to decide what is

best for them instead of consulting them” (Addams 1902, 70). We must instead approach other people in attempt at social understanding and take responsibility for their welfare. These are crucial, in Addams’ conception, to social science, social work, and social ethics.

3.4.2 *Du Bois on Race Consciousness*

W.E.B. Du Bois, as a historian and an American pragmatist philosopher, focused primarily on issues of race. He developed a conception, *double-consciousness*, which in some respects relates to standpoint theory, but uniquely addresses the condition of African-Americans. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois writes:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (Du Bois 1903, 3).

Standpoint theorists have tended to emphasize the epistemic advantage of the oppressed. Women understand both their own experience and they imbibe the official dogmas of the patriarchy; the proletariat knows both the ideology of the capitalist class and their own experiences of alienation and exploitation; etc. In *Souls* Du Bois emphasizes the way that this double-consciousness is itself alienating: oppressed folk know not only what white supremacists think about them, but they learn to measure themselves by those standards.

James Baldwin described double-consciousness in a particularly vivid way:

In the case of the American Negro, from the moment you are born every stick and stone, every face, is white. Since you have not yet seen a mirror, you suppose you are, too. It comes as a great shock around the age of 5, 6, or 7 to discover that the flag to which you have pledged allegiance, along with everybody else, has not pledged allegiance to you. It comes as a great shock to see Gary Cooper killing off the Indians, and although you are rooting for Gary Cooper, that the Indians are you.

It comes as a great shock to discover that the country which is your birthplace and to which your life and identity has not, in its whole system of reality, evolved any place for you (“The American Dream and the American Negro” 1965, Baldwin 1998, 98:714–15).

In a white supremacist culture, every facet of the media reflects white supremacist ideology. The protagonist in nearly every story is white. And even though today we have made improvements to the representation of other identities and perspectives, still the majority of literature, of history, of philosophy reflects white people and white perspectives.

The passage above from Du Bois's *Souls of Black Folk* also emphasizes the "gift of second-sight" that double-consciousness entails. Du Bois emphasizes this element more significantly in later writings, particularly in "The Souls of White Folk" in *Darkwater* (1920):

Of [The Souls of White Folk] I am singularly clairvoyant. I see in and through them. I view them from unusual points of vantage. Not as a foreigner do I come, for I am native, not foreign, bone of their thought and flesh of their language. Mine is not the knowledge of the traveler or the colonial composite of dear memories, words and wonder. Nor yet is my knowledge that which servants have of masters, or mass of class, or capitalist of artisan. Rather I see these souls undressed and from the back and side. I see the working of their entrails. I know their thoughts and they know that I know. This knowledge makes them now embarrassed, now furious! (Du Bois 1920, 29).

Du Bois claims to know white folks, in a sense, more intimately than they know themselves. In part this is because, growing up in America, he is fed white supremacist ideology from early childhood, while at the same time, he sees the arbitrary lies at bottom of this ideology. Du Bois argued that writers like himself, in order to address racial problems, had to lead (white?) readers "within the Veil" so they could have a better understanding of the black experience (Gooding-Williams 2018). For Du Bois, too, then, something like *sympathetic understanding* was necessary for addressing racial problems. Standpoint theory and double-consciousness differ from some perspectivist views in that, while it treats knowledge as perspectival, it does not see all social perspectives as created equal.

3.4.3 *Cultural Pluralism in Kallen, Locke, and Follett*

Horace Kallen is perhaps better known for his essay, "Democracy versus the Melting Pot", in which he criticized the "melting pot" metaphor for the incorporation of immigrants into American society as, effectively, being a form of destructive cultural assimilation disguised by a thin veneer of tolerance. The idea was that immigrants should assimilate to a "common" American culture than in practice was simply the culture of the Anglophone majority. By contrast, Kallen argued that "*cultural pluralism*" was the foundation for the growth of American culture. "In many-ness, variety, differentiation, lies the vitality of such oneness as they may compose" (Kallen 1924, 35). In a similar vein, Mary Parker Follett writes, "[t]he hope of democracy is in its inequalities" (Follett 1918, 139), by which she means, in the differences between the citizens.

For both Kallen and Follett, cultural pluralism had to be *integrative*, or melioristic in the sense of James and Addams, rather than a view where separate cultures keep to themselves. As Follett put it, "[u]nity, not uniformity, must be our aim. We attain unity only through variety. Differences must be integrated, not annihilated,

nor absorbed” (Follett 1918, 39).² Kallen asked us to replace the metaphor of the melting pot with the metaphor of the orchestra:

As in an orchestra, every type of instrument has its specific timbre and tonality, founded in its substance and form; as every type has its appropriate theme and melody in the whole symphony, so in society each ethnic group is the natural instrument, its spirit and culture are its theme and melody, and the harmony and dissonances and discords of them all make the symphony of civilization (Kallen 1924, 116–17).

Kallen qualified this metaphor by insisting that, unlike a symphony that is written ahead of time to be played by the orchestra, “in the symphony of civilization the playing is the writing” (ibid.). It is less an orchestra than a jazz ensemble, then.

Kallen acknowledged that he developed his conception of cultural pluralism in conversations with his African-American student, Alain Locke, who would go on to be called “Father of the Harlem Renaissance” (see McKenna and Pratt 2015; Carter 2012).³ Locke was particularly interested in connecting cultural pluralism and value theory. He sometimes referred to his value theory as “value relativism”, though his view did not contain the ultimate incommensurability often associated with the term “relativism”. For Locke, cultural pluralism and value relativism largely involved the acknowledgement, on the one hand, that values are culturally dependent, and on the other hand, that cultural exchange should be approached from “*The principle of cultural reciprocity*” rather than a hierarchical relation between cultures (Harris 1991, 73).

The relativism was mitigated by the functional equivalences between values, “limited cultural convertibility” (ibid.), and the pervasiveness of the transvaluation of values, i.e., that all valuation evolves reevaluating and transforming our values (Harris 1991, 31ff.). While different cultures might value different things as “sacred”, all cultures value *some* things as sacred. While what our religious values are may be culturally relative, all (or most) cultures have religious values. These kind of functional equivalences enable “limited cultural convertibility”, i.e., communication across cultures about values independent of their specific cultural contents. Locke thought transvaluation, the reevaluation and transformation of our values, was common both for individuals and society. All of these benefitted from cultural exchanges under conditions of reciprocity.

²Follett took pains to make sure that her account of “integration” was not misunderstood along assimilationist lines. In a footnote to this passage, she wrote:

I therefore give here a list of words which can be used to describe the genuine social process and a list which gives exactly the wrong idea of it. Good words: integrate, interpenetrate, interpermeate, compenetrates, compound, harmonize, correlate, coordinate, interweave, reciprocally relate or adapt or adjust, etc. Bad words: fuse, melt, amalgamate, assimilate, weld, dissolve, absorb, reconcile (if used in Hegelian sense), etc. (Follett 1918, 39).

³Although compare Kallen’s rather condescending memorial address, “Alain Locke and Cultural Pluralism” (1957).

3.4.4 *Cultural Lessons for and from Perspectivism*

Perspectivism in epistemology and philosophy of science recognizes the partiality and the plurality of claims to knowledge. But it does not always acknowledge the range of perspectives, particularly perspectives deriving from other cultures, including non-Western and indigenous knowledge traditions. Here perspectivism could learn from the postcolonial and multicultural approaches to science as explored, for example, by Sandra Harding (Harding 1994, 1998). Cultural pluralism reminds perspectivism and pragmatism that they have rich resources for thinking beyond a narrow-minded Eurocentrism to a position where those who have been pushed to the epistemic margins are given a voice and have their contributions to knowledge respected.

Another element highlighted by these standpoint theory and cultural pluralist approaches from the broader American pragmatist tradition is the relation of power and oppression to knowledge. Pragmatists and American philosophers like Addams, Du Bois, Kallen, and Locke join with other feminists, Marxists, and critical race theorists in developing standpoint epistemology and theories of double-consciousness that remind us that not only are not all perspectives created equal, but the perspective of oppressed groups has a special relevance to many questions of knowledge. It also reminds us of the ethical requirements of approaching different perspectives in remaining humble, practicing reciprocity, and being aware of the dimensions of our own perspectives' social privileges.

Finally, this discussion points towards the need to build bridges and reciprocity between perspectives. We should not be satisfied with different perspectives in isolation from one another. That does not mean assimilation of one perspective to another. Rather, as Follett would insist, it points towards a non-dominationist account of *integration* of perspectives. To continue the visual metaphor, integrating perspectives into a kind of *stereoscopic* vision reveals dimensions of understanding not available to an isolated perspective. That advantage is destroyed by reduction of one perspective to another or both to a third. This suggests a fruitful connection between perspectivism and what Sandy Mitchell has called "integrative pluralism" (Mitchell 2002, 2003), acknowledging that integration is a difficult and piecemeal task.

3.5 Conclusion

This paper has provided merely an overview of potential points of connection between contemporary perspectivism and the American pragmatist tradition. It is my hope that contemporary perspectivists might find valuable resources within the pragmatist tradition for developing their views, and that this chapter might spark mutual insight and appreciation between contemporary perspectivists and pragmatists.

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