Bernstein, Richard, J., The Pragmatic Turn, Polity, 2010, pp. 1-25.

Prologue

"Isms" in philosophy are notorious, and this is certainly true of "pragmatism." It is fashionable in philosophy to speak about "isms": "materialism," "idealism," "existentialism," "realism," "nominalism," "naturalism," etc. The advantage of this type of talk is that it enables us to label philosophical positions, orientations, and theses that presumably share distinctive characteristics. But there are also dangers, because we may be seduced into thinking that there is an essential hard core to a particular "ism." What is worse, we often use these expressions carelessly, frequently assuming that our hearers and readers have a perfectly clear idea of what we mean. Yet when we closely examine the positions advocated by representatives of these "isms," we discover enormous differences – including conflicting and even contradictory claims. Even the anti-essentialist idiom of "family resemblances" has become a cliché. Not only are differences in a family as striking as any resemblances, but in an actual family, we can typically appeal to common biological factors to *identify* a family. There is nothing comparable to this in philosophy. So it might seem advisable to drop all talk of "isms" in order to avoid confusion, ambiguity, and vagueness. Yet this would also impoverish our ability to understand what we take to be positions and thinkers who, despite significant differences, do share important overlapping features.

These general observations are relevant to pragmatism. In the case of pragmatism, we have the advantage of being able to specify the precise date when the word was first introduced publicly to identify a philosophical position. On 26 August 1898, William James

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delivered an address before the Philosophical Union of the University of California in Berkeley. Characteristically in his eloquent, gracious, and informal manner, James introduces pragmatism in his talk, "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results."

> An occasion like the present would seem to call for an absolutely untechnical discourse. I ought to give a message with a practical outcome and an emotional accompaniment, so to speak, fitted to interest men as men, and yet also not altogether to disappoint philosophers – since philosophers, let them be as queer as they will, still are men in the secret recesses of their hearts, even here in Berkeley. (James 1997, pp. 345–6)[1]

James tells us that "philosophers are after all like poets." They are pathfinders who blaze new trails in the forest. They suggest "a few formulas, a few technical conceptions, a few verbal pointers – which at least define the initial directions of the trail" (James 1997, p. 347). With this initial flourish, he introduces pragmatism.

> I will seek to define with you what seems to be the most likely direction in which to start upon the trail of truth. Years ago this direction was given to me by an American philosopher whose home is in the East, and whose published works, few as they are scattered in periodicals, are no fit expression of his powers. I refer to Mr. Charles S. Peirce, with whose very existence as a philosopher I dare say many of you are unacquainted. He is one of the most original of contemporary thinkers, and the principle of practicalism – or pragmatism, as he called it, when I first heard him enunciate it at Cambridge in the early 70's – is the clue or compass by following which I find myself more and more confirmed in believing we may keep our feet upon the proper trail. (James 1997, p. 348)

This is the first public philosophical introduction of the word "pragmatism," and the first narrative account of the origin of American pragmatism.[2] When James tells us that he heard the principle of pragmatism enunciated in the 1870s, he is referring to the meetings of the Metaphysical Club, an informal discussion group that met in Cambridge, and he specifically refers to Peirce's now famous 1878 paper, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear."[3]

> Peirce's principle, as we may call it, may be expressed in a variety of ways, all of them very simple. In *Popular Science Monthly* for January,

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> 1878, he introduces it as follows: The soul and meaning of thought, he says, can never be made to direct itself toward anything but the production of belief, belief being the demi-cadence which closes a musical phrase in the symphony of our intellectual life. (James 1997, p. 348)[4]

Here is Peirce's own formulation of what has subsequently been called the "pragmatic maxim" – even though Peirce did not use the word "pragmatic" in this article.

> 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. (Peirce 1992, p. 132)

Prior to 1898, neither Peirce nor any of the other thinkers that we today associate with the pragmatic movement had ever mentioned "pragmatism" in their published writings. Yet, after James published his Berkeley address, the word caught on and spread like wildfire. When James published *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*, nine years after he delivered his Berkeley address, he wrote the following about "Peirce's principle":

> The term is derived from the same Greek word πραγμα, meaning action, from which our words 'practice' and 'practical' come. It was first introduced into philosophy by Mr. Charles Peirce in 1878. In an article entitled 'How to Make Our Ideas Clear,' … Mr. Peirce after pointing out that our beliefs are really rules for action, said that, to develop a thought's meaning, we need only

determine what conduct it is fitted to produce: that conduct is for us its sole significance. And the tangible fact at the root of all our thought-distinctions, however subtle, is that there is no one of them so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference in practice. To attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object, then, we need only consider what conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involved – what sensations we are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare. Our conception of these effects, whether immediate or remote, is then for us the whole of our conception of the object, so far as that conception has positive significance at all.

This is the principle of Peirce, the principle of pragmatism. It lay entirely unnoticed by anyone for twenty years, until I … brought it forward again and made a special application of it to religion. By that date (1898) the times seemed ripe for its reception. The word

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'pragmatism' spread, and at present it fairly spots the pages of the philosophic journals. (James 1997, pp. 377–8)

Not only had the word spread, but pragmatism was savagely caricatured and severely criticized. Peirce was so distressed about the popular literary appropriation of "pragmatism" that he disowned the word. In an article entitled "What Pragmatism Is," published in the *Monist* (April 1905), he wrote:

> But at present, the word begins to be met with occasionally in the literary journals where it gets abused in the merciless way that words have to expect when they fall into literary clutches. … So then, the writer, finding his bantling "pragmatism" so promoted, feels that it is time to kiss his child goodbye and relinquish it to its higher destiny; while to serve the precise purpose of expressing the original definition, he begs to announce the birth of the word "pragmaticism," which is ugly enough to be safe from kidnappers. (Peirce 1998, pp. 334–5)[5]

The confusion about the meaning of pragmatism was so widespread that on the tenth anniversary of James's introduction of the term, Arthur O. Lovejoy set out to distinguish *thirteen* different meanings of pragmatism. With sly irony, Lovejoy wrote:

> In the present year of grace 1908 the term "pragmatism" – if not the doctrine – celebrates its tenth birthday. Before the controversy over the mode of philosophy designated by it enters upon a second decade, it is perhaps not too much to ask that contemporary philosophers should agree to attach some single meaning to the term. … A complete enumeration of the metamorphoses of so protean an entity is, indeed, perhaps too much to expect: but even after we leave out of the count certain casual expressions of pragmatist writers which they probably would not wish taken too seriously, and also certain mere commonplaces from which scarcely any contemporary

philosopher would dissent, there remain at least thirteen pragmatisms: a baker's dozen of contentions which are separate not merely in the sense of being discriminable, but in the sense of being logically independent, so that you may without inconsistency accept any one and reject all the others, or refute one and leave the philosophical standing of the others unimpugned. All of these have generally or frequently been labeled with one name and defended or attacked as if they constituted a single system of thought – sometimes even as if they were severally interchangeable. (Lovejoy 1963, p. 1)

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I suspect that today, a hundred years after Lovejoy wrote these words, many philosophers may want to suggest that Lovejoy was far too conservative in discriminating *only* thirteen pragmatisms.

The Cultural Context

In order to bring some clarity to the meaning(s) of pragmatism and the vicissitudes of the movement, I wish to describe briefly the state of philosophy in the United States during the last decades of the nineteenth century – especially after the Civil War. Prior to the Civil War, there is scarcely any evidence of the discipline of philosophy in the United States. Of course, an educated elite existed (primarily clergy) who had some familiarity with the great philosophers of the past, but the institution of an ongoing discipline that we could today identify as philosophy did not exist. Throughout most of the nineteenth century, our colleges were primarily undergraduate teaching institutions preparing young men to become clergy and for citizenship. To speak of undergraduate colleges is already anachronistic, because there was no well-defined graduate education. The idea of a university as an institution dedicated to encouraging scholarly research came into existence only during the last decades of the nineteenth century. But in the period after the Civil War, a remarkable intellectual life flourished. During this time the most creative discussion took place within informal discussion groups. A great center of intellectual life was Cambridge, Massachusetts. The Metaphysical Club was only one of numerous philosophical discussion groups that spontaneously arose. Educated individuals with a great variety of interests (and professions) came together to present papers, discuss texts, and engage in lively debates. Neither Peirce nor James was ever *formally* trained as a philosopher. Peirce, the son of a famous Harvard mathematician, Benjamin Peirce, identified himself as a practicing experimental scientist and a logician. James, who was trained as a medical doctor (but never practiced medicine), initially gained his fame for his work in psychology. They were intellectuals whose interests ranged over the gamut of human affairs.

Philosophy, as they practiced it, was not a distinctively demarcated discipline – a *Fach* – but emerged from their reflections on the range of human knowledge and activities. And they

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did not hesitate to speculate about the nature of the cosmos. Wilfrid Sellars tells us: "The aim of philosophy, abstractly formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term" (Sellars 1963, p. 1). Peirce and James conceived of, and practiced, philosophical reflection in this manner.

Cambridge was not the only center of philosophical activity in the United States during the post-Civil War period. During the nineteenth century a significant number of educated Germans emigrated to the United States – several of whom rose to prominent positions. They brought with them a vital interest in German philosophy, especially Kant and Hegel. "Kant clubs" and "Hegel clubs" sprang up in Missouri and Ohio. Individuals, frequently not associated with any academic institution, met to discuss and debate philosophical issues. Few philosophers today are aware of Henry C. Brockmeyer (1826–1906), a German émigré, lawyer, and lieutenant-governor of Missouri, who spent many years working on a translation of Hegel's *Logic* – a translation never published but circulated and recopied by others who shared Brockmeyer's passion for Hegel. Better known is William T. Harris, born in New England, who along with Brockmeyer established the St Louis Philosophical Society. They became known as the "St Louis Hegelians." Harris, who later was appointed US Commissioner of Education, founded the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* in 1867, the first journal in America dedicated exclusively to philosophical studies. Harris conceived of the journal as a means for spreading the influence of Hegel and German idealism in the United States. The early issues were filled with translations and discussions of German philosophy. One of Peirce's earliest philosophical publications was an exchange with Harris about technical issues in Hegel's *Logic* (see Peirce 1984, pp. 132–59). Some of the most important early articles by Peirce, James, and Dewey appeared in Harris's journal.

Harris is noteworthy for another reason. When John Dewey was 22, he submitted his first philosophical article to Harris, and hesitantly asked for an assessment of his philosophical ability. Harris's encouragement played a significant role in Dewey's decision to apply to the newly founded graduate philosophy program at Johns Hopkins University. Although Peirce was teaching logic at Johns Hopkins when Dewey was a graduate student, the major influence on Dewey during his graduate studies was the neo-Hegelian, G. S. Morris. In Dewey's own recounting of the development of American pragmatism, he tells

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us that the neo-Kantian and Hegelian influences were "very marked in the United States during the last decade of the nineteenth century. I myself, and those who collaborated with me in the exposition of instrumentalism, began by being neo-Kantians, in the same way that Peirce's point of departure was Kantianism and that of James was the empiricism of the British School" (Dewey 1981, p. 52).[6]

Dewey started his teaching career at the University of Minnesota in 1888, but moved to the University of Michigan the following year. At Michigan, he met George H. Mead, who became a lifelong

friend and colleague. Mead had studied at Harvard, primarily with the neo-Hegelian Josiah Royce.[7] Mead had also spent some time in Germany studying physiological psychology and attending the lectures of Wilhelm Dilthey. When Dewey was offered the chairmanship of the Department of Philosophy and Psychology at the newly founded University of Chicago in 1894, he brought Mead with him. From their earliest association they exerted a mutual philosophical influence.

The liveliness and fertility of this "classical" period of American pragmatism is due to several factors.[8] These thinkers drew upon a rich diversity of philosophical traditions. Peirce's original source of inspiration was Kant. Peirce also had a sophisticated knowledge of the history of philosophy and science. He was familiar with the subtlety of medieval thought, especially that of Duns Scotus, at a time when philosophers barely paid any attention to this medieval tradition. James appropriated themes from British empiricism and dedicated *Pragmatism* to John Stuart Mill, although he vigorously criticized the static abstractness of the British empiricist conception of experience. Dewey was inspired by the version of Hegelianism that was influential in the United States and England during the last decades of the nineteenth century, although Darwin soon replaced Hegel as Dewey's intellectual hero.[9] Because there was no single dominant philosophical school or tradition in the United States, the pragmatic thinkers enjoyed a freedom in their creative appropriation of philosophical themes. At the time divisions that are now so prominent in academic disciplines and subdisciplines simply did not exist. Consequently, there was an intellectual ease in the way these thinkers spanned the various areas and fields of knowledge and human activity. The more closely one studies these thinkers, the more one realizes how different they were in their temperaments, talents, backgrounds, and interests. With his sophisticated knowledge of mathematics, logic, probability, and the natural sciences, Peirce was certainly the most

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"tough-minded" of the group. James had remarkable psychological perspicuity and was deeply concerned with the varieties of religious experience throughout his life. James's descriptions of the plurality of human experience display a rare phenomenological subtlety and metaphorical vividness.[10] Consider how Dewey described the difference between Peirce and James:

> Peirce was above all a logician; whereas James was an educator and humanist and wished to force the general public to realize that certain problems, certain philosophic debates, have a real importance for mankind, because the beliefs which they bring into play lead to very different modes of conduct. If this important distinction is not grasped, it is impossible to understand the majority of ambiguities and errors which belong to the later period of the pragmatic movement. (Dewey 1981, p. 46)

James, not Peirce, was the major influence on Dewey during his Chicago years, when he and his colleagues were working out their experimental instrumentalism.[11] Dewey was attracted to the

biological motifs in James's *Principles of Psychology*.[12] Dewey's fascination with organic metaphors was already evident in the Hegelian phase of his development, but became dominant with his turn toward Darwin.[13] Darwin's *The Origin of Species* had been published in 1859, the year of Dewey's birth. All the pragmatic thinkers were influenced by Darwin's evolutionary hypotheses.[14] The themes of democracy, education, and social reform became central to Dewey's version of pragmatism. Mead, who shared many of Dewey's interests in philosophy and social reform, was also concerned with the social character and the genesis of language and communication. Mead, more than any other of the pragmatic thinkers, developed a detailed comprehensive social theory of action and language. All of these thinkers were robust naturalists stressing the *continuity* of human beings with the rest of nature, although each of them strongly opposed scientism, reductive naturalism, and mechanical determinism. They argued for the positive role of chance and contingency in the universe. They were skeptical of any attempt to draw a sharp boundary between philosophical reflection and scientific activity. Each of them stressed the need for philosophy to be informed by, and open to, the significance of novel scientific developments. They were critical of the traditional philosophical quest for absolute certainty and of what Dewey labeled

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the "spectator theory of knowledge." They emphasized the role of *know-how*, *social practices*, and *human agency*.

There is another aspect of the pragmatic thinkers that should be highlighted – their self-understanding that pragmatism was related to important features of American life. (This is especially true of James, Dewey, and Mead, less so of Peirce.) Thus far, I have been stressing how the classical pragmatists were influenced by, and transformed, themes that they appropriated from European philosophy, but they were self-consciously Americans. In "The Development of American Pragmatism," which was originally written for a European audience, Dewey says that the pragmatic movement is a "re-adaptation" of European thought. He vehemently rejects the caricature that pragmatism reflects the worst aspects of American materialism. Speaking of the various philosophical developments in America, Dewey asserts that "they do not aim to glorify the energy and love of action which the new conditions of American life exaggerated. They do not reflect the excessive mercantilism of American life. … Instrumentalism maintains in opposition to many contrary tendencies in the American environment, that action should be intelligent and reflective, and that thought should occupy a central position in life" (Dewey 1981, p. 56). He also declares:

> It is beyond doubt that the progressive and unstable character of American life and civilization has facilitated the birth of a philosophy which regards the world as being in continuous formation, where there is still place for indeterminism, for the new, and for a real future. But this idea is not

exclusively American, although the conditions in American life have aided this idea in becoming self-conscious. (Ibid.)

Peirce was even more emphatic in repudiating the caricature of pragmatism. In "What Pragmatism Is" he presents an imaginary dialogue between a pragmaticist and his questioner.

Questioner: Well, if you choose so to making Doing the Be-all and the End-all of human life, why do you not make meaning to consist simply in doing? …

Pragmaticist: Forcibly put! … It must be admitted … that if pragmaticism really made Doing to be the Be-all and the End-all of life, that would be its death. For to say that we live for the mere sake of action, as action, regardless of the thought it carries out, would be

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to say that there is no such thing as rational purport. (Peirce 1998, p. 341)

Louis Menand, in *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America*, situates the pragmatic movement in the context of American history. One of Menand's contributions is to show how the origins of pragmatism can, in part, be understood as a critical response to the horrors and excesses of the Civil War. Menand focuses on four individuals: Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr (a participant in the discussions of the Metaphysical Club), William James, Charles S. Peirce, and John Dewey – although he also discusses many of their contemporaries. Menand makes a bold claim about the influence of these four.

Their ideas changed the way Americans thought – and continue to think – about education, democracy, liberty, justice, and tolerance. And as a consequence they changed the way Americans live – the way they learn, the way they express themselves, and the way in which they treat people who are different from them. We are still living, to a great extent, in a country these thinkers helped to make. (Menand 2001, p. xi)

What was the bond that tied together these thinkers? Menand's thesis is that they shared a common attitude toward ideas.

What was that attitude? If we strain out the differences, personal and philosophical, they had with one another, we can say that what these four thinkers had in common was not a group of ideas, but a single idea – an idea about ideas. They all believed that ideas are not "out there" waiting to be discovered, but are tools … that people devise to cope with the world in which they find themselves. They believed that ideas are produced not by individuals – that ideas are social. They believed that ideas do not develop according to some inner logic of their own, but are entirely dependent, like germs, on human careers and environment. And they believed that since ideas are

provisional responses to particular situations, their survival depends not on their immutability but on their adaptability. (Menand 2001, pp. xi–xii)

The Historical Vicissitudes of Pragmatism

Let us return to the history and vicissitudes of the pragmatism in America (see also Bernstein 2006b, pp. 1–14). Originally "pragma-

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tism" was used in a restricted sense – primarily to identify Peirce's theory of meaning and James's extension of Peirce's maxim to characterize truth. Neither Peirce nor James ever used the expression to describe his entire philosophical orientation. Dewey preferred to characterize his philosophy as "experimentalism," or "instrumentalism," and sometimes as "instrumental experimentalism."[15] But gradually "pragmatism" was generalized as a convenient label to refer to this group of diverse thinkers. The expression "pragmatism" is like an accordion; it is sometimes stretched to include a wide diversity of positions and thinkers (not just philosophers) and sometimes restricted to specific doctrines of the original American pragmatists. The truth is that ever since the origins of American pragmatism – and right up to the present – critics and champions of pragmatism have been arguing about what constitutes pragmatism and who is and is not a pragmatist.[16] Rather than attempting to define pragmatism anew, I hope to *show* through my discussion of specific themes what I take to be characteristic of the best of the pragmatic tradition.

Peirce was barely known during his lifetime except by the small circle of his admirers, which included James, Dewey, Royce, and Mead. James was immensely popular – a gifted lecturer who attracted audiences in the hundreds. And during the first decades of the twentieth century, Dewey exerted a powerful influence upon many American progressives, even though his professional philosophical colleagues were critical of his pragmatism, experimentalism, and naturalism. By the 1930s, pragmatism as a vital philosophical movement began to fade from the American scene. The movement seemed to have exhausted its creative potential. William James had characterized pragmatism as a philosophy that is both "tough-minded" and "tender-minded." But increasingly, among academic philosophers, pragmatism was viewed as excessively "tender-minded" – diffuse, fuzzy, and soft at its center. A patronizing attitude toward pragmatism developed. The pragmatists may have had their hearts in the right place, but not their heads. Their vagueness and lack of clarity simply did not meet the high standards of "rigor" required for serious philosophical inquiry.

One cannot overestimate the quiet revolution that was transforming academic philosophy in America. This was, in part, a consequence of the growing influence of the émigré philosophers who had escaped from Europe and joined American philosophy departments: Reichenbach, Carnap, Tarski,

Feigl, Hempel, and many others. Several of these philosophers had been associated with the famous Vienna

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Circle. They all shared a logical finesse, sophisticated knowledge of the physical sciences, and a commitment to the highest standards of argumentation, which surpassed anything exhibited by the classical pragmatists (with the exception of Peirce). These logical empiricists sought to establish alliances with American philosophers who had been shaped by the pragmatic tradition. From the perspective of the logical empiricists, the pragmatic thinkers were viewed as having seen through a glass darkly what was now seen much more clearly. The *myth* developed (and unfortunately became entrenched) that pragmatism was primarily an anticipation of logical positivism, in particular, the positivist's verifiability criterion of meaning.

Other influences also had a deep impact on the character of philosophy in mid-twentieth-century America. Whereas philosophers from Dewey's and Mead's generation turned to Germany for philosophical inspiration, England – Cambridge, and especially Oxford – became the place where young American philosophers made their intellectual pilgrimage after the Second World War. They were fascinated with the new type of philosophizing initiated by G. E. Moore, Bertrand Russell, Wittgenstein (at least the Wittgenstein filtered by his Anglo-American students), Gilbert Ryle, and J. L. Austin.

After the Second World War, during a period of rapid growth of American universities, academic philosophy in the United States was completely transformed (except for a few pockets of resistance). Virtually every major "respectable" graduate department reshaped itself in the new spirit of tough-minded linguistic analytic philosophy. Philosophers now prided themselves on having made the "linguistic turn."[17] The American pragmatists were marginalized, relegated to the dustbin of history. To the extent that the classical pragmatists were studied, it was primarily by American intellectual historians – not by philosophers. Even though philosophers occasionally paid lip service to the pragmatism, there was a prevailing sense that there really wasn't much that a "serious" philosophy student could learn from the pragmatists. From that time until today, many philosophy students at our most prestigious graduate schools do not even bother to read the works of the classical pragmatists.

The story I have just told about the rise and fall of pragmatism in twentieth-century America is simplified. Nevertheless, some version of it is still the dominant understanding of how philosophy developed in America. For some, the triumph of analytic philosophy is a narrative of progress and technical sophistication. For others, it is a

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sad story of decline from the speculative spirit of the "golden age" of American philosophy to a thin concern with technical issues that do not really matter to anyone outside the professional circle of like-

minded philosophers. But, however one judges what happened, the basic narrative structure of philosophy in America remains the same.

During the past few decades, the philosophical scene has begun to change dramatically. There is a resurgence of pragmatic themes in philosophy throughout the world, and a growing interest in the works of the classical pragmatists. There are the beginnings of a more subtle, complex narrative of the development of philosophy in America that highlights the *continuity* and the *persistence* of the pragmatic legacy. Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam, both of whom situate their own philosophical approaches within the pragmatic tradition, have played major roles in rethinking and rewriting the history of pragmatism in America. Rorty has argued that such key "analytic" philosophers as W. V. O. Quine, Wilfrid Sellars, and Donald Davidson can and *should* be read as refining basic pragmatic themes anticipated by the classical pragmatic thinkers – especially those that can be found in James and Dewey. In the "Introduction" to *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty tells us that the central chapter of his book is the one that deals with Sellars and Quine.

> I interpret Sellars's attack on "givenness" and Quine's attack on "necessity" as the crucial steps in undermining the possibility of a "theory of knowledge." The holism and pragmatism common to both philosophers, and which they share with the later Wittgenstein, are the lines of thought within analytic philosophy which I wish to extend. I argue that when extended in a certain way they let us see truth as, in James's phrase, "what is better for us to believe," rather than as "the accurate representation of reality." (Rorty 1979, p. 10)

Rorty interprets Davidson as going beyond Quine and Sellars in furthering the cause of pragmatism. In his introduction to John P. Murphy's *Pragmatism: From Peirce to Davidson*, Rorty writes:

> [W]hat Davidson added to Dewey is a non-representationalist account of knowledge. I have argued elsewhere that the "linguistic turn" in philosophy was sort of a last refuge of representationalism and that the dialectic that leads the later Wittgenstein and Davidson away from a picture theory of language is the same as that which led Dewey away from a spectator theory of knowledge. If no further refuge is found,

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> then Davidson may have been right when he wrote "a sea change" is occurring in recent philosophical thought – "a change so profound that we may not recognize that it is occurring." If the change of which Davidson spoke is someday recognized as having occurred … [then] Peirce, James, and Dewey may cease to be treated as provincial figures. They may be given the place I think they deserve in the story of the West's intellectual progress. (Rorty 1990, p. 5)

Regardless of what one thinks of Rorty's own idiosyncratic version of pragmatism, he should be given credit for challenging the standard narrative of the development of twentieth-century philosophy in

America. It is superficial and misleading to claim that pragmatism came to an end with the arrival of analytic philosophy. On the contrary, after the linguistic turn, philosophers such as Wittgenstein, Quine, Sellars, and Davidson were able to refine and advance themes that were anticipated by the classical pragmatists. The most original and creative thinking of the best analytic philosophers advances the cause of pragmatism and helps to bring about the sea change that the classical pragmatists initiated.

Rorty has been joined by Hilary Putnam, who, despite his many disputes with Rorty, also stresses the continuity and centrality of pragmatism. In *Realism with a Human Face*, Putnam, whom Rorty once called the leading pragmatist of our time, describes the ideas that he explores as follows:

> All of these ideas – that the fact/value dichotomy is untenable, that the fact/convention dichotomy is also untenable, that truth and justification of ideas are closely connected, that the alternative to metaphysical realism is not any form of skepticism, that philosophy is an attempt to achieve the good – are ideas that have long been associated with the American pragmatic tradition. Realizing this has led me (sometimes with the assistance of Ruth Anna Putnam) to make the effort to better understand that tradition from Peirce right up to Quine and Goodman. (Putnam 1990, p. xi)

Before proceeding, I want to emphasize a fundamental point. When Rorty reads the later Wittgenstein, Quine, Sellars, and Davidson as furthering the pragmatist agenda, or when Putnam raises the question "Was Wittgenstein a Pragmatist?," neither is suggesting that the achievements of these philosophers are the result of *direct* influence

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of the classical pragmatists. There is no evidence that Wittgenstein ever read any of the writings of the classical pragmatists except William James, although it is said that he heard about Peirce from Frank Ramsey. When Quine uses the term "pragmatic" in his famous essay "On What There Is," its meaning owes more to Carnap than to any of the classical pragmatists. Sellars was certainly knowledgeable about the pragmatists, but, like Peirce, he was inspired by Kant. And from Davidson's occasional remarks about pragmatism, it is primarily Rorty's understanding of pragmatism that he has in mind. My fundamental point is that philosophers, starting from the most diverse orientations and without being directly influenced by the classical pragmatists, have been articulating insights and developing theses that are not only congenial with a pragmatic orientation but also *refine* its philosophical import. Cheryl Misak succinctly makes this point in her introduction to *New Pragmatists*.

> It is not of much concern … whether these philosophers have in fact been influenced by the classical pragmatists or whether they see themselves as part of the pragmatic tradition. What matters is that the best of Peirce, James, and Dewey has resurfaced in deep, interesting and fruitful ways. (Misak 2007, p. 2)

Thus far I have been discussing pragmatism as primarily an American philosophical movement that has its origins in the second half of the nineteenth century and continues in a variety of forms right up to the present. So, despite the conventional story of how analytic philosophy in America displaced pragmatism, we should think of pragmatism as a complex movement that has had a number of tributaries during the past 150 years in America. Pragmatic themes have not been limited to philosophy in North America – they have a much more global significance.

The Global Reach of Pragmatism

Perhaps the most ambitious understanding of pragmatism is that advanced by Robert Brandom. In *Articulating Reasons*, he writes:

> Pragmatism about the norms implicit in cognitive activity came down to us in the first half of the twentieth century from three independent

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> directions: from the classical American pragmatists, culminating in Dewey; from Heidegger of *Being and Time*; and from Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations*. In trying to work out how the insights of these traditions (partly common, partly complementary) could be applied to make progress within contemporary philosophy of language and philosophy of mind, however, I found myself driven back to Hegel's original version. For unlike all three of these more recent sorts of social practice theory, Hegel's is a *rationalist* pragmatism. By contrast to their conceptual assimilationism, he gives pride of place to *reasoning* in understanding what it is to say or do something. (Brandom 2000a, p. 34)

At first blush, it may seem excessive to speak of Wittgensteinian, Heideggerian, and Hegelian *pragmatism*. Brandom wants to stress a theme that is central to his own version of pragmatism: conceptual norms are implicit in discursive social practices. In *Making it Explicit*, he works out in great detail a theory of linguistic practices that shows precisely how norms arise within these practices and are made explicit. Linguistic conceptual norms are instituted by social-practical activity – by know-how. Brandom develops an inferential semantics that dovetails with a normative pragmatics. Given this understanding of pragmatism, it makes good sense to see anticipations, insights, and contributions to such a theory of social practices in the classical American pragmatists as well as in Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Hegel. And it is to his credit that, in *Making it Explicit* (1994) and *Tales of the Mighty Dead* (2002), Brandom provides readings of Hegel, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger to support his interpretation. Although I think it is inflationary to speak of Wittgensteinian, Heideggerian, and Hegelian *pragmatisms*, I endorse the idea that there are identifiable themes in all of these thinkers that are not only compatible with, but also develop in novel ways ideas that are central to the classical

American pragmatists. I agree with Brandom that, despite radical differences, Hegel, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger contribute to a richer understanding of the primacy of social practices in all aspects of our lives.

Brandom's comments about the pragmatism of Wittgenstein and Heidegger bring to mind the striking remark by his teacher, Richard Rorty, that the three most important philosophers of the twentieth century are Dewey, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger. "Each tried, in his early years, to find a new way to make philosophy 'foundational' – a new way of formulating an ultimate context for thought. … Each

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came to see his earlier effort as self-deceptive. … They set aside epistemology and metaphysics as possible disciplines" (Rorty 1979, p. 6).[18] They shared much more than a critique of modern philosophy; they opened new vistas and new ways of thinking that Rorty employs in his vision of a post-philosophical pragmatic culture.

Still, one may feel uneasy about making even the more modest claim that there are significant pragmatic themes in Wittgenstein and Heidegger. So let me suggest another perspective for discerning the deep similarities among the American pragmatists, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger. In my chapter on Peirce, I will argue that the origin of American pragmatism lies in a remarkable series of papers that he published in 1868–9 in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*.[19] Like so much of Peirce's writing, these articles are brilliant, extremely dense, and occasionally cryptic. In standard accounts of American pragmatism (including James's narrative), Peirce's more popular papers, "The Fixation of Belief" and "How to Make our Ideas Clear" – written a decade later – are cited as inaugurating the pragmatic movement. Yet I believe that these earlier papers, especially the first two – "Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man" and "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities" – are essential for understanding pragmatism, and even for appreciating the significance of his more famous 1878 papers. They provide the necessary background and set an agenda for many of Peirce's subsequent investigations. We hear echoes of these papers in the other classical pragmatists, as well as in the work of Wilfrid Sellars, Hilary Putnam, Richard Rorty, Robert Brandom, Jürgen Habermas, and many others.

Peirce begins the second paper in this series with a succinct summary of his critique of Cartesianism. "Descartes is the father of modern philosophy, and the spirit of Cartesianism – that which principally distinguishes it from the scholasticism which it displaced – may be compendiously stated as follows" (Peirce 1992, p. 28). Peirce then proceeds to list four major contrasts between Cartesianism and the scholasticism that it displaced. These are:

1. a belief that philosophy must begin with universal doubt, as contrasted with scholasticism, which did not question fundamentals;

2. a belief that the ultimate test of certainty is found in individual consciousness, rather than by relying on the testimony of sages;

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3. privileging a single thread of inference (depending on inconspicuous premises), rather than appealing to the multiform scholastic argumentation; and finally,

4. Cartesianism fails to explain many things and renders them absolutely inexplicable, whereas scholasticism had its mysteries of faith but attempted to explain all created things.

After listing these contrasts, Peirce makes a striking claim:

> In some, or all of these respects, most modern philosophers have been in effect Cartesians. Now without wishing to return to scholasticism, it seems to me that modern science and modern logic requires us to stand upon a very different platform. (Ibid.)

Peirce's critique of Cartesianism results in four denials:

1. We have no power of Introspection, but all knowledge of the internal world is derived from hypothetical reasoning from our knowledge of external facts.

2. We have no power of Intuition, but every cognition is determined logically by previous cognitions.

3. We have no power of thinking without signs.

4. We have no conception of the absolutely incognizable.

(Peirce 1992, p. 30)

I will be exploring the meaning and consequences of these denials in my chapter on Peirce. Pragmatism begins with a radical critique of Cartesianism. In one fell swoop, Peirce seeks to demolish the interrelated motifs that constitute Cartesianism: the ontological dualism of mind and body; the subjective individualism implicit in the appeal to direct personal verification; the method of universal doubt that is supposed to lead us to incorrigible truths; the conviction that unless we discover firm foundations for knowledge we cannot avoid epistemological skepticism; the belief that knowledge of the world consists of having ideas that correctly represent and correspond to this world; the doctrine that vagueness is "unreal" and that the epistemological endeavor is to know clearly and distinctly a completely determinate reality; and, most fundamentally, that we can break out of language or systems of signs and have direct immediate knowledge of nonlinguistic objects. Peirce takes this last claim to be at the core of

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Cartesianism, and to be a central dogma of many varieties of modern philosophy. Peirce's attack on Cartesianism is, in effect, a generalized attack on what Wilfrid Sellars calls the Myth of the Given, regardless of what is taken to be the cognitively given – "sense contents, material objects, universals,

propositions, real connections, first principles, even givenness itself" (Sellars 1997, p. 14). Peirce is not interested solely in critiquing Cartesianism, but rather, in working out an alternative pragmatic understanding of human beings and their place in the cosmos. We can view the development of pragmatism from Peirce until its recent resurgence as developing and refining this fundamental change of philosophical orientation – this sea change. A unifying theme in all the classical pragmatists as well as their successors is the development of a philosophical orientation that replaces Cartesianism (in all its varieties).

Viewing Peirce's project and the pragmatic movement in this manner enables us to see the plausibility of Brandom speaking of Wittgensteinian and Heideggerian pragmatism. For although their philosophical styles and idioms are strikingly different, Heidegger and the later Wittgenstein can be approached as also engaging in a radical critique of the Cartesianism of modern philosophy. Both of them are critical of epistemological and metaphysical foundationalism; they attack the traditional dualisms that characterize so much of modern philosophy. They contribute to the critique of the Myth of the Given. They argue that subjectivism leads to unavoidable aporias. For very different reasons, both would agree with Peirce's theses that we have no power of immediate intuition and no power of thinking without signs.

Peirce, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger – working in and out of very different traditions – are motivated by a "felt difficulty," a similar problematic. Each of them detects that something is profoundly wrong with Cartesianism, and each of them seeks to rethink a more adequate way of understanding our forms of life and our being-in-the world. They are critical of what Dewey called the "spectator theory of knowledge" and shift our attention to know-how, to how we engage in the world and social practices. Each of them repudiates what Rorty calls "philosophy as the mirror of nature." The similarities and overlaps in their projects are *not* the result of any direct influence. There is no evidence that Heidegger ever read any of the pragmatists or even knew of the existence of Peirce. And although Wittgenstein frequently discusses William James, it was

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James's *Principles of Psychology* and the *Varieties of Religious Experience* that fascinated him, not James's explicitly pragmatic writings. With the American pragmatists, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein, we witness a similar dialectic at work in their thinking, a dialectic that starts with the same problematic and thinks through its radical consequences.

When Heidegger introduces his distinction between *Zuhandensein* (readiness-to-hand) and *Vorhandensein* (presence-in-hand) in *Being and Time* and argues for the primacy of readiness-to-hand, he introduces a theme that echoes the pragmatic claims about the primacy of practice and conduct. The readiness-to-hand of a piece of equipment consists in its having a distinctive practical significance like a hammer (Heidegger's famous example). A hammer is the kind of entity that exhibits this sort of

being. To take something as a hammer is not simply to perceive it, but to know that it is a piece of equipment used for driving nails (although it can be used for other purposes). And as Heidegger explores the meaning and consequences of *Zuhandensein* and how it is related to *Vorhandensein*, it becomes clear that he is fundamentally altering the way in which we understand our being-in-the-world. Although "being-in-the-world" is not an expression that any of the classical American pragmatists ever used, it beautifully articulates the pragmatic understanding of the transaction that takes place between human organisms and their environment – a transaction that involves know-how and is the basis for knowing-that. When, for example, Axel Honneth tells us that, "according to Heidegger, we do not encounter reality in the stance of a cognitive subject, but rather we practically cope with the world in such a way that it is given to us as a field of practical significance," he is also describing one of the most basic theses of the American pragmatists (Honneth 2008, p. 30).[20] The resonances between Heidegger and the pragmatists can also be detected in Heidegger's exploration of care (*Sorge*), projection (*Entwurf*), and situatedness (*Befindlichheit*).

The literature dealing with the similarities and differences between Heidegger and pragmatism is now quite extensive. In addition to the affinities noted by Brandom and Rorty, one should also mention those emphasized by Hubert Dreyfus and John Haugeland, both of whom have had a significant influence on Anglo-American interpretations of Heidegger.[21] Mark Okrent's *Heidegger's Pragmatism* (1988) is a comprehensive study of pragmatic themes in Heidegger's corpus. There are lively debates and strong disagreements about which aspects of Heidegger's writings are most closely related to pragmatism. Some

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have argued that we grossly distort Heidegger when we read him through a pragmatic lens. Even if we avoid the "cultural imperialism" that can result from labeling Heidegger a "pragmatist" and focus on shared insights, concerns, and thematic strains in the American pragmatic thinkers and Heidegger, we can see how much they illuminate each other.

Concerning Wittgenstein, let me note that every major post-Wittgensteinian philosopher who has identified with the pragmatic tradition has been attracted to and influenced by the later Wittgenstein. All of them read Wittgenstein as sharing a great deal with pragmatism and as advancing the sophistication of pragmatic themes after the linguistic turn. This is true for Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam, Wilfrid Sellars, Robert Brandom, Jürgen Habermas, and many others. Indeed, in his *Pragmatism*, based on a series of three lectures, Putnam entitles one of his lectures, "Was Wittgenstein a Pragmatist?" He concludes by declaring that even though Wittgenstein was not in a "strict sense" a "pragmatist," he nevertheless shares "a central – perhaps *the* central – emphasis with pragmatism: the emphasis on the primacy of practice" (Putnam 1995, p. 52).[22]

One of the first philosophers to note the significant commonalities between pragmatism, especially Peirce, and Wittgenstein was Richard Rorty. Rorty begins one of his earliest and most brilliant articles, "Pragmatism, Categories, and Language" (1961), by telling us that "pragmatism is getting respectable again and that the most up-to-date pragmatist is Peirce."[23] Rorty sets out to show that "Peirce's thought envisaged and repudiated in advance, the stages in the development of empiricism, which logical empiricism represented, and that it came to rest in a group of insights and a philosophical mood much like those we find in the *Philosophical Investigations* and in the writings of those influenced by the later Wittgenstein" (Rorty 1961a, pp. 197–8.). Rorty lists five points of convergence between Peirce and Wittgenstein:

> **1.** What Peirce called "nominalism" and what present-day philosophers call "reductionism" are forms of a single error.
>
> **2.** The error in both cases goes back to "the Protean metaphysical urge to transcend language."
>
> **3.** Peirce's attempt to give sense to the notion *universalia ante rem* is not the result of succumbing to this urge, but is rather his device for repudiating it as strongly as possible.

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> **4.** When Peirce says that "vagueness is real," and when Wittgenstein points to the difference between causal and logical determination, the only differences between what they are saying are verbal (or, to give the cash value of this overworked word, uninteresting).
>
> **5.** The similarity of their insights about language reflects the fact that the slogans "Don't look for the meaning, look for the use" and "The meaning of a concept is the sum of its possible effects upon conduct" reciprocally support each other.
>
> *(Rorty 1961a, p. 198)*

Rorty proceeds to show how Peirce and Wittgenstein complement each other. "What I am trying to show is that the closer one brings pragmatism to the writings of the later Wittgenstein and those influenced by him, the more they shed light on each other" (Rorty 1961a, pp. 198–9).[24] I agree entirely with Rorty, and I also think that when we compare Wittgenstein with the other classical pragmatic thinkers, we discover equally illuminating shared insights.[25]

My earlier discussion of the continuity and persistence of the pragmatic tradition in analytic philosophy, and my brief discussion of pragmatic themes in Heidegger and Wittgenstein (the two most influential philosophers of the twentieth century), are intended to provide a very different reading and interpretation of philosophy during the past 150 years. The standard philosophical conventions that divide philosophy into such "schools" as pragmatism, analytic philosophy, and Continental philosophy obscure these common pragmatic themes. Once these ideological blinders are removed, the philosophical investigations of the classical American pragmatists, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein take on a fresh and more exciting character. If we bracket the standard and misleading philosophical

classifications and *look* at what these philosophers are actually saying and doing, then a very different panorama emerges. We discover commonalities in what pragmatists, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger are all reacting against, in their critiques of traditional epistemology and metaphysics, and especially in the sea change in philosophical orientation that they seek to bring out. This does not mean that differences among them are any less significant – just as the consequential differences among the individual pragmatists are not less significant than their overlapping agreements. We gain a more nuanced understanding of these differences against the background of what they share.

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The German Appropriation of Pragmatic Themes

To justify my thesis about the growing international significance of pragmatism, I want to consider its importance for German intellectual life since the end of the Second World War. During the first half of the twentieth century, German ignorance of pragmatism was – with very few exceptions – matched only by blind prejudice. Just as the cultural, political, and social life in Germany has undergone a radical change since the end of the Second World War, so too this has happened in intellectual life (and the changes here are closely related). German philosophy during the post-Second World War period has been shaped by a threefold concern: to recover and rethink what is "living" in the German philosophical tradition; to engage critically with different contemporary philosophical movements, especially analytic philosophy and pragmatism; and to bring about a transformation of philosophy thatwould overcome scientism, reductive naturalism, relativism, and historicism.

I shall single out the work of four outstanding German thinkers who have a sophisticated grasp of pragmatism and have also critically appropriated pragmatic themes: Karl-Otto Apel, Jürgen Habermas, Hans Joas, and Axel Honneth. Each of them has argued that the pragmatic thinkers advance contemporary philosophical discussion, and each of them has sought to incorporate and develop pragmatic insights in novel ways. Karl-Otto Apel played a major role in introducing Peirce and pragmatism to a German audience. In 1967 and 1970, he published two volumes of Peirce's writings with extensive introductions. He combined these introductions into a full-scale study of Peirce's philosophical development: *Denkweg von Charles S. Peirce: Eine Einführung in den amerikanischen Pragmatismus*. Translated into English in 1981, *Charles S. Peirce: From Pragmatism to Pragmaticism* is one of the best books written on Peirce in any language (see Bernstein 1981, pp. xix–xxvii). Apel, along with his close colleague Jürgen Habermas, argued that post-Hegelian philosophy has developed three distinctive (and competing) orientations: Marxism, existentialism, and pragmatism.[26] Both Apel and Habermas increasingly came to identify their own philosophical projects with this pragmatic orientation. As Apel tells us, "Peirce finally became important for me primarily as an ally in the

systematic undertaking of a 'transformation of (transcendental) philosophy' " (Apel 1981, p. ix). Furthermore, Apel claims that "transcendental semiotic, or transcendental pragmatics, with

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its insight that the thinking (and by this I mean 'arguing') subject must necessarily conceive of itself as a member of a communication community," can serve as the basis for a final foundation of ethics (ibid., pp. ix–x). Habermas, stimulated by Apel's investigations of pragmatism, argues that a major paradigm shift took place at the end of the nineteenth century – a shift from a philosophy of consciousness or subjectivity to a communicative model of action and reason. The classical pragmatists initiated this shift. Habermas conceives of his theory of communicative action as furthering the development of this pragmatic understanding of reciprocal intersubjectivity. In his *Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas builds on Mead's social understanding of the genesis of human language in order to develop his own normative theory of intersubjectivity. Habermas draws on Peirce in his understanding of truth and justification and on John Dewey in developing his theory of democracy and communicative freedom. The trajectory of Habermas's philosophical development comes increasingly closer to the Kantian strain in pragmatism, so much so that he now identifies himself as a "Kantian pragmatist" (see Habermas 2003). As an engaged democratic intellectual who combines sophisticated theoretical analysis with practical, political, and ethical interventions, Habermas has played a role in German society that is comparable to the role that John Dewey played in American society during the first decades of the twentieth century.

Hans Joas, a sociologist by training, is the most perceptive German interpreter of American pragmatism (especially Mead and Dewey). His *Pratische Intersubjectivität: Die Entwicklung des Werkes von George Herbert Mead* (1980), translated as *G. H. Mead: A Contemporary Re-examination of his Thought* (1985), is the finest study of Mead's intellectual development. Joas is not exclusively interested in redeeming the importance of Mead, but in showing how Mead contributes to a contemporary philosophical and sociological theory of action. He argues that Mead and the pragmatists provide a more adequate theory of action than Habermas's more "rationalistic" theory. Joas further develops this pragmatic theory of action in his *The Creativity of Action* (1996).

Finally, Axel Honneth draws on the pragmatists at a number of significant junctures in his comprehensive theory of recognition. Dewey, Honneth argues, provides the resources for developing a theory of radical democracy based upon social cooperation that is superior to contemporary theories that oscillate between republican and proce

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dural understandings of democracy (see Honneth 1998). And recently, in his revival of the concept of reification, Honneth draws upon Dewey to support his thesis that objective thought is rooted in, and emerges out of, nonreflective "qualitative thought" (see Honneth 2008, pp. 36–40). What is especially

exciting about this German appropriation of pragmatic themes is the way in which these thinkers draw upon the richness of the pragmatic tradition in order to deal with problems that are at the cutting edge of philosophy today. And there are currently signs that this creative engagement with pragmatic themes is taking place throughout the world.