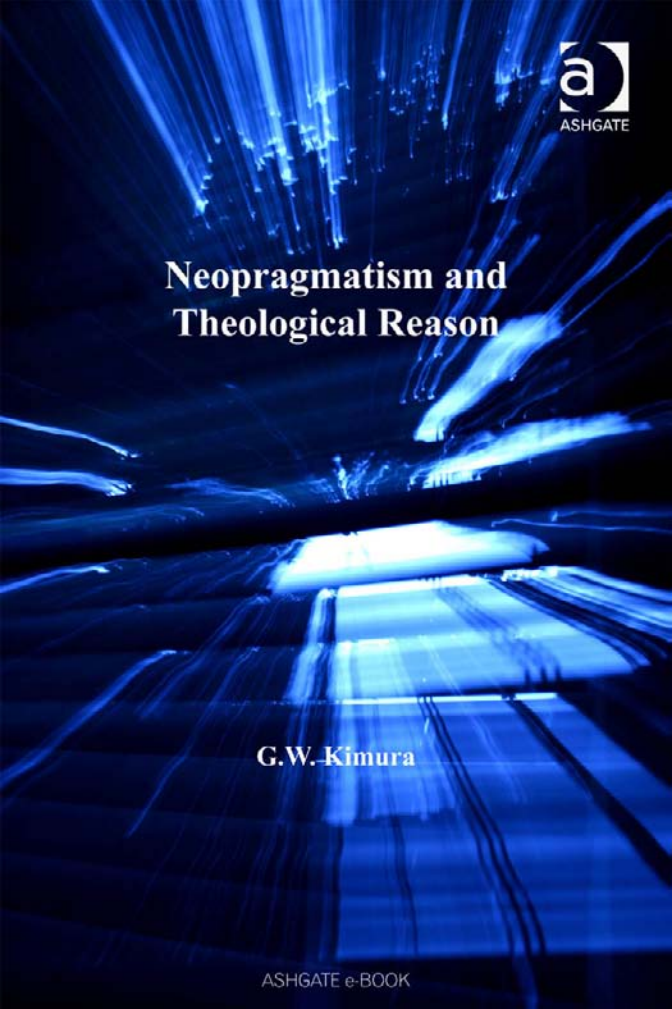
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Neopragmatism and Theological Reason
G.W. Kimura
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NEOPRAGMATISM AND THEOLOGICAL REASON

Neopragmatism and Theological Reason examines the recent explosion of interest in pragmatism. Part I traces the source of classical pragmatism's distinctive thought to Peirce, James, and Dewey – specifically to their shared theological understanding inherited from Emerson's Transcendentalism and British Romanticism. Part II reconstructs this rationality for postmodernity, showing how neopragmatism, properly understood, is theological reason. Kimura discusses the return of religious themes in philosophers like Putnam, Cavell, and Rorty and critiques the neopragmatic theologies of West, McFague, and Kaufman.

Neopragmatism and Theological Reason explores pragmatic themes across philosophy, theology, and literary theory, arguing that neopragmatism must acknowledge its theological sources and then reconstruct its rationality to the religious context of modernity/postmodernity.

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Neopragmatism and Theological Reason

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Alaska Humanities Forum, USA

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Published by
Ashgate Publishing Limited
Gower House
Croft Road
Aldershot
Hampshire GU11 3HR
England

Ashgate Publishing Company
Suite 420
101 Cherry Street
Burlington, VT 05401-4405
USA

Ashgate website: http://www.ashgate.com

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Kimura, G. W.
Neopragmatism and theological reason. – (Ashgate new critical thinking in religion, theology and biblical studies)
1. Pragmatism 2. Religion – Philosophy
I. Title
144.3

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Kimura, G. W.
Neopragmatism and theological reason / G.W. Kimura. p. cm. – (Liturgy, worship, and society series) Includes index. (hardcover : alk. paper) 1. Pragmatism. 2. Postmodernism. 3. Philosophical theology. I. Title.

B832.K56 2007
144'.3–dc22

2006022591

ISBN 978-0-7546-5868-9

Printed and bound in Great Britain by MPG Books Ltd, Bodmin, Cornwall.

For Joy and Julian

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PART I

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Introduction

Neopragmatism in Crisis

Neopragmatism faces a dilemma. This dilemma is of its own making, the result of its rapid success in the world of ideas. It is an unintended consequence created by its own enthusiasts that now threatens the pragmatic revival from the inside. This dilemma is the internal coherence, or lack thereof, of neopragmatist philosophy. This predicament is especially acute in epistemology, going to the heart of neopragmatism's self-sufficiency as a theory of knowledge.

Of course, such accusations are nothing new. In its earliest forms, both empiricist and rationalist critics derided classical pragmatism as pseudo-philosophy for its lack of systematisation. Today, however, leading neopragmatists – Cornel West and Richard Rorty to name two – make the case, instead of the opponents. They gleefully characterise pragmatism as an 'American evasion of philosophy'[1] and 'cultural criticism',[2] respectively, rather than epistemology. Rorty even fashions his version of neopragmatism as parallel to deconstructionism, casting himself as the North American equivalent to '[Jacques] Derrida…the most intriguing and ingenious of contemporary' thinkers.[3]

Compare such anti-philosophical, anti-realist characterisations with two other leading neopragmatists: Nicholas Rescher and Hilary Putnam. Rescher states '[p]ragmatism takes the traditionalistic line of seeing the purposive character of the philosophical enterprise to lie in its very nature as a venture in seeking to answer our larger questions in a systematic way.' Neopragmatism for Rescher is not just traditionally philosophical, it is also epistemologically 'objective'. It involves 'metaphysical realism' of specific neoKantian construction, the polar opposite of Rorty and West.[4] Putnam's neopragmatist epistemology, likewise, is 'realism', although he has evolved from 'internalism' and 'internalist'[5] realism to 'commonsense realism'[6] to a '"direct" realism'[7] that is non-metaphysical.

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1 *Cf.* Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982).

2 Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. 87.

3 Richard Rorty, *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers 3* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 307.

4 Nicholas Rescher, *Realistic Pragmatism: An Introduction to Pragmatic Philosophy* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2000), p. 125. *Cf.* esp. pp. 125-142.

5 Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 54-55, 49-50.

6 Hilary Putnam, *Many Faces of Realism* (La Salle, IL: Open Court Press, 1987), pp. 16-17.

7 Hilary Putnam, *Pragmatism: An Open Question* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 19.

These brief examples illustrate the dilemma. Neopragmatism cannot, intuitively or logically, be both 'philosophy' and its 'evasion'; epistemology and anti-epistemological 'deconstructionism'; anti-realism/irrealism and realism, whatever the stripe. Simply stated, neopragmatism cannot be all things to all people championing it as a distinctive form of thought. This lack of internal consistency, if not outright contradiction, over the most basic constitutive notions is now more of a threat to the neopragmatic revival than competing philosophies. Neopragmatism cannot sustain its numerous divergent and frequently irreconcilable interpretations without becoming a meaningless term.

Classical pragmatism, of course, entertained disparate versions. C. S. Peirce, whom William James credited with originating the name and philosophy of pragmatism, temporarily redubbed his version '"pragmaticism," which is ugly enough to be safe from kidnappers' to differentiate his thought, ironically enough, from James.[8] Dewey likewise evolved his own interpretation.

Despite their differences, what each thinker held in common about mind and world was greater than what separated them, hence their creation of the philosophy known as pragmatism. Furthermore, none of the original three would have imagined that what they were engaged in was not 'philosophy' *per se*. Rather, pragmatism was, as James said, 'a new name for some old ways of thinking'.[9] It was a recovery of the *pragma*, the practical heart of philosophy lost, according to this view, by the abstract and arcane machinery of empirical and rationalist thought.

Pragmatism was, therefore, for Peirce, James and Dewey the return of philosophy to its proper Socratic *milieu*, reconnecting reason to life expressed in all its facets. This life specifically included the religious faith and epistemology too frequently trivialised or dismissed by other philosophical schools of the time. Pragmatism for the classical pragmatists was in this way the *apotheosis* of the philosophical tradition, not its 'evasion'.

The dilemma for neopragmatism now runs opposite. Neopragmatists increasingly tout their radical differences rather than similarities, whilst perversely continuing to trade under a common name. This is in spite of the evident fact that neopragmatism cannot support, epistemologically or otherwise, all that is claimed for it.

Part of the dilemma is due to the newness of the revival. As a relatively recent development, neopragmatism has been up to now an open field of notional experimentation. By its nature *qua* pragmatism, exactly what neopragmatism means could not be determined *a priori.* But now such unrestricted development is itself the problem.

It is not that the evolution of neopragmatism was ever predetermined, yet because it grows from classical pragmatism the tradition does exert an influence, at least in a proximal sense (even if untheorised or inadequately theorised by some of its proponents). Part I of this book develops a specific genealogy to clarify this historical background and describe the peculiar epistemological shape that neopragmatism carries over from classical pragmatism.

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8 C. S. Peirce, *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings Vol. 2 (1893-1913)* (Indianapolis, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1998), p. 335. *Cf.* below Chapter 3.

9 *'A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking'* is the subtitle to James's expository *Pragmatism.*

Neopragmatism's heritage is, of course, not the only determining force. The other major factor is the contemporary epistemological situation giving rise to the revival. Part II evaluates the current philosophical context, critiquing the varieties of neopragmatism in light of Part I. Chapter 6 traces neopragmatism's origins to the breakdown of analytical thought around the mid-twentieth century. In the past twenty-five years that literature on neopragmatism has exploded and chapters 7-10 examine the trajectory of that development in depth. However, it may be stated succinctly here that neopragmatism's attraction, contrary to Rorty, is as a viable epistemological alternative to deconstructionism.

Neopragmatism is widely seen as addressing the current crisis within modernity/postmodernity about the breakdown of rationality and the future of epistemology as a philosophical study. This book develops an argument throughout that goes beyond mere genealogy to a substantive philosophical proposal. It reconstructs neopragmatism epistemologically as *scientifico-Romantic theological realism.*

Neopragmatism and the Crisis of Epistemology

Classical pragmatism attracts contemporary philosophers because it carved out in its own day a middle epistemological position. It balanced issues such as the conceptualisation of knowledge with *praxis*-oriented realism, epistemological fallibilism with epistemological corrigibility and cultural-linguistic relativism with the search for generally universalisable standards. Such balance not only resisted scepticism, but also made possible the type of robust epistemic and moral claims that late nineteenth-, early twentieth-century philosophy sought. The success the classical pragmatists enjoyed as that middle position between empiricism and rationalism is now read as a token for today. It offers at least a possible model of how such a balance might be struck, when neopragmatism stands between the breakdown of analytical thought and rise of deconstructionism.

But neopragmatism is now, even by conservative dating, a generation old. No longer in its infancy, more clarity needs to be established as to what is possible, epistemologically-speaking, and what is mere claim or hope as a revived 'new name for some old ways of thinking'. What counts and, perhaps more importantly, what does not count as neopragmatism needs to be clearly articulated and defended. If not, the revival will be unable to sustain itself and die its own pragmatic-style death. In other words, spread so thin as a notion, appealing to it will not make a practical difference in the areas of inquiry towards which it is addressed.

Furthermore, philosophy has had a generation not only to look forward to the reconstruction of neopragmatism, but also to look back through the earlier tradition. It now possesses a more thorough understanding of classical pragmatism. Knowing this history, it can better gauge those characteristics from classical pragmatism, and from sources behind it, that make contemporary reconstructions possible and give shape to a neopragmatism adequate to the current crisis of epistemology.

This book aims at such clarity. It describes a particular epistemological profile for neopragmatism, if neopragmatism is to accurately reflect its classical forebear. That is, if neopragmatism is to carry forward and reconstruct those characteristics

that make it so attractive to the present epistemological crisis – features such as practicalism, contextualism, 'critical common-senseism',[10] naturalism (in a non-materialist sense), holism, fallibilism, corrigibility, methodological adaptability and pluralism, revaluation of the aesthetic-literary sensibility and so forth – it must adopt a rational form that makes possible the very features it wants to reconstruct.

The issue, in short, is what makes *neo*pragmatism pragmatism. Proponents have adopted numerous strategies in their reconstructions, but they tend towards two camps: those who cast wide the genealogical net and those who draw it narrow. Philosophers like West and Rescher represent the latitudinarian impulse. This is not to say that they do not, in the end, reconstruct a specified neopragmatism of their own. Yet, they are more inclined towards a view of the pragmatic tradition that is both as inclusive as possible and pliable in its epistemological direction. They may not even see the explosion in versions of neopragmatism as a real epistemological problem. As Rescher states:

> [P]ragmatism has not managed to achieve a uniform stability but has come to be construed very differently by different philosophers. Nor has pragmatism's practice always lived up to is own teachings. …The fact is that pragmatism has been many things to many people and this characterization has been applied over the years to a considerable variety of different theses, theories and teachings – positions of a diversified and sometimes doctrinally conflicting tendency.[11]

Rescher's strategy is to establish a genealogy that is so wide it extends the range of the classical pragmatists from Peirce, James and Dewey to their contemporaries and near-contemporaries G. H. Mead, F. C. S. Schiller, C. I. Lewis, to near-present and present-day thinkers, including Rudolph Carnap, Nelson Goodman, Donald Davidson, Putnam and Rorty.

His genealogy is overly broad and unsustainable for two reasons. First, Rescher grants secondary early thinkers like Mead, Schiller and Lewis an undeserved influence in defining a pragmatic tradition clearly set and still led in neopragmatism by the classical pragmatists Peirce, James and Dewey. It is not that other early and middle thinkers's work was insignificant, but that it was secondary, based upon the contributions of the original three.

Second, Rescher's later genealogy gives some indication why he elevates these other figures. Whilst Davidson, Putnam and Rorty have all adopted neopragmatist themes in their philosophy, Goodman and especially Carnap[12] have not generally been included in this category. They may have addressed aspects of the early neopragmatic revival and their writings contributed to the epistemological environment of the period, but the term 'pragmatist' or 'neopragmatist' was not one that either thinker applied to themselves.

Rescher's rationale for widening the tradition is because he reconstructs an idiosyncratic neoKantian metaphysical trajectory that is not evidenced by a

10 Peirce's term. *Cf. The Essential Peirce Vol. 2*, pp. 346-59.

11 *Realistic Pragmatism*, pp. 48-49.

12 Rescher is the only writer I have found who characterises the logical positivist Carnap as a neopragmatist.

consideration of any of the three classical pragmatists. Rescher has in mind a specific lineage tracing to Peirce, even though Peirce fashioned 'synechic' pragmatic theory of mind *against* Kantian dualism. [13] James and Dewey similarly rejected such thought. Nonetheless, Rescher expands the lineage to retrospectively discover the genealogical space into which his atypical version of neopragmatism might fit.

Cornel West follows another track. He expands both the genealogy and the definition of pragmatism in order to fit in thinkers that have been excluded historically from the American intellectual tradition. West begins his genealogy with Ralph Waldo Emerson, a source even more vigorously argued for in Chapters 1 and 2, although with different conclusions. Emerson sought to be America's first true philosopher, but for the most part has not been treated as a philosopher because of the literary-autobiographical (sometimes loose, sometimes recondite) style of his prose. Emerson did not write like any other nineteenth century philosopher, but West does not want this to exclude him from the genealogy. Hence, West's 'evasion' of philosophy begins with the Emersonian prehistory of pragmatism.

West expands the genealogy for another reason. He wants the tradition to include other marginal, and marginalised, thinkers who have not had a natural home in American intellectual history. So West is interested in seeing the tradition as pliant enough to make room for figures as disparate as African American abolitionist W. E. B. DuBois and one-time Marxist Sidney Hook.[14]

West clearly thinks of himself in the same way and reconstructs his 'prophetic pragmatism' with the widest possible genealogical scope. West's version is expressly not philosophy, but 'criticism' of a particular kind:

> The distinctive hallmarks of a prophetic pragmatist are a universal consciousness that promotes an all-embracing democratic and libertarian moral vision, a historical consciousness that acknowledges human finitude and conditionedness, and a critical consciousness which encourages relentless critique and self-criticism.[15]

West's neopragmatism is another broad church. It embraces theists and nontheists, and mostly anti-establishment political thinkers, including 'feminist, Chicano, black, socialist, left-liberal ones'.[16]

The fact that none of these thinkers hold a common epistemological thread and that the 'distinctive hallmarks' of prophetic pragmatism are so amorphous, means that it is by *fiat* that West must take pragmatism beyond philosophy, however understood. Yet, as laudatory the impulse to draw in excluded thinkers, West problematises the meaning of 'pragmatism' or 'neopragmatism' for anyone who wants to understand it in terms of its epistemological implications. His prophetic pragmatism ultimately resembles more of an ideology, and even he identifies it with 'continental traveling

13 *The Essential Peirce, Vol. 1 (1867-1893)* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp. 313-33. Chapter 7 critiques in depth the neoKantian approach in neopragmatism.

14 *Cf. The American Evasion of Philosophy*, pp. 114-23 and 138-49.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 232.

16 *Ibid.*

theories such as Marxism, structuralism, and poststructuralism', rather than philosophies or substantive epistemological positions.[17]

Contrast Rescher and West's expansion of the genealogy with another strategy. Whereas their tendency is to include as many figures as possible, others, most notably Richard Rorty, pare down the branches to a narrower lineage. Rorty's neopragmatism is discussed in depth in Chapter 9, but the most remarkable difference to consider at this point is whom Rorty does not include. Indeed, Rorty may be the only neopragmatist who minimises any reference to Peirce, writing Peirce out of the philosophy he ostensibly founded:

> I do not think (although I once did) that Peircian [sic] pragmatism is defensible…. Peirce went half-way towards destroying the epistemological problematic which motivated the metaphysical quarrels between idealists and physicalists. He did so by leaving out 'mind' and sticking to 'signs'. But he only went half-way….[18]

For Rorty, Peirce went 'half-way', where James and especially Dewey in his view completed the revolution. Peirce was still engaged in the 'epistemological'. Thus, his version was still philosophy, and realist philosophy at that. It had as its goal an end-point of truth, even if in an idealised eventual convergence by the community of inquirers. In Rorty's controversial definition, pragmatism does away with conventional notions like truth. It moves to language for 'solidarity' in 'telling the story of [human] contribution to a community', rather than 'objectivity' in 'describ[ing] themselves as standing in immediate relation to a nonhuman reality'.[19]

Rorty's strategy illustrates a larger problem underpinning both inclusive and narrow genealogies that dates to pragmatism's earliest days. Peirce saw the problem as a false choice between theoretical directions, such that if pragmatism 'is to be made a science, the very first price we must pay for it must be to abandon all endeavor to make it literary'.[20]

In the contemporary context, the false choice expands between science and literature, epistemology and criticism and versions of realism and anti-realism/irrealism. Rescher's neoKantian emphasis attempts to expand the tradition in order to include the most implausible metaphysical forms of realism. West's genealogy attempts to include the most divergent forms of marginalised criticism, pointing to anti-realism. Rorty attempts to limit the tradition to exclude even non-metaphysical realism such that it maximises a neopragmatic appeal to cultural-literary relativism.

Each approach, of course, appeals to genealogy to support its case. This book traces a genealogy as well, given the unavoidability of drawing upon historical connections in philosophical reconstruction. However, this approach differs from seeking a wider or narrower lineage. It focuses instead on the epistemological commonalities amongst the classical pragmatists Peirce, James and Dewey.[21]

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17 *Ibid.*, p. 239.

18 Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers Volume 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 130-32.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

20 *The Essential Peirce, Vol. 2*, pp. 360-1.

21 Contrary to Rorty, all three considered their thought philosophical and epistemological.

It therefore rejects the dubious recruitative efforts of Rescher, West and others and the equally strained exclusionary strategy of Rorty.

Instead, it draws on the three central thinkers who created the philosophy known as pragmatism. It acknowledges the important differences amongst Peirce, James and Dewey, but recognises their commonalities. It distils from them relevant epistemological features that lend themselves to those pragmatic characteristics enumerated earlier (practicalism, holism, naturalism, contextualism, pluralism and so forth). Furthermore, it sees differences amongst the classical pragmatists not as simple oppositions, i.e. of science *v.* literature, epistemology *v.* criticism and realism *v.* anti-realism/irrealism, but as necessary and creative tensions giving rise to a new type pragmatic realism that incorporates aspects of each.

In short, this book examines Peirce, James and Dewey and asks 'What is it that they held in common that constitutes pragmatism as a distinctive epistemological approach?'. Rather than postulate an 'essence of pragmatism', it follows Wittgenstein's metaphor of family resemblance and of strands of a rope (in the case of the classical pragmatists, a three-fold cord).[22] It further reconstructs those commonalities or resemblances in a scientifico-Romantic realist version of neopragmatism adequate to the present dilemma and the larger modern/postmodern epistemological context.

Neopragmatism as Theological Reason

This book argues that the key to understanding pragmatist epistemology is found specifically in the theological understanding of Peirce, James and Dewey. One of the distinctive features of classical pragmatism, if least remarked upon in the revival, is that it was one of few philosophical developments of the late nineteenth, early twentieth century that was also explicitly theological. Religious themes, language and an interest in the dynamics of religious faith were prime concerns, and earlier critics, like Bertrand Russell and A. J. Ayer, had no illusions about this fact. Russell even treats pragmatism in *History of Western Philosophy* principally as a philosophy of religion.[23]

Neopragmatism's initial reticence, if not resistance towards theological concerns is attributed by Giles Gunn to Rorty, whose rebarbative attacks on religious faith and institutions are well known.[24] Recently, however, several leading neopragmatists are beginning to incorporate religious faith and God-talk in their work: thinkers as diverse as Putnam, Cavell, West, Stanley Fish and Stephen Carter, amongst others. This unexpected development has even perplexed these thinkers, some of whom are addressing such issues for the first time. In a self-revelatory passage, Putnam states:

> As a practicing Jew, I am someone for whom the religious dimension of life has become increasingly important, although it is not a dimension I know how to philosophise about

22 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), §65-69.

23 Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1946, pp. 846f..

24 *Cf.* Chapter 9 below.

> except by indirection; and the study of science has loomed large in my life. …Those who know my writings from that [earlier and middle] period may wonder how I reconciled my religious streak, which existed to some extent even back then, and my general scientific materialist worldview at the time. The answer is I didn't reconcile them. I was a thoroughgoing atheist, and I was a believer. I simply kept these two parts of myself separate.[25]

Putnam's *viva* reads like a history of twentieth and twenty-first century Anglo-American philosophy, compassing positivism, analytic thought, post-analytic thought and finally neopragmatism. Like Rorty, there is nothing in his philosophical background that would lead him to theism. Yet, this confession comes only after converting to neopragmatism, a philosophy of epistemological holism that this book argues is deeply rooted in the religious view of the world.

Now that Putnam has forsaken these other types of thought he has begun philosophising about religion with a little more direction. From *Meaning and the Moral Sciences* [1978] where he explored the literary-religious relationship to ethics, to introducing a reprint of Franz Rosenzweig's *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy: A View of World, Man, and God* [1999],[26] to engaging with theologians over themes like 'God', 'idolatry' and 'religious values',[27] the theological is becoming a significant concern in Putnam's writing.

Even more surprising, Rorty, whom Gunn earlier charged with leading neopragmatism in an atheistic direction, has reversed his approach. He now styles his version of neopragmatism 'romantic polytheism'. He is not avoiding or writing off religious themes anymore, but identifying his thought as a public theology of privatised religious belief. He even theologically reconstructs an immanentised understanding of divinity:

> For human perfection becomes a private concern, and our responsibility to others becomes a matter of permitting them as much space to pursue these private concerns – to worship their own gods, so to speak – as is compatible with granting an equal amount of space for all. The tradition of religious toleration is extended to moral toleration. This privatization of perfection permits James and Nietzsche to agree with Mill and Arnold that poetry should take over the role that [traditional] religion has played in the formation of individual human lives.[28]

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25 From his Gifford Lectures *Renewing Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 1.

26 Franz Rosenzweig, *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy: A View of World, Man and God*, trans. by Nahum Glatzer with an introduction by Hilary Putnam (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). In the introduction, Putnam places Rosenzweig in the intellectual company of Buber and Levinas. He goes so far as to consider Rosenzweig's contribution to theology parallel to the impact of Wittgenstein's later thought upon philosophy.

27 Hilary Putnam and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, 'From Darkness to Light?' Two Reconsiderations of the Concept of Idolatry', in *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, Summer 2000, vol. 29, no. 2, p. 19.

28 Richard Rorty, 'Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism', in *The Revival of Pragmatism: New Essays on Social Thought, Law, and Culture*, ed. by Morris Dickstein (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 22-23.

Rorty is engaging representatives of the mainline theological tradition as well. Lately, he has associated his 'romantic polytheism' with the demythologising approach of Paul Tillich, the Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch and what he interprets as the 'liberation' influenced documents of the Pope John Paul II Vatican.[29]

Thus, the 'revival' of pragmatism is creating another unintended consequence: a theological revival. It is returning 'God' and other theological concepts to respectability in philosophical circles after a century-long banishment. Now that the neopragmatist turn includes a theological turn (or, at least, a nascent one), this book argues the epistemological success of the former is dependent upon correctly understanding and reconstructing the latter.

That theological themes and language are now being raised in neopragmatism speaks to their irrepressibility by anything claiming the pragmatist mantle. More importantly, this book explores how the theological is not just one irrepressible dimension, but constitutive of the tradition. The epistemological features of classical pragmatism and the language they are expressed in arise from the theological understanding of mind and world of the classical pragmatists. It is consistent that the revival of these same epistemological themes would entail the return of a theological rationality. Therefore this book argues not only for the connection between neopragmatism and theological reason. It argues that, correctly understood, neopragmatism is theological reason.

Towards Neopragmatic Reconstruction

This book contends that neopragmatism is theological reason and that that rationality involves a non-metaphysical realist epistemology. As with classical pragmatism, it draws on elements such as practicalism, commonsenseism, holism, naturalism, fallibilism, corrigibility, contextuality, methodological adaptability and pluralism, the autobiographical-literary voice and so forth.

Part I analyses the historical precedent in the work of classical pragmatists Peirce, James and Dewey. It searches behind them in twin background sources: the development of modern science and Romantic-Transcendental thought, especially that of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

It is important to recall that Peirce was originally an engineer and experimental scientist, James a medical doctor and Dewey a progressive educator. Contrary to Rorty's deconstructionist reading, none rejected the methodology of the natural and human sciences. Rather, they created pragmatism out of their practical experience of the lack of adequate epistemological models for their work. A hallmark of their pragmatism was their combination of a Transcendental-Romantic understanding with evolving

29 Richard Rorty, 'Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility, and Romance', in *The Cambridge Companion to William James*, ed. by Ruth Anna Putnam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 84-102 and 'Failed Prophecy, Glorious Hopes', in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (New York: Penguin, 1999), pp. 201-9.

views of modern science.[30] This balance is what makes possible their conception of science and religion in terms of complementarity, rather than opposition.

The question of dual sources again reveals the inadequacy of earlier genealogies that follow the inclusive/exclusive model described above. In such views, the tendency is to skew the trajectory of classical pragmatism, and ultimately neopragmatism, along a Peircean/Peircean-Jamesian axis or a Jamesian/Jamesean-Deweyan one. The upshot is to roughly split the tradition into a scientific and a literary side.

This book contends that such genealogies create from the outset an anti-pragmatic, dualistic way of conceiving of the tradition. The point is that classical pragmatism, and a neopragmatism faithful to the tradition, unites these views in a theological understanding of mind and world, redescribing epistemology in religion-imbued terms.

This observation leads to Part II, which aims at reconstructing this combined scientifico-Romantic trajectory of classical pragmatism against the contemporary backdrop of post-analytic, post-Wittgensteinian thought. This book argues that that shape includes a form of non-metaphysical, commonsensical realism. It describes this 'pragmatic realism' as lying between metaphysical versions of realism made implausible by a post-Wittgensteinian linguistified understanding and Derrida-style deconstructionism where words not only do not touch the world, they infinitely defer meaning.

This neopragmatic version of realism is anti-sceptical. Thus, it follows the classical pragmatist technique of reversing the burden of epistemological proof and requiring good reason for doubt in the first place. This anti-scepticism holds in the philosophy of knowledge, but it also has been adapted in related fields, e.g. literary criticism where it extends to a neopragmatic approach to interpretation. This book discusses such developments and highlights an important distinction of the renaissance: that neopragmatist epistemology has been in large part driven by developments outside the philosophy faculty.[31]

In pragmatically self-fulfilling style, literature, law and, especially, the practice of religion have recovered from the tradition the very epistemological resources they require for their varied areas of inquiry. Much of the most important neopragmatist writing, therefore, is found along the peripheries of, and across divisions between, traditional areas of study. Richard Rorty is a philosopher who has spent most of his career in literature departments. Stanley Fish is an English professor writing on literary criticism and law. Stanley Cavell is a philosopher whose own work, varying from film studies to poetry, calls into question what counts as philosophy. Such cross-pollenisation and lack of easy categorisation is also descriptive of the earlier pragmatist tradition.

Although much neopragmatic thought grows along the seams of these perceived divisions, it does not minimise the fact that the tradition is still philosophical. The reconstructed scientifico-Romantic neopragmatism of this book is therefore submitted to the guiding modern/postmodern philosophical concerns and the current crisis that

30 The classical pragmatists, of course, were not the only philosophers to attempt such a synthesis. G. W. F. Hegel is the most prominent continental thinker in this mode. A discussion of Hegelianism and pragmatism is beyond the scope of this book. Suffice it to say here that classical pragmatism was more adaptive and less abstract and logico-mathematical than Hegel's dialectical methodology.

31 *Cf.* especially Chapters 8 and 9.

gave rise to the revival. Much of Part II is devoted to these concerns. It describes a neopragmatism in direct contrast to West and Rorty, both of whom conceive of a philosophically 'evasive' or post-epistemological version.

This book argues that if neopragmatism is to be a true *tertium aliquid*, as classical pragmatism was to empiricism and rationalism, it cannot occupy this position by avoiding the issues relevant to modern/postmodern epistemology, but by showing that such a neopragmatism is a more rational way. In this manner, the scientifico-Romantic theological neopragmatism is not offered as another option amongst the *plethora* of neopragmatisms, but is reconstructed as the most historically accurate and presently viable version.

Finally, although this book is primarily concerned with philosophy of religion and, more specifically, epistemology, the final chapter brings this scientifico-Romantic neopragmatic understanding to the work of three theologians: Cornel West, Sallie McFague and Gordon D. Kaufman. It critiques their common project of theological reconstruction, specifically addressing a tendency of all three towards neopragmatic *over*-contextualisation. That is, each tends to be limited by their own self-described pragmatic influenced reconstructions. Whether conceiving of new theological metaphors for God, humanity, world and so forth, they index these notions against the very material conditions towards which they are reconstructed. However, the temptation to gain in contextual specificity, e.g. to reconstruct the notion of divinity in light of a particular view of the economic or environmental situation, threatens the stability of such notions when the thinking about those conditions change. This problem reveals something about the notion of mind and the theological imagination that has not been theorised sufficiently by these thinkers.

The problem is that the *ad hoc*, issue-oriented reconstructions of West, McFague and Kaufman – whether racial-economic justice, gender equity or environmental concern, respectively – unintentionally work against the long-term theological ethic that each thinker requires. Thus, part of the motivation for this book is to establish a theological rationality that makes possible imagination of new models and metaphors, but provides the epistemological stability required for the long-term. The chapter ends with a metaphor for such a scientifico-Romantic theological realism. It tropes a well-known epistemological example, Otto Neurath's conception of the philosophical enterprise as cooperative nautical exploration, for neopragmatism's theological rationality.

Thus, this book is a story-telling. It tells the story behind classical pragmatism that underpins neopragmatism. It argues from assumptions within the pragmatist tradition in order to save it from suffocation by the many irreconcilable interpretations claiming the name, and to rescue epistemology from its modern/postmodern *malaise*. Ultimately, it offers a version of neopragmatism that not only makes room for the theological in its rationality, as in the title *Neopragmatism and Theological Reason.* It more radically reconstructs neopragmatism as theological reason.

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Chapter 1

Emerson, Part I

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) predates pragmatism, but his work is the horizon that C. S. Peirce, William James and John Dewey extend. Emerson was the first to conscientiously make himself into an 'American philosopher', and his influence on classical pragmatism is determinative.

Emerson was a prolific essayist, diarist, and poet, but in his own time he was best-known as a public speaker. He preached on progressive religion and morals and, as with other Transcendentalists such as Henry David Thoreau, Louisa May Alcott and Frederick Douglass, was an outspoken suffragist and abolitionist. He taught in the *lyceum*, a nineteenth-century combination of community college and inspirational lecture series in the New England hinterlands, after resigning as a Unitarian minister. Emerson left the church because he could not reconcile himself with even the minimal liturgical rites of liberal Unitarianism.[1]

Emerson's oratorical reputation grew such that even after dropping out of Harvard Divinity School he was invited back as the 1838 graduation speaker. What came to be known as 'The Divinity School Address' contrasted the poetics of 'Nature' with the artificiality of modern homiletics and worship. It attacked professionalised religion, precisely the life graduates were entering, and scandalised the Faculty. Emerson had been invited on his strength as a replacement speaker for Harvard's *Phi Beta Kappa* academic honours society. That address, 'The American Scholar', was less bellicose in tone, but no less critical of institutional education. Emerson admonished listeners to study nature and the religious in nature, to work with the hands and not only the mind and to seek the novel instead of relying upon the Anglo-European past. Contemporary Oliver Wendell Holmes celebrated 'The American Scholar' as America's intellectual *Declaration of Independence*. Stanley Cavell calls it 'the most famous address and, I suppose the best, ever given by an American thinker on a scholars' day'.[2] Ironically, Emerson had been a mediocre undergraduate. He addressed a society that he had not been invited to join.[3]

Thus, the leading intellectual figure of nineteenth century America occupied no pulpit, as his predecessors might; nor did he hold a university post, as his successors. He fitted no established intellectual model. Cornel West calls Emerson

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1 Robert D. Richardson, *Emerson: The Mind on Fire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 125-27.

2 Stanley Cavell, *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes*, ed. by Savid Justin Hodge (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 22.

3 'Introduction' in *The Portable Emerson*, ed. by Carle Bode in collaboration with Malcolm Cowley (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p. xv. The journal of *Phi Beta Kappa* is *The American Scholar*, after Emerson.

America's first 'organic intellectual'. He remained in New England and was never invited back to Harvard. He rode the *lyceum* circuit, lecturing on the margins of the frontier, speaking to farmers, yeomen and church wives. He preached the virtues of practicalism, individuality, idealism, voluntarism, optimism and experimentation, peppered with naturalistic religion. These themes resonated with his listeners and prefigure the *ethos* of pragmatism. As West states, '…both the content of this [Emersonian] ideology and the way in which he presented it deeply shaped the emergence of American pragmatism'.[4]

Emerson was a polymath. Although he sought to be the first 'American philosopher', he does not fit neatly into one category. His dense prose opened him to charges of sublimity and contradiction, which he answered with his oft-quoted aphorism, 'A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds'.[5] Whilst Emerson's import as a central intellectual figure is acknowledged, precisely *why* is a matter of continuing debate.

Most observers of Emerson and the pragmatists see them linked by a desire to break away from Anglo-European thought and account for the 'American difference'. But, as with the pragmatists, this rejection is at least partly rhetorical, functioning as a myth of American uniqueness. In fact, Emerson's influences were multiple, including Anglo-European thought and, especially, Romanticism. As for Emerson's aspirations, contemporaries far from universally appreciated him.

Emerson held the friendship and admiration of New and Old World intellectuals as diverse as Coleridge, Carlyle, Wordsworth, Goethe, Dickinson, Whitman and the elder and younger Henry James. However, the two leading representatives of nineteenth century American letters, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville, dismissed Emerson's writing as cold and derided his *lyceum* lecturing as populist and gross. Emerson influenced Nietzsche, who apparently borrowed *Übermensch* from Emerson's 'The Over-Soul' and titled *The Gay Science* after his essays.

As far as the classical pragmatists were concerned, Peirce thought Emerson too poetical and Romantic. Dewey, in contrast, called Emerson the father of American philosophy. William James, the most explicitly allied of the three with Transcendentalism, avoided Emerson as a philosopher until later in life.[6]

Harvard Platonist George Santayana thought 'reality eluded' Emerson. T. S. Eliot thought him hopelessly optimistic and Transcendentalism an out-moded type of 'gentility'.[7] Literary critic Harold Bloom writes, '[t]he lengthened shadow of our American culture is Emerson's' whose 'truest achievement was to invent the American

4 Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), p. 35.

5 'Self-Reliance', in *op. cit.*, p. 145.

6 *Cf. The Mind on Fire*; 'Introduction' in *The Portable Emerson*; 'Emerson', in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. by Robert Audi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 221-22; and Joel Porte, 'Introduction: Representing America, The Emerson Legacy', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. by Joel Porte and Saundra Morris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 3.

7 T. S. Eliot, *Shock of Recognition, Volume 2*, cited in Michael Lopez, *Emerson and Power* (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996), p. 33.

religion'.[8] For Bloom, Emerson was an 'experiential critic and [theological] essayist, and not [merely] a Transcendental philosopher'.[9] The American religion he created, according to Bloom, was practical, nature-centred and self-authenticating, or, in a word, pragmatic.

Novelist John Updike agrees with Bloom on Emerson's lasting influence, but considers it regrettable because Emerson's 'philosophical idealism' created an American faith of 'egoistic aggrandisement'. Emersonianism, according to Updike, led to 'parking lots and skyscrapers, the voracious tracts of single-family homes, the heaped supermarket aisles and crowded ribbons of highways'.[10] Emerson preached a 'demonic', 'anti-Barthian' gospel, where aphorisms like 'follow your star' and 'trust thyself' lead not to social optimism, but to materialistic individualism and fatalism.[11]

The Return of Emerson

Renewed interest in Emerson parallels the rise of neopragmatism. This interest is partly driven by the desire to understand the origins of classical pragmatism, especially those epistemological features inherited from Emerson's Transcendentalism. As the main intellectual forebear to Peirce, James and Dewey, Emerson exerted a significant influence on their development. Emerson influence continues for neopragmatism as well.

Much of the recent debate relates to pragmatism's early genealogy. Identifying Emerson, the American Romantic *par excellence*, as a spiritual progenitor to classical pragmatism has broadened the later pragmatist lineage. Before the nineties, that line was restricted to the visionaries Peirce, James and Dewey and, sometimes, George Herbert Mead. Likewise, all were portrayed as radically breaking from Anglo-Continental philosophy to create pragmatism.

Their programme, it was held, was to create a *tertium aliquid* to empiricism and rationalism and, thus, avoid their epistemological *aporias.* This portrayal has long-served a mythology of pragmatism as *the* American philosophy or, alternately, the American *evasion* of philosophy.[12] This myth is half-right. The classical pragmatists, like every vanguard philosophy, did seek a better way. But for the classical pragmatists, and especially for their forebear Emerson, the philosophical inheritance from the Anglo-European tradition is inescapable. No philosophy is created in a vacuum, and neither classical pragmatism nor its parent Emersonian

8 Harold Bloom, *Agon: Toward a Theory of Revisionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 145.

9 Harold Bloom, *Poetics of Influence*, ed. by John Hollander (New Haven, CT: Henry R. Schwab, Inc., 1988), p. 308.

10 John Updike, *Emersonianism* (Cleveland: Bits Press, 1984), p. 21.

11 *Ibid.*, pp. 15f.

12 *Cf.* '…American pragmatism is less a philosophical tradition putting forward solutions to perennial problems in the Western philosophical conversation initiated by Plato and more a continuous cultural commentary or set of interpretations that attempt to explain America to itself at a particular historical moment.' West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, p. 5.

Transcendentalism is a product of the American thinking alone. Recognising Emerson's importance to classical pragmatism itself undercuts such a myth. Even the name 'Transcendentalism', was appropriated from Kant. And although Emerson sought to be America's first philosopher, his philosophy was an adaptation of German and British Romanticism in the context of late nineteenth century American.

Acknowledging Emerson as the prime background thinker for classical pragmatism has had a further effect. It has allowed some scholars to see an extended influence in thinkers as diverse as African American abolitionist W. E. B. DuBois, pan-Africanist Alain Locke, social reformer Jane Addams and Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes. [13] Rorty even includes Nietzsche in pragmatism's genealogy.[14] Cavell speaks of Wittgenstein's pragmatist leanings.[15]

This book considers Emerson a proto-pragmatist. It also argues against the view of pragmatism as unphilosophical, or as an evasion of epistemology-concerned philosophy. Ultimately, this book denies the myth of pragmatism as some sort of national (or 'ethnocentric', to use Rorty's idiom) way of thinking. The object is a reconstruction of pragmatism – of classical pragmatism and now neopragmatism – as scientifico-Romantic *theological* epistemology. And whilst distinguishing pragmatism from other philosophies, such a reconstructed understanding of the pragmatic only makes sense in the context of the Western philosophical tradition and its perennial Socratic concern with living the true, the good and the beautiful.

The clearest parallel to pragmatism is Romanticism itself.[16] Romanticism was a countercultural philosophical movement. It also incorporated atypical literary and critical devices, from poetry to the autobiographical voice. It troped philosophical conventions to challenge what counts as epistemology. Therefore, that Romanticism and Emersonian Transcendentalism or, for that matter, pragmatism do not look like traditional philosophy does not indicate a failure in epistemology. It is, in fact, the very point.

This book argues, with West, Cavell and others, the prime importance of Emerson to pragmatism. Nonetheless, it rejects the expansion of the classical pragmatist group to include other early thinkers, even Mead.[17] The reason for such a rejection is twofold. First, these others certainly did not see themselves as seminal pragmatist philosophers

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13 The most influential is literary scholar and journalist Louis Menand. *Cf.* his *Pragmatism: A Reader* (New York: Vintage, 1997) and Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Metaphysical Club* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001). *Cf.* also the several contributors in *The Revival of Pragmatism.*

14 'Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism', in *The Revival of Pragmatism.*, p. 23. The implausibility of Rorty's inclusion of Nietzsche is discussed later.

15 *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes*, p. 219.

16 *Cf.* Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, ed. by Henry Hardy (London: Pimlico, 2000) and Richard Eldridge, *The Persistence of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

17 Of all the figures Mead is a special case, since he, along with Dewey, is the father of the Chicago School of pragmatism. The major problem is Mead's dearth of publication. He only published a handful of papers and never published a book during his lifetime. Mead's greatest influence was as a teacher, mainly in the new field of sociology.

and second, their contribution was in a particular area rather than classical pragmatism *qua* philosophy.

DuBois, Locke, Addams, Wendell Holmes and so forth may be shorter branches in pragmatism's early lineage, but Peirce, James and Dewey are the trunk. Emerson, following the metaphor, is the main root, subterranean, nourishing the tree. Emerson is the inescapable background thinker for all three and Transcendentalism is their common epistemological source.

Renewed interest in Emerson is not merely retrospective. It extends Transcendentalism's trajectory to the present, drawing upon it as an epistemological source for neopragmatism. Stanley Cavell is in no small part responsible for Emerson's revival.[18] Like Emerson and the classical pragmatists, Cavell is a thinker who calls into question his own categorical placement as philosopher. Cavell is equally admired and hesitated over, and yet consistently regarded as an important thinker in modernity/postmodernity.[19] Bridging philosophy, literary theory and film criticism, he, along with other neopragmatists like Stanley Fish and Richard Rorty, crosses over intellectual disciplines, challenging their notional separation in the first place. Such experimentalism and holism are epistemological hallmarks tracing to Emerson.

This recovery of Emerson is more than 'critical' for Cavell, as it is for another leading neopragmatist, Cornel West. It is philosophical, and explicitly epistemological. For Cavell, Emerson's work epitomises a type of 'philosophical reading' that in the contemporary situation, resists postmodern scepticism. He understands Emerson's 'elusiveness' as epistemological insight rather than obstacle to his serious philosophical consideration. Emerson's prose resists easy interpretation; therefore it resists reification in theory. Reading him requires the 'self-transcendence' demanded by the best art and literature, in Cavell's view.

Cavell sees Emerson in the Romantic mould of Schlegel, Black and, especially, Emerson's own favourite, Coleridge. Like them, Emerson is trans-categorical and holistic. He stands out because he was amongst the first American thinkers to jump freely from prose to poetry, religion to philosophy, without seeing contradiction in such moves.

Such transgression is more than mere grammatical exercise. It has larger philosophical and epistemological implications. According to Cavell, Emerson's complexity is a literary analogue to the Romantic notion of self-identity and self-overcoming. Cavell dubs this Emersonian propensity for self-transcendence 'nextness':

> …[H]aving a 'self' is a process of moving to, and from, nexts. It is, using a romantic term, the 'work' of (Emerson's) writing to present nextness, a city of words to participate in. A further complication…is that our position is always (already) that of an attained self; we are from the beginning, that is from the time we can be described as having a self, a next, knotted.[20]

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18 Stephen Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), pp. 263*f.*

19 *Cf.* 'Introduction: Between Acknowledgement and Avoidance', in *Stanley Cavell*, ed. by Richard Eldridge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 1-14.

20 Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 12.

Cavell sees Emerson working against a nineteenth-century view of literature as past art. His writing reflects the need to self-authenticate by moving forward and reaching outside of the self to 'nextness' in life.

The Emersonian self, according to this view, is a process rather than a static thing. It flourishes in reinvention and its identity is found in the tension between attainment and overcoming. It is like a text for which the interpretation evolves with each new reading. Emerson's view of the rational self is hermeneutically reconstructive, according to Cavell. The subject exists insofar as it becomes. The self is a constant series of arrivals and departures, an interpretive and reinterpretive work always-in-progress.

Cavell coins this propensity 'Emersonian perfectionism'. He identifies it in other writers, including Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Kant, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Wittgenstein and other Romantic thinkers. It is found in the poetry of William Blake and the logic of G. W. F. Hegel.

But Cavell's understanding of Emersonian perfectionism is more than literary. It is epistemological, embodying the dynamism of Romantic thought. The Emersonian thinker is caught up in a cycle of finding itself complete in each moment, and yet always compelled to begin anew. Further, this understanding is for Emerson theological. The Emersonian perfectionist exists in an enchanted universe, continually arriving and losing, attaining and self-transcending, if for Cavell that process moves beyond the orthodox Christian salvific scheme.

Emerson is the watershed thinker for Cavell, whether considered a philosopher proper or not.[21] America's intellectual history begins with Emerson and everything afterwards, including pragmatism, is measured by him. Cavell reverses the question raised by thinkers like West, asking instead, How is pragmatism Emersonian?[22] Peirce, James and Dewey do not account for the so-called 'American difference', according to Cavell, Emerson does. What he bequeathed to them was a new way of philosophising.

This book argues that classical pragmatism and neopragmatism inherited the Romantic epistemology of Emerson. Further, the inability to 'place' Emerson, in spite of his durability, prefigures an ambiguity within the pragmatist tradition itself, from Peirce, James and Dewey to Cavell, Putnam, West and Rorty. Emerson saw himself as articulating something novel, but nonetheless grounded in a tradition of practical, commonsense thought that had been lost or overlooked by the Anglo-American philosophical tradition. James captured this sentiment best, calling it 'A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking'.[23]

Understanding this tension between old and the new is key to understanding both Emersonian Transcendentalism and pragmatism. Both shared the desire to be novel, even distinctively American. Yet, they also understood themselves in continuity with

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21 Stanley Cavell, *Cities of Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 20-21.

22 Stanley Cavell, 'What is the Use of Calling Emerson a Pragmatist?', in *The Revival of Pragmatism*, pp. 72-80.

23 *Cf.* William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* and *The Meaning of Truth: A Sequel to Pragmatism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

the broader philosophical tradition. That continuity was more radical than a simple recovery of thought. As Emerson described in his famous Introduction to *Nature,* it was something basic to intellectual life that had once been articulated, but now was lost:

> Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs?[24]

Emerson's thought was, on one level, precisely what Bloom and Updike describe, an attempt to account for the 'American difference'. He articulated a philosophy for a New World seeking, perhaps for the first time, its own identity. But it was also something more. It was a recovery of what Emerson characterised as 'original insight'. It was rediscovery of a pre-lapsarian way of thinking lost in the so-called advance of Western history, art, culture, philosophy and, ultimately, religious understanding.

Emerson's sentiment is neither novel, nor exclusively American. It is a recurring theme in Western thought, most recently for Emerson in British Romanticism.[25] Transcendentalism was no less a movement opposing the scientific hegemony than was Romanticism in Britain or on the Continent. Likewise, Emerson's project was a vast cultural endeavour, which goes towards explaining not only conflicting views of his success or failure, but also the elusiveness of his prose. Emerson sought to write an 'original relation to the universe' expressed in a new poetics replacing both an overly scientific epistemology and a moribund religious faith.

For all its claimed American distinctiveness, this project was in continuity with an extensive tradition. Emerson was influenced by thinkers ancient and modern, East as well as West, who sought such an original relation. Emerson borrowed from these thinkers, especially Romantics like Coleridge, Wordsworth, Schlegel and Schelling with whom he saw himself particularly allied. He adapted the Romantics, as well as those thinkers who influenced the Romantics. Therefore, Transcendentalism and its cognates 'Emersonianism' and 'Emersonian perfectionism', are best understood as Romanticism Americanised.[26]

Emerson appropriated the name 'Transcendentalism', with all its Teutonic capitalised self-importance, from Immanuel Kant, whose philosophy was in vogue at the time. Yet, it is wrong to think Emerson sought Kant's fixed universal foundations for thought.[27] Emerson rejected both philosophical empiricism and Kantian rationalism. Emerson tempered these views by appealing to the dynamism of nature and the privileging of the imagination, in particular the fluid genius of individual

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24 *The Portable Emerson*, p. 7.

25 America has long been a field for this sort of rediscovery, especially for Europeans. Coleridge, Wordsworth and others of their group contemplated the Pantisocratic idea of relocating to Kentucky. *Cf.* Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (London: Flamingo, 1989), pp. 59-88.

26 *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes*, pp. 183-91.

27 *Emerson: The Mind on Fire*, pp. 234, 249-251.

consciousness as it is manifested in ordinary experience. Moreover, Transcendentalism was an attractive term for him because of its spiritualist connotations.

Despite the name, Emerson's 'recovery' was of the immanent. His Transcendentalism was concerned with practical life in all its inflections. The ordinary was the only proper philosophical topic for him. Emerson likewise rejected the Kantian dualism that set the transcendental apart from the immanent and ordinary.

Besides the name, Emerson did not borrow from Kant so much as react against Kantianism. He rejected Kant's search for fixed universal foundations for thought and stringent categorical partitions within reason. Emerson's sense of 'Transcendental' described the overcoming of strict theoretical divisions, such as transcendental/immanent, sacred/mundane, religious thought/rational thought and even nature/reason. Emerson, countering Kant who sought such nomological divisions as the only way to rationally secure thought, saw the fluidity of such divisions at the heart of all understanding. For Emerson, reason's fluidity is epitomised in religious understanding. [28]

Emersonian Transcendentalism therefore rejected its namesake's transcendental methodology, and Emerson did not pursue a logical system to replace it. He dismissed philosophy, especially epistemology, conceived as scientific methodology, whether monological, like Kant, or dialectical, like Hegel. Emerson was an enthusiast of the aphorism, which may explains Nietzsche's interest in him. The closest Emerson came to 'method' was in his call to seek authenticity, follow nature and think meta-categorically.

Although Emerson mostly expressed this view in prose, the Transcendentalist voice aspires to the poetic, revealing another Romantic connection. Like Coleridge and others he admired, Emerson countered the Enlightenment view of epistemology not only in content, but in form.[29] He expounded on poetical metaphors and other descriptives, even in his essays, without considering such a technique philosophically sloppy or a diminution of 'real' epistemology. And, as with the Romantics, that imagery often ran to the religious.

Emersonian Transcendentalism and Religious Thought

Emerson's Transcendentalist 'believes in miracle, in the perpetual openness of the human mind to new influx of light and power. He believes in inspiration and ecstasy'.[30] The Transcendental spirit eschews received thought and thinks for itself. It seeks an original relation to the universe lost in abstract theorising and mechanistic science. Emerson undertook this by naturalising poetry, experimentalising philosophy and experientialising religion.

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28 *Cf.* Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* trans. by Norman Kemp (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1929), p. 29, 'I have therefore found it necessary to deny *knowledge*, in order to make room for faith'.

29 Jacques Barzun, *From Dawn to Decadence* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), pp. 469-507.

30 From 'The Transcendentalist', in *The Portable Emerson,* p. 96.

The revival of interest in Emerson is tied to his identification as a forerunner of classical pragmatism. In order to make that fit, the tendency has been amongst philosophers to downplay his religiosity, especially in such notions as 'Transcendentalism', 'Spiritual Laws' and 'Over-Soul'. Thus, Emerson's 'pragmatisation' has come at the expense of his theology. Such treatment is notable in philosophers like Dewey, West and Cavell, the latter of whom trades 'Transcendentalism' for the de-spiritualised 'Emersonian perfectionism'. In literary theorists such as Bloom and Updike, the opposite occurs. Emerson's theology is understood as his most important contribution, for good or ill, to American thought. In Bloom, Transcendentalism is religious faith *secularised*; in Updike, religious faith *consumerised.*

The upshot of Emerson's 'pragmatisation' is a perverse selectivity amongst these commentators that either avoids the central themes of his work, in the case of the philosophers, or focuses on a handful of later essays, in the case of the literary theorists. It is telling that this revival of interest in Emerson ignores his most emblematic writings and the theological themes spanning his career.

Amongst the most prominent work is 'The Transcendentalist', which expounded the ideas inspiring the eponymous movement. Emerson characterised Transcendentalism as a spiritual revival that had both social and political dimensions. A number of theological notions stand out, including his reconstruction of a triune 'Divinity'. Emerson, the one-time minister too radical for the Unitarian Church, drew a mysterious economy of 'the eternal Trinity of Truth, Goodness and Beauty' to oppose a tendency towards aestheticism in Unitarianism, on the one hand, and moralism in Calvinism, on the other.

Emerson's goal was to create a religious epistemology to undergird Transcendentalist views on philosophy, culture, art and progressive social action. That epistemology reconnected consciousness with the spiritual processes of the natural world. This reconnection was exemplified in the direct 'intuition' of 'Transcendental forms' occurring in religious experience. Such a theological understanding was Emerson's ultimate epistemological hedge against the materialism of British empiricism and the rational scepticism of Cartesianism and Kantianism.[31]

Connecting the theological to the epistemological *via* religious experience of the natural world is a common thread in Emerson's writing. 'The Transcendentalist' shares this approach with *Nature*, 'The American Scholar', 'Divinity School Address', 'The Over-Soul', 'Circles' and much of his poetry. This 'transcendental' connection is Emerson's device to overcome various dualisms, from the division between the rational self and nature to the practical and the theoretical. Therefore, de-transcendentalising Emerson in order to 'pragmatise' him, as Cavell and others do, is not only misguided. It misses the very point of his thought.

31 *Ibid.*, pp. 97-99, 107.

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Chapter 2

Emerson, Part II

Emerson wove religion into philosophy. His Transcendentalism, an American version of Romanticism, saw divinity in the phenomena and processes of the natural world. The Transcendentalist vision, in Emerson's hand, privileged *praxis* over theory, holism over dualism, dynamism over *stasis*, poetry over prose. It even mollified the epistemological division between nature and the supernatural, rendering the ordinary as the *locus* of the holy. Emerson bequeathed such views, along with his Romantic epistemological approach, to pragmatism.

This theological background is not fully appreciated by the philosophical-pragmatic tradition. Current genealogies that repress or explain it away do so to their detriment. A constellation of epistemological issues trace to this background, notably whether, or in what sense, neopragmatism is *realism*.[1] Emerson held a dual insistence on direct realism and a fallibilistic theory of truth. These features grew from the rational subject's religious experience of nature that simultaneously delivers it to what Cavell calls 'nextness'.

For Emerson, concurrently 'knowing' and accepting the provisionality of knowledge was the epistemological hallmark of the divinity shared with nature. Rational subjectivity was in continual arrival and self-transcendence, just as the universe was in a constant process of growth and evolutionary development. Emerson called this movement 'circles', recalling Augustine's description of God as 'a circle whose center was everywhere and its circumference nowhere':

> There are no fixtures in nature. The universe is fluid and volatile. Permanence is but a word of degrees. …There are no fixtures to men, if we appeal to consciousness. Every man supposes himself not to be fully understood; and if there is any truth in him, he rests at last on the divine soul, I see not how I can be otherwise. …I am God in nature; I am a weed by the wall.[2]

Theological epistemology is the overarching theme of Emerson's writing. The simplest observations of nature provide this understanding. It is not in Platonic 'ascent' from nature that it arises, but in contemplation of the spiritual unity between rational subjectivity and the universe. This unity is not gleaned from others' accounts. Knowing, as Emerson argued in the 'Divinity School Address', is more than a mere spectator-event. Knowing arises through personal experience and becomes 'Transcendental'.

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1 *The Revival of Pragmatism* is the best collection of essays surveying the disagreement. On the one side is Hilary Putnam, who considers pragmatism's most epistemologically important legacy its naturalistic realism. On the other is Richard Rorty, whose own version allies itself with deconstruction and anti-realism.

2 'Circles', in *The Portable Emerson*, pp. 229-31.

The Transparent Eyeball

Nature is also more than mere background material for consciousness, according to Emerson. Human understanding and the natural world were intertwined. Emerson re-naturalised an excessively theorised, artificial reason. His key was to transcend the dualism *via* religious experience, which he described in poetical imagery rather than the traditional philosophical idiom:

> Crossing a bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, under a clouded sky, without having in my thoughts any occurrence of special good fortune, I have enjoyed a perfect exhilaration. I am glad to the brink of fear. …In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life, – no disgrace, no calamity (leaving me my eyes), which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground, – my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space, – all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God.[3]

The experience of *transparency* between self and nature is mystical, but the setting is ordinary, even unaesthetic. Emerson walks home on a twilit winter evening. He re-enters the natural world (or at least becomes aware of the nature around him) and nature enters into him. This awareness occurs gradually, the liminal imagery describing an indistinct boundary between self and the environment: departing civilisation, 'snow puddles' recrystallising, evening air cooling his face, darkness growing overhead.

The experience is not voluntaristic. It occurs without expectation of 'special good fortune'. But it is not intuitional, either. It arrives through the senses, producing a visceral, 'perfect exhilaration', causing him to lift his head in prayerful reverence. The experience is self-transcendent, challenging the separation of volition and intuition in the first place. It describes epistemology as spiritual awareness, expressed in vividly sensual language. The experience stretches Emerson in Kierkegaardian tension between 'glad[ness]' and 'fear'.

This transparency is not a rational sublation of the senses, as with Hegel. It is a deeper habitation in which the whole subject is restored with the world.[4] Emerson can imagine nothing bad happening to him, *except* losing sensuousness, i.e. his 'eyes'. Emerson's metaphor is not spiritual insight or illuminated understanding in the manner of Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*,[5] Wordsworth's 'The World

3 *Nature*, in *ibid.*, p. 10-11. The importance of this passage in the American religious imagination can hardly be overestimated. It is Emerson's paradigm writing, included in numerous high school and college textbooks and anthologies. It is the best-known Transcendentalist writing and one of the best-known passages in the American literary canon.

4 *Cf.* G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* trans. by A. V. Miller with analysis and foreward by J. N. Findlay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 58-79.

5 *William Blake*, ed. by Robin Hamlyn and Michael Phillips (London: Tate Publishing, 2000), pp. 132-35f., and *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. by David V. Erdman (New York: Anchor, 1988), pp. 33-44.

Is Too Much With Us' or Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan'.[6] It is the gross organ itself, the eyeball, simultaneously seeing and seen-through.

The transparent eyeball shares more than 'consanguinity' with nature.[7] The experience embodies radical *identity* that does not obliterate subjectivity, but paradoxically guarantees it. Transparency recovers the unity lost, according to Emerson, in abstract philosophy and formalistic religion. Thus, it is outdoors rather than in school or church that 'we return to reason and faith'. Emerson's epiphany transpires in the cold, slushy sanctuary of night.

Emerson's evening walk reverses Plato's ascent from the cave. Instead of leaving the womb of the earth, Emerson departs the city and enters nature. Rather than the sun, Emerson stares into the darkening abyss above. The 'blithe air' in which his 'head' swims replaces warmth. The darkness is profound; stars do not penetrate the 'clouded sky'. Shapes and forms grow imperceptible until the eyeball is finally overcome. Night covers everything.

Awareness arrives at twilight, transitioning from day to night. Dimming light throws everything in relief, and the self and the world are authentically disclosed. Consciousness becomes self-aware, caught up in the 'circle' of a greater nature in which it participates. Subjectivity does not slip away, but becomes opaque, purified. 'All mean egotism' disappears.

The 'best moments of life are these delicious awakenings' that reconcile the antimonies of the subject, according to Emerson. The self is simultaneously dissolved ('I am nothing') and expanded ('I see all…I am part or parcel of God') in transparency. Human being and natural being are one and 'the currents of Universal Being' 'circulate through all'.

Transparency arrives through experience, but Emerson rejects empirical or psychological interpretations like those of Locke or Hume. He is also more critical in his depictions than other literary Romantics, such as Coleridge, who tend to abstract the relationship between the human and the natural. Transparency for Emerson reveals a shared divinity, found amidst the often cruel cycles of the universe.

Nature is a tough task-master and 'does not cosset or pamper us'.[8] Human life is 'sturdy' because it is the life of nature.[9] It delivers tragedy along with blissful transparency. Nature overpowers those who try to physically control or rationally de-sacralise it. The transparent eyeball experience itself fosters epistemological modesty.

Nature resists sentimentalising, but does not overwhelm us with 'savage elements' because 'we…are made up of the same elements'.[10] 'We can never be quite strangers or inferiors in nature' because '[i]t is flesh of our flesh, and bone of our bone'.[11] This view cultivates faith in instinct and self-reliance over otherworldly/noumenal appeals,

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6 *Romanticism: An Anthology*, ed. by Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers,1994), pp. 274 and 514-15.

7 David Van Leer, *Emerson's Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 21f.. Van Leer describes Emerson's nature-consciousness as 'kinship' or 'consanguinity'.

8 'Fate', in *The Portable Emerson*, p. 349.

9 'Experience', in *ibid.*, p. 275.

10 *Op cit.*, p. 374.

11 Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'The Method of Nature', in *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. by Richard Poirier (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 84.

according to Emerson. Transparency reveals our solidarity with the universe, showing that nature may be cruel, but it is not deceptive.

Emerson dismissed Cartesian scepticism as 'utter impotence to test the authenticity of the report of my senses to know whether the impressions they make on me correspond with outlying objects'.[12] Transparency confirms what everyday experience teaches. We hold a commonsense realist attitude towards the so-called 'outside world', which is not separate, but fluid with our being. We do not normally doubt our senses because they have proven dependable. The evidence is found in our everyday success moving about in the world.

Radical scepticism, as in Cartesianism, is forced and therefore inauthentic, according to Emerson. It does not arise from practical experience and cannot be verified by it, so as an epistemological exercise, it is not so much as wrong as empty. It delivers the sceptic to the interiority of subjectivity, which for Emerson is in transparent identity with the world. Again, the transparent eyeball stands for more than an empty metaphor. It displays a deep epistemological attitude that turns the tables on doubt. It accepts the reliability of subjective consciousness and it imposes the burden of proof on the sceptics.

Emerson prefigured the classic pragmatist response to scepticism, asking what 'difference' it would make 'whether Orion is up there in heaven, or some god painted the image in the firmament of the soul'? Strong warrant is required to overturn belief, and reasonable (for Emerson 'natural') justification for doubting in the first place.[13] The sceptic must show the 'difference', what James termed the 'cash value', of the doubt in practical experience. Doubting for its own sake simply does not cash out in reality, according to Emerson. Cartesian sceptics abandon contrived doubt when they leave the seminar room and enter the world.

Nature is the real classroom and teacher for Emerson and, later, the pragmatists. It leads to belief and from belief to *action*, the prime confirmation of reason's trustworthiness. Our reliance upon nature 'proves' the correlation between mind and world. Nature conforms to myriad uses, but its epistemological connection is more than instrumental. Since nature is part of us and we of it, spiritual, moral and aesthetic virtues are written into it. Transparency is an experience of nature, but it is an experience of our own nature as well.

Nature also provides for language because human consciousness and nature are, for Emerson, in 'radical correspondence'. The universe itself is 'emblematic', not just words and grammar. 'Parts of speech are metaphors because the whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind'.[14] Transparency reveals that language is an operation of nature. This 'radical correspondence' is not the analytical positivist one-to-one correspondence between word and object, *mimesis* or 'mirroring' of nature by mind.[15] Rather, it is a parallelism between the linguistic operation of mind and nature,

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12 *Nature*, in *op cit.*, p. 32.

13 *Cf.* C. S. Peirce's pragmatic distinction between 'real' and 'philosophical' doubt in the next chapter.

14 *Op cit.*, pp. 21, 23-24.

15 *Cf.* Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1980), pp. 131-311.

a holism in process revealed in transparency. The transparent eyeball reconnects *natura naturata* (objects in nature) and *natura naturans* (thinking nature, or active laws of nature).[16] They are united because the operations of nature and human consciousness are the same.

Ecstasy

Nature and mind share another trait Emerson dubs 'ecstasy'.[17] Nature is in constant flux. Its 'necessity' and 'fate' is to outstrip itself and surprise us.[18] It presses into new directions, evolving forms and continually transcending its current state. This ecstasy is inexhaustible. It constitutes nature's 'genius' and is a sign of 'divinity'. '[B]ecause ecstasy is the law and cause of nature, therefore you cannot interpret it in too high and deep a sense'.[19] We experience this as a 'law' of nature that 'touches on every side until we learn its arc':

> There are no fixtures in nature. The universe is fluid and volatile. Permanence is but a word of degrees. Our globe seen by God is a transparent law, not a mass of facts. The law dissolves the fact and holds it fluid. Our culture is the predominance of an idea which draws after it this train of cities and institutions. Let us rise to another idea; they will disappear.[20]

Emerson rejected the Enlightenment view of history as a progressive line. He replaced it with a spiral of creation and recreation following the organic process of nature. Emerson's universe exists in overcoming, even randomly, rather than *stasis*.

Emerson's view of ecstasy does not converge in a philosophical system or *eschaton.* Emerson resists the teleological view of the world and the economy of salvation history:

> We can point nowhere to anything final; but tendency appears on all hands: planet, system, constellation, total nature growing like a field of maize in July; it is becoming somewhat else; is in rapid metamorphosis. The embryo does not more strive to be a man, than yonder burr of light we call a nebula tends to be a ring, a comet, a glob, and parent of new stars.[21]

Emerson thought it self-refuting to ascribe ecstasy to nature and then proscribe its limits. Human reason cannot determine what are ends in a world in constant flux. Arrival is *stasis*, the death of ecstasy, which always delivers what Cavell terms Emersonian 'nextness'.

Progress is a function of ecstasy, not arrival. Ecstasy is the 'genius' of Emersonian perfectionism in individuals. Cavell is right to dub it 'perfectionism', not perfection.

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16 A medieval distinction revived by British Romanticism. *Cf.* Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. by James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 240-41.

17 'The Method of Nature', in *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, p. 87.

18 *Cf.* 'Fate', in *The Portable Emerson*.

19 *Op. cit.*, p. 92.

20 'Circles', in *op. cit.*, p. 229.

21 *Op. cit.*, p. 87.

For Emerson, it is not attainment that matters, but self-transcending. He thought philosophy imposed limits on random cycles of nature when it reasoned this way.

Emerson satirised this problem in the 'chicken and egg' conundrum, asking 'Which is the end?' in place of 'Which came first?'. 'The bird hastens to lay her egg: the egg hastens to be a bird'.[22] The notion of *telos* does not obtain in this 'circle' of existence. Nor does it apply to the 'undulation' of the 'ebb and flow of the sea', the cycle of 'day and night', 'breath', and 'desire and satiety'.[23] Emerson thought natural examples problematised teleological reasoning, an observation that Darwin made a generation later.

Analytic reasoning condescends to nature, treating it as discrete, manipulable chunks when, according to Emerson, it can only be appreciated in its entirety. Even a leaf exhibits the 'catholic character' of nature. Observed as a whole, it is an 'emblem of the world' because it contains nature's inter-connected structure in miniature.[24] The emblem only holds when observed as a unity. The miracle is lost when philosophy analyses it into stem, petal and veins, and re-synthesises it as a sum of parts.

The role of the subjective reason, in Emerson's view, is to combat this approach. This is why the child and farmer understand nature the best. They enjoy a less abstract, more 'natural' relationship with nature lost by the so-called 'cultured'.[25] Their epistemology is concrete and organic, not theorised into or theorised away. The child and farmer understand instinctually the ecstatic character that nature and human consciousness share. The true thinker, therefore, is a combination of philosopher, theologian and artist who elucidates it for the benefit of those who do not know, or who have forgotten.

Emerson was not *prima facie* hostile to science. Rather he was against scientific approaches that disenchanted nature and human subjectivity. Emerson spoke of nature embodying a structure that is both aesthetically and morally law-like, discernible on a level of abstraction. Direct observation, however, showed that particular ends grow into other causes and events, spreading out geometrically. Applied science reveals the law of nature as relentless chaos. The world's 'permanence is a perpetual inchoation', an endless 'rushing stream'.[26] Emerson combined this notion of open-endedness with a sense of the mutuality of the universe:

> The simultaneous life throughout the whole body, the equal serving of innumerable ends without the least emphasis or preference to any, but the steady degradation of each to the success of all, allows the understanding no place to work. Nature can only be conceived as existing to a universal and not to a particular end, to a universe of ends, and not to one, – a work of ecstasy….[27]

The ecstasy of nature is not a revolt of individual parts, but a transformation and overcoming towards the interest of the whole. Nature exhibits a plurality of ends, but

22 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

23 'The American Scholar', in *The Portable Emerson*, p. 61.

24 *Op. cit.*, p. 86.

25 *Nature*, in *op. cit.,* p. 15.

26 *Op cit.*, p. 85. James adopts this metaphor as 'stream of consciousness' for the human mind. See below, Chapter 4.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 86.

they are a causally inter-related 'commonweal'. Subjective consciousness posseses no Archimedean point, no privileged epistemological foundation on which to anticipate particular ends because the field itself is 'a work of ecstasy'. The universe of ends is infinite, and that infinity exemplifies a deeper divinity.

Emerson believed all 'ends' were provisional, whether in nature or subjective consciousness. There are no 'fixtures' in human understanding and rational powers are 'fluid' and 'volatile'. We are always in a process of 'becoming', not a state of predetermined being. It is within our epistemological power to participate with nature in redrawing our goals, not just aim at fulfilling and finishing them. This reveals human understanding's basic creative and re-creative character.

The ecstasy of nature is a boundless process of overcoming, of transcendence. Nature expands to infinite particular ends, that themselves turn into new beginnings, into 'nexts'. Nature also exists as a collective, inter-related whole. The direction nature takes is unpredictable, even mysterious. The primary way to understand and appreciate this ecstatic dimension of the universe is to see ourself as the transparent eyeball does, as 'part and parcel' of the divine.

Abandonment

The consciousness of identity with nature in the transparent eyeball experience, combined with the ecstatic character of both, led Emerson to a Transcendentalist attitude towards human development he termed *'abandonment'*.[28] Abandonment is both a moral and aesthetic extension of self-reliance. It is what we are delivered to, according to him, when we trust the human capacity to imagine and adapt to an open-ended world. Abandonment involves the wilful striking out on our own. It means a refusal to be satisfied with the answers that others have handed over to us as authoritative:

> There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better or worse as his portion; that the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given him to till. The power that resides in him is new in nature, and none but he knows what that is which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried.

Human beings become themselves by abandoning the moulds they have been given and pouring out one of their own. Just as the 'genius' of nature resides in ecstasy, so does the genius of human consciousness, whether collective or subjective rationality. Thought 'exists', according to Emerson, only for the moment that brought it into existence. It grows stale if it does not transcend itself. Even what he called 'Greek letters', i.e. classical philosophy with its timeless concerns, is not immune. Like 'Greek sculpture' it can corrode unless reconstructed for new times and contexts.

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28 'The way of life is wonderful; it is abandonment'. From 'Circles', in *The Portable Emerson,* p. 240.

The Emersonian individual is a 'nonconformist'. Just as Emerson gave up the security of the church and convention of the academy to fashion himself into an itinerant philosopher, the Transcendentalist refuses to be satisfied even with chosen ends. Following nature's ecstasy, the Transcendentalist eschews goals once they have been reached, sometimes changing course mid-stream if a better goal presents itself. The individual life, like nature, cannot be mapped out ahead of time, according to Emerson. Human genius is always adapting, changing and transcending itself:

> A man's wisdom is to know that all ends are momentary, that the best end must be superseded by a better. But there is a mischievous tendency in him to transfer his thought from the life to the ends, to quit his agency and rest in his acts. …His health and greatness consist in his being the channel through which heaven flows to earth, in short the fullness in which an ecstatical state takes place in him.[29]

Emerson's notion of abandonment, like that of ecstasy and transparency to which it is connected, is epistemological *and* theological. Ecstasy, in its out-pouring of change and continual renewal of ends, is an expression of the divine percolating throughout the human and natural world. That subjectivity can reflect upon its direction and conscientiously 'abandon' each end shows its distinctive spiritual power to create and self-transcend. The ability to see this is humanity's true 'wisdom'.

Abandonment is Emerson's term for the human response that follows such an understanding. It is rational subjectivity's analogue to the superfluence of change observed in nature. The Transcendental self rejects convention and endeavours to find truth for oneself in a further end and a vanishing point.

Abandonment is for Emerson a type of religious devotion. As an act of faith, it requires confidence in the rational and spiritual capabilities of the individual to re-make himself or herself by always aiming for new ends. It requires hope that these future ends, and the future self, will be better off for its choices.

Abandonment, as faith, also exacts a cost. With each deferral of end, stability is traded off for a future that cannot be known beforehand. For Emerson, in an eerily self-revelatory passage from his *Phi Beta Kappa* address, the cost was heavy:

> Long he must stammer in his speech; often forego the living for the dead. Worse yet, he must accept – how often! – poverty and solitude. For the ease and pleasure of treading the old road, accepting the fashions, the education, the religion of society, he takes the cross of making his own, and of course, the self-accusation, the faint heart, the frequent uncertainty and loss of time, which are the nettles and tangling vines in the way of the self-relying and self-directed; and the state of virtual hostility in which he seems to stand in society, and especially educated society. For all this loss and scorn, what offset? He is to find consolation in the highest functions of human nature.[30]

Emerson characterises his own life of abandonment, or perhaps the forced abandonment that comes with non-acceptance by the establishment, as that of a religious believer whose only consolation is 'in the highest functions of human nature'.

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29 'The Method of Nature', in *op cit.*, p. 90.

30 'The American Scholar', in *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63.

Abandonment is not only a giving up, but a taking up of 'the cross of making his own'. It is a hard path, involving the 'poverty and solitude' of an ascetic. It requires the nonconformism of the prophet to withstand the 'virtual hostility in which he seems to stand in society, and especially educated society'. Evoking the imagery of Gethsemane, he undergoes the self-doubt of 'self-accusation, the faint heart, the frequent uncertainty and loss of time' all for the sake of a higher order.

The cost also required foregoing 'the living for the dead'. Abandonment was not an automatic rejection of past thinkers. It was rather a refusal to be satisfied with them, thus turning the genius of history into paradigmatic wisdom. What we learn from the best of the past is that we must find truth for ourselves in our own time. For Emerson, this meant that abandonment could involve creative reinterpretation of thinkers as diverse as Buddha, Socrates, Plotinus, St. Paul, Luther, Kant, Hindu mystics and Swedenborg.

Emerson's multiple intellectual influences point to an epistemological sense of abandonment: giving up the Enlightenment search for a monolithic rationality. Emerson did not seek genius; he sought geniuses. His intellectual pluralism was not hero worship, but iconoclasm because it juxtaposed such diverse thinkers. Emerson abandoned the notion of an epistemological end-point and end-person and substituted a plurality of intellectual paths and thinkers.

Emerson critiqued the growing professionalism of knowledge that came with Enlightenment science. Great insights for him were not limited to the thinking class. He thought the intellectual was trapped in a culture inimical to the novel, privileging thought over action, received wisdom over the risk of the new. That culture masked social inequities as well:

> There is a certain wisdom of humanity which is common to the greatest men with the lowest, and which our ordinary education often labors to silence and obstruct. The mind is one, and the best minds, who love truth for its own sake, think much less of property in truth. They accept it thankfully everywhere, and do not label or stamp it with any man's name, for it is theirs long beforehand, and from eternity. The learned and studious have no monopoly on wisdom. Their violence of direction in some degree disqualifies them from those who think truly. We owe many valuable observations to people who are not very acute or profound, and who say the thing without effort which we want and have long been hunting in vain. …We know better than we do. We do not yet possess ourselves, and we know at the same time we are much more.[31]

Emerson thought if there was anything approaching a methodology to abandonment, it was democracy. Genius can come from anywhere and individuals, regardless of social status or formal education, hold the capacity for an infinity of insights they 'do not yet possess' and yet 'know'.

Opening up inquiry not only democratises truth. It is also problematises it. Knowledge, according to the Enlightenment, leads to greater stability and control, especially over nature. If for Bacon knowledge is power, for Emerson it is abandonment. Abandoning ends means constant revising that can lead in unknown directions.

31 'The Over-Soul', in *ibid.*, p. 216.

Emerson called this attitude 'whim', a willingness to take different paths for the sake of exploration, not knowing where they will arrive.[32]

Whim requires bravery and character for Emerson. The sacrifice of the security of the masses for open-ended future requires epistemological hope, and religious hope as well. Emerson rejects the loss of faith and disenchantment of nature that marked nineteenth century America:

> Let us affront and reprimand the smooth mediocrity and squalid contentment of the times, and hurl in the face of custom and trade and office, the fact which is the upshot of all history, that there is a great responsible Thinker and Actor working wherever a man works; that a true man belongs to no other time or place, but is the centre of things. Where he is, there is nature.

This chapter and the previous one describe the Emersonian background to the rise of pragmatism. Chapter One argues that Emerson is the key to understanding classical pragmatism and its significance for today. Emerson bequeathed to Peirce, James and Dewey an American version of Anglo-European Romanticism, a fact that qualifies the view that what they created was home-grown philosophy (or anti-philosophy). Emerson was indebted to multiple sources, not only Western but also Eastern, as were many of his Romantic counterparts.

Emerson shared a style of thought and expression with the Romantics as well. Emerson wrote epistemology, but expressed in literary, even poetical language that until recently has been an obstacle to his being taken seriously as a philosopher. Neopragmatists like Stanley Cavell and Cornel West are rehabilitating Emerson, seeing his style as indicative of an epistemology of 'perfectionism' and 'nextness', where subjectivity is never fully summed up, but always projecting to a future self-understanding.

The Emersonian subjectivity is motivated by its desire for authenticity and a need to chart out distinctiveness. Emerson characterised this attitude in naturalistic-theological terms to combat the scientism that had overtaken philosophy. He sought 'God and nature face to face' and 'an original insight' and 'religion by revelation to us' rather than obeisance to history or tradition. The Emersonian perfectionist is, in this sense, as the pragmatist later: a reflection of American thought, seeking to account for the 'American difference', whilst inextricably tied to its acknowledged epistemological heritages.

Chapter Two clarifies the content of Emerson's thought and what it contributes to classical pragmatism. The best way to conceive of Transcendentalism is as a species of theologically-imbued Romanticism that sees the divine operating in nature and sees human subjectivity as part and parcel of nature and therefore 'part or parcel of God'.

This connection is exemplified in Emerson's 'transparent eyeball' experience, where '[c]rossing a bare common' at night he looks up into the dark sky and undergoes an epiphany. The division between the self, nature and God are revealed as fluid and see-through. This experience is both religious and epistemological.

32 'Self-Reliance', in *ibid.*, p. 142.

It indicates shared dynamism, direct realism and rational holism in favour of the noetic distinctions and teleologies of Anglo-Continental philosophy.

Emerson's universe exhibits ecstasy by resisting finality and 'becoming somewhat else' 'in rapid metamorphosis'. This overcoming is an expression of the infinite character of the divine in which nature participates. Likewise, subjectivity is led to 'abandonment', the giving up of particular ends with respect to one's own life. Abandonment sometimes occurs when a provisional goal is reached, spurring on to new self-chosen ends that become provisional when attained. It also occurs when a person changes tack mid-stream for no reason other than the free exercise of creative choice, or 'whim' in pursuit of understanding. The upshot is an epistemological emphasis on striving over attaining, process over ends that subjectivity shares with nature.

This involves religious faith and religious virtues for Emerson. Abandonment is lonely and arduous. It places hope in an unknown future over known present. It prefers creative striving over 'mediocrity'. It means hardship, where 'consolation' is found 'in the highest function of human nature'. The Transcendentalist also holds faith and hope. If truth is a process without final ends and no set methodology, no absolute division between the subject, the world and the divine, the truth-seeker looks towards the future as an open possibility. It is a future only that person can write.

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Chapter 3

Peirce

Emerson was not a pragmatist. The term was not in widespread use until after his death in 1882. William James attributed 'the pragmatic method…to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences' to Charles Sanders Peirce in Peirce's 1878 essay 'How to Make Our Ideas Clear'.[1] James popularised the term in an address twenty years later.[2] Peirce did not deny that he coined 'pragmatism', although he was unsure if he or James used it first.[3]

The term grew from discussions of the Metaphysical Club, a short-lived intellectual society founded in January 1872 in Cambridge, Massachusetts and disbanded by the end of the summer.[4] It took its name in the same manner that Emerson adopted 'Transcendentalism', as a jab at the growing agnosticism around Harvard. The Metaphysical Club birthed the pragmatic movement, with Peirce the first to articulate it, from notes he scribbled at meetings.

Although Emerson interacted with several of its members, and they were no doubt familiar with his thought, he was not a member of the Metaphysical Club. He probably would have seen himself as allied with pragmatism, especially as it took shape in the later years of his life, but that connection was never explicit.[5] Yet, even a scholar like Menand who minimises the connection considers Emerson's influence on the pragmatists broadly, from progressive social matters including abolitionism and the suffrage movement, to the criticism of institutions and individual conformity and, especially, in the revival of naturalistic religion as a counter to science. Menand sees another, more literary-philosophical connection, in imparting an 'inchoate' mood or approach, 'a disestablishmentarian impulse in American culture' to pragmatism.[6]

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1 Peirce's article was initially published not in an academic journal, but in *Popular Science Monthly.* James's quote is from *Pragmatism and the Meaning of Truth*, introduction by A. J. Ayer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1978), p. 28.

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 28, 29.

3 Gerard Deledalle, *Charles S. Peirce: An Intellectual Biography* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1990), pp. 26-27.

4 Joseph Brent, *Charles Sanders Peirce: A Life* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998). Proponents of the myth of pragmatism as a distinctly American way of thinking, conspicuously Louis Menand and Cornel West, neglect to mention that the Metaphysical Club met to discuss the impact of Scottish Common sense philosophy on psychology.

5 Emerson and Peirce, although a generation apart, collaborated on a series of University Lectures in philosophy in 1870 (later to be replaced by the Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences). Emerson's lectures were titled 'A Natural History of Intellect'. *Cf.* Richardson, p. 562.

6 *The Metaphysical Club*, pp. 89, 370.

Peirce frequently quotes Emerson, especially a section from his poem 'The Sphynx'.[7] But for all the admiration, Peirce was a scientist and of all the classical pragmatists possessed the least native affinity to Emerson's idiomatic and logic-twisting prose. He does not call Emerson a pragmatist. He was playful concerning the Romantic-Transcendentalist influence on him:

> I may mention, for the benefit of those who are curious in studying mental biographies, that I was born and reared in the neighborhood of Concord, – I mean in Cambridge, – at the time when Emerson, Hedge, and their friends were disseminating the ideas they had caught from Schelling, and Schelling from Plotinus, from Boehm, or from God knows what minds stricken with the monstrous mysticism of the East. But the atmosphere of Cambridge held many an antiseptic against Concord transcendentalism; and I am not conscious of having contracted any of that virus.

Then in the next sentence Peirce reconsiders, drawing on Emersonian scientific-naturalistic metaphors:

> Nevertheless, it is probable that some cultured bacilli, some benignant form of the disease was implanted in my soul, unawares, and that now, after long incubation, it comes to the surface, modified by mathematical conceptions and by training in physical investigations.[8]

Later, Peirce explicitly identifies himself a 'Schellingian of some stripe', saying 'If you were to call my philosophy Schellingism transformed in the light of modern physics, I should not take it hard'.[9]

Rather than invite the difficulties of ascribing to Emerson a philosophical affiliation he did not claim, this book adopts a different route, describing Emerson's relation in terms of a forefather, a proto-pragmatist, the one inescapable background figure without whom pragmatism would not make sense, and most likely also would not exist.

The hallmarks of pragmatic thought are present in Emerson's work. These are described in the previous two chapters: the rejection of Cartesianism and Kantianism and their attendant dualisms; the doctrine of direct realism; a fallibilistic theory of truth; methodological pluralism; the centrality of *praxis* and the revaluation of the ordinary; an experientialist emphasis; the democratisation of inquiry; holism between nature and human consciousness; an attraction to the mytho-poetic and other non-positivistic forms of expression and the reintroduction of religion and faith as serious philosophical topics.

Emerson inspired pragmatic consciousness, but could not be a pragmatist, in the same way contemporary Søren Kierkegaard could not be an existentialist. The terms

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7 E.g. 'The Principles of Phenomenology' in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. by Justus Buchler (New York: Dover Books, 1955) p. 83, and 'A Guess at the Riddle', in *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings Vol. I*, ed. by Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp. 245-279.

8 'The Law of Mind', in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, p. 339.

9 C. S. Peirce, *The Collected Papers of C. S. Peirce*, ed. by C. Hartshorne and P. Weiss, Vol. 6 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), pp. 87, 415.

did not exist for them, even if the kernel of the ideas can be found in their work. This book follows Peirce's self-reflection, asking what impact, 'benignant' or otherwise, Emerson had in opening the way, rather than creating pragmatism in all but name.

Peircean Pragmatism and Pragmaticism

The question of pragmatism's genesis involves more than what are today matters of intellectual property. It is not an issue of who coined 'pragmatism', but what it meant. Following James's attribution, Peirce spent the rest of his life defending the method from critics and distancing himself from new interpretations, especially James's interpretation. Peirce went far enough to rechristen it 'pragmaticism,' a name 'which is ugly enough to be safe from kidnappers', in 1905.[10] 'Pragmatism' had caught on then and Peirce returned to using it by 1907.[11] Sharp methodological and epistemological disagreements existed from the beginning and are another legacy persisting today.

Peirce repeatedly stated that pragmatism was a theory of inquiry for the sciences. But commentators are divided as to whether Peirce's philosophical vision expanded to other areas of rationality. Hilary Putnam argues that whilst Peirce favoured a 'strong form of [scientific] "cognitivism" in ethics', he was 'pessimistic' about pragmatic methodology solving 'practical problems' of ethics and religious faith.[12] It would be a supreme irony if the founder of pragmatism, literally *'practicalism'*, thought it would not extend in some way to other areas of lived experience, or that the influence of *praxis* would be only unidirectional on scientific methodology. Yet, even James considered Peirce too hesitant to extend pragmatism.[13] Methodological conservatism is one reason scientific neopragmatists like Susan Haack and Nicholas Rescher follow Putnam in praising Peirce's 'tough-minded' pragmatism, and an anti-realist neopragmatist like Richard Rorty does not even include him in pragmatism's genealogy.[14]

Others, like Peter Skagestad, resist this scientisation and point out that Peirce wanted to insulate other areas of inquiry from the hegemony of science, rather than exclude them from pragmatic epistemology.[15] Karl-Otto Apel has developed an

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10 C. S. Peirce, 'What Pragmatism Is', in *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings, Volume 2 (1893-1913)*, ed. by the Peirce Edition Project (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998) p. 335.

11 *Ibid.*, pp. 398f.

12 Charles Sanders Peirce, *Reasoning and the Logic of Things*, ed. by Kenneth Laine Ketner with an Introduction by Kenneth Laine Ketner and Hilary Putnam (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 55-57.

13 William James, *Pragmatism and The Meaning of Truth*, pp. 34f..

14 Susan Haack, *Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate: Unfashionable Essays* (Chicago: University or Chicago Press, 1998), and Nicholas Rescher, *Realistic Pragmatism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000). Rescher refers to Haack several times, but misspells her name Haak. For Rorty, *cf.* Chapter 8.

15 Peter Skagestad, *The Road of Inquiry: Charles Peirce's Pragmatic Realism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), pp. 42 and 221.

evolutionary theory, describing four distinct periods where Peirce moved between a strict view of pragmatism as scientific methodology and its extension to other areas of rational thought. According to this view, Peirce returned to his early views, restricting it to the pragmatic maxim and science alone.[16]

Umberto Eco and Peter Ochs both trace the opposite trend in Peirce's thought. Eco sees development of 'textual implicature' in Peirce's theories of 'semeiotic' and logic which are both based in scriptural thought and extend from there to science, literature, ethics and other areas of philosophical interpretation.[17] Ochs, likewise, conceives of Peirce's pragmaticism as a 'corrective reading of his earlier pragmatism' now 'integrating his theological, logical, and mathematical claims'.[18] Ochs's contention is that Peirce's pragmaticism primarily entails principles for interpreting across rational spheres, based upon a biblical-religious understanding. That is, for Ochs, Peirce's significance is more hermeneutical – specifically, biblically hermeneutical – than properly epistemological, which still begs the question of exactly how far the maxim logically extends.

The issue of pragmatism's epistemological reach hangs on what areas of Peirce's philosophical thought is considered pragmatic and if, *qua* pragmatism as epistemological holism, one area can be so strictly separated from another. Peirce himself was ambivalent. In the twenty years between the publication of the initial essays and James's attribution, he spent little time writing on the pragmatic maxim. He developed his complex theory of semiotics; he dubbed 'semeiotic', a distinctive 'trichotomic' system of logic, a six-part system of categories, light-metric physics, philosophy of history and, later, arguments for the existence of God.

Even in later work, *contra* Apel, Peirce identified pragmatism with the 'Logic of Abduction', a realism based on the essence of medieval scholasticism 'which will give light and life to cosmology and physics' and have 'positive' and 'potent' 'moral applications', and 'grammar', i.e. 'a method of ascertaining the meanings of hard words and of abstract concepts'.[19] Peirce was caught between strict scientism and his insistence on the connection of the pragmatic-scientific view of the world to other spheres of understanding that he, in turn, described pragmatically.

Peirce was a confessed 'conservative' in religious and moral matters after undergoing a religious conversion 1892. Even before then he expressed pessimism over the ability of the pragmatic maxim to provide answers adequate to even simple religious, moral and aesthetic situations.[20] Pragmatism, in his view, was concerned

16 Karl-Otto Apel, *Charles S. Peirce: From Pragmatism to Pragmaticism*, trans. by John Michael Krois (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981).

17 Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 147-56.

18 Peter Ochs, *Peirce, Pragmatism, and the Logic of Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 317. Ochs calls all of Peirce's later work 'pragmaticism' even though Peirce returned to using 'pragmatism'. In any case, Ochs overstates the conversion to extend the maxim, as even in later writings Peirce expressed his own hesitancy. See below.

19 'Pragmatism as the Logic of Abduction [1903]', pp. 226-241; 'What Pragmatism Is [1905]', p.339 and 'Pragmatism [1907]' in *The Essential Peirce, Vol. 2*.

20 Hilary Putnam, 'Comments on the Lectures', in Charles Sanders Peirce, *Reasoning and the Logic of Things*, pp. 55-57.

with the long-run, whilst people needed belief upon which to act in the present. Peirce maintained the primacy of even 'instinct' over 'reasoning' in this case. [21] But 'instinct' held a distinctive meaning that he connected to 'critical common-senseism'. [22] Instinct is a physiological manifestation of human evolutionary adaptation to the lived environment. Instinct is pragmatic truth hard-wired in our central nervous system. Pragmatically stated, instinct persists because it works and, because it works, it has been passed along as an inherited trait rather than selected out.

This book treats Peirce's philosophy – from the pragmatic maxim, to his theory of signs and language, to his logic, to his religious and moral thinking, to his 'critical common-senseism' – as of a piece. It takes his hesitancy to apply a universal method to all areas of thought, whilst at the same time recognising their necessary epistemological connection, as an *expression*, rather than an avoidance, of pragmatism.

This book follows the 'pragmatic creep' of Peirce's thought as he found it necessary to move beyond pragmatism as a maxim to a larger inter-connected philosophical system. That system was scientific-pragmatic, as his more scientifically-influenced observers note, but it was also Romantic-pragmatic, as has been less observed. Peirce's pragmatism contained elements of the Emersonian 'transcendentalism' he reluctantly acknowledged in his own intellectual background. This Romantic-theological imprint is found in the holism of reason he called 'synechism' and the overcoming character of nature he called 'tychism'. It is also expressed in the 'disestablishmentarian impulse', the mood of creative experimentation exemplified in his proclivity for neologisms, and the practical spirit of Peirce's thought.

Peirce's Epistemological Pragmatism

Peirce laid out the principles of pragmatism in two 1878 essays, 'The Fixation of Belief' and 'How to Make Our Ideas Clear'.[23] 'The Fixation of Belief' describes four methods of attaining agreement in matters of truth. On one level, it is an *apologia* for the new Darwinian conception of human nature, adopting an evolutionary view of human inquiry. On another, it is a critique of materialist and behaviourist psychology and a confirmation of Scottish Common Sense psychologist Alexander Bain's theory that belief is 'that upon which a man is prepared to act'.[24] In both cases, the central idea was of the ultimate validity of scientific principles over rival non-scientific or other philosophical methodologies of inquiry

Peirce begins with a rationale for inquiry. Inquiry is not taken to find 'The Truth', as has been normally conceived in philosophy. Inquiry, i.e. simple questioning, commences when doubt arises that upsets ordinary habits. Inquiry 'repairs' the dissonance between the normal way of thinking, i.e. our instinctive or habituated 'logic,' and the new,

21 'Philosophy and the Conduct of Life', in *op.cit.*, pp. 40-41.

22 'Issues of Pragmaticism', in *The Essential Peirce, Vol. 2*, pp. 346f.

23 It is critical to note that Peirce and the other classical pragmatists saw them as *principles* of pragmatism. Later neopragmatists such as literary critic Stanley Fish wrongly characterise the tradition as principle-less. *Cf.* below, Chapter 7.

24 *The Road of Inquiry*, pp. 30-32.

conflicting information. Inquiry does not necessarily involve mathematical certainty in reasoning. In fact, Peirce thought of inquiry as a form of biological adaptation that developed animals appear to share:

> That which determines us, from given premises, to draw one inference rather than another, is some habit of mind, whether it be constitutional or acquired. The habit is good or otherwise, according as it produces true conclusions from true premises or not; and an inference is regarded as valid or not, without reference to the truth or falsity of its conclusion specially, but according as the habit which determines it is such as to produce true conclusions in general, or not.[25]

These 'guiding principles' of inference underpin inquiry, whether a scientist or wild animal. They are taken for granted because they are habits of mind. They are practical techniques, whether 'constitutional' or 'acquired'. Although not full-blown inferential logic, they have nonetheless proven themselves adequate by our successful adaptation. Habit aims at truth in the long run, rather than 'the truth or falsity of its conclusion specially'.

For Peirce, inquiry is directed towards long-term, stable belief, *not necessarily to establish law-like truth*. Stability is indexed to adaptive success, and its loss spurs reason to inquiry. The truth or falsity of any particular belief may or may not upset us from ordinary habits that guide behaviour. The practical independence of truth and habit convinced him to replace the true/false model of inquiry with that of belief/doubt:

> Hence, the sole object of inquiry is the settlement of opinion. We may fancy that this is not enough for us, and that we seek, not merely an opinion, but a true opinion. But put this fancy to the test, and it proves groundless; for as soon as a firm belief is reached we are entirely satisfied, whether the belief be true or false.[26]

Doubt is an 'uneasy and dissatisfied' state of mind from which we naturally try to free ourselves by moving forward into a state of belief. That process, or 'struggle,' of moving forward is what we call inquiry, according to Peirce.

Belief and doubt exercise central functions in inquiry, but the aim is not the psychological state of 'believing'. It is a level of belief that leads to *action.* Doubt also stimulates action negatively, until the 'irritation' of doubt is 'destroyed' by new, more secure belief.

This belief/doubt dynamic combined with its target in action led Peirce to 'the pragmatic maxim':

> Consider what effects that might conceivably have practical bearings we conceive the object of our conception might have: then, our conception of those effects is the whole of our conceptions of the object.[27]

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25 *The Essential Peirce Vol. 1*, p. 112.

26 *Ibid.*, pp. 114-15.

27 'The Maxim of Pragmatism', in *The Essential Peirce, Vol. 2*, p. 135.

The pragmatic maxim states that the import a 'conception' holds is how it modifies 'practical' conduct differently from another conception.[28] The litmus test, according to Peirce, is a change in how we act in the world. In his view, the truth about something *might* modify our practical conduct, but not necessarily. 'The most that can be maintained is, that we seek for a belief that we shall *think* to be true.'[29] Peirce traded the *a priori* distinction of truth/falsity for the theological dialectic of belief/doubt to fill the epistemological gap between truth in the abstract and its effect upon behaviour *a posteriori*.

Doubt is like a 'tickle' that causes the reflex action of inquiry and its cessation in belief.[30] But a tickle can be caused by many sources, real or imaginary. After it stops, we do not normally continue to find a reason that caused it. The abstract notion of truth drops out.

Pragmatism's critics, from Bertrand Russell to John Patrick Diggins, say it exchanges the notion of expediency with truth. Peirce entertained this concern regarding James, thinking he tended towards realist-incompatible nominalism.[31] Peirce, whilst he believed the pragmatic maxim worked for most ordinary behaviour, held the logical independence of truth was regulative for inquiry. Scientific methodology was for Peirce the most highly-evolved form and could not be undertaken without this presupposition. He allied himself with a Scotist-inspired realism that posited general laws and forms that were mind-independent and could be predicated in the future.[32]

As a scientist, Peirce observed the progressive character of inquiry. New discoveries forced constant revision of theories so that 'we can be sure that nothing in science is an ancient truth'.[33] Truth has the character of a vanishing point, and what we call scientific truth, until it reaches that point, is warranted true belief. 'Truth' is that 'predestinate opinion' 'which would *ultimately* prevail if investigation were carried sufficiently far in that particular direction'.[34]

Furthermore, Peirce was an early evolutionist who saw the operations of mind and the natural world along the same continuum. That connection was demonstrated in the fact that following habits lead to successful action. Belief and doubt are evolutionary adaptations arising *from* nature, not rational procedures imposed by a human consciousness that is set apart or foreign. A person cannot help but believe or doubt a claimed truth. It is not a matter of volition, wishing the expedient over the actual, but the inability to simply wish doubt or belief away when presented with the choice.

Peirce, like Emerson, castigates the 'false doubt' of a Descartes, 'who would begin by having a man doubt everything'.[35] Descartes presupposes a sharp separation between the operations of mind and world, inculcating a suspicion betrayed by our

28 'Pragmatism as the Law of Abduction', in *ibid*., p. 224.

29 *Op. cit.*, p. 115.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 114.

31 'Pragmatism in Retrospect: A Last Formulation', in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, p. 273f.

32 *Cf.* especially *'Laws of Nature'*, in *The Essential Peirce, Vol. 2*, pp. 67-74.

33 'The First Rule of Logic', in *ibid.*, p. 49.

34 'A Sketch of Logical Critics', in *ibid.*, p. 457.

35 'The Fixation of Belief', in *The Essential Peirce, Vol. 1*, p. 115.

action in the world. In Peirce's view, subjectivity is biologically-oriented to believe what is true in reality, but this can only be determined in the long run, after inquiry has reached that 'predestinate opinion'. In the short term, the everyday inferences of habit have proven themselves trustworthy. They provide the rational stability required to think and act in the world.

Although Peirce maintained a strict distinction between scientific and other types of knowledge, even science falls under the umbrella of his belief/doubt. Here we see, following Emerson, the Romantic image of the inquirer that underwrites Peirce's theory. The scientist's job frequently entails a form of methodological doubt, the free-play thought experiment, to arrive at new hypotheses and, ultimately, more secure belief. Creative imagination is necessary in this process, both for the individual scientist and the scientific community.

The inquirer embodies religious and moral qualities of 'self-sacrifice', 'courage' and 'heroism' akin to the Christian salvific scheme. The scientist posits 'hope' in the future and faith in the 'unlimited community' and 'intellectual race' that pursues inquiry towards its predestinate end. Peirce considered the 'virtues' of the inquirer identical to the Pauline 'spiritual gifts' of 'Charity, Faith, and Hope'. He thought scientific inquiry, if pursued correctly, would effect change in other spheres of life, such as the religious, moral, aesthetic, but he did not expect them to necessarily adopt the same methodology. He believed that '[n]either the Old nor New Testament is a text-book of the logic of science, but the latter is certainly the highest existing authority in regard to the dispositions of heart which a man ought to have.'[36]

Belief, Reason and the 'Community of Inquirers'

Peirce compares and contrasts different methods of establishing belief in 'The Fixation of Belief', arguing the superiority of the scientific approach, at least in its own sphere. The first method is 'the method of tenacity.' Since the goal of belief is to remove doubt, not truth *per se*, the simplest approach is to ignore the irritation. The method of tenacity continues believing whatever was held prior to doubt. It believes in spite of doubt. This method, of course, contains inherent problems:

> The social impulse is against it. The man who adopts it will find that other men think differently from him, and it will be apt to occur to him, in some saner moment, that their opinions are quite as good as his own, and this will shake his confidence and belief.[37]

The method of tenacity fails on two counts. First, it is anti-logical and non-rational, rejecting doubt without considering legitimacy. Second, it runs counter to the social dimension of knowledge. Encountering different views held by others problematises belief. Besides, doubt and belief are not usually attitudes we choose, but states in which we find ourselves. We doubt because we cannot help it in the face of compelling evidence, including divergent views.

36 'The Doctrine of Chances', in *ibid.*, pp. 149-50.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 116.

The second method is 'the method of authority.' It is preferable to the 'method of tenacity' because it accounts for the social element of inquiry and has been more successful historically:

> Let an institution be created which shall have for its object to keep correct doctrines before the attention of the people, to reiterate them perpetually, and to teach them to the young; having at the same time power to prevent contrary doctrines from being taught, advocated, or expressed. Let all possible changes of mind be removed from men's apprehensions.[38]

The method of authority is also non-rational. It avoids doubt by ignoring it, but transfers responsibility for authorising belief to the government or another entity. Peirce considered this method the most effective on a wide scale, making possible the achievement of 'Siam', 'Egypt', 'Rome' and 'medieval Europe'. Nevertheless, limitations of the method of authority arise, including the impossibility 'to regulate opinions upon every subject' and among all members in society. It is especially difficult to quell dissenters, which is why authoritarian cultures rise and fall precipitously.

The method of authority struggles procedurally over which beliefs it should authorise. Because its choices are not designed around the cessation of doubt, belief tends to be arbitrary. These cultures require a high degree of insulation from other societies, lest the 'authorised' beliefs fall under the same scrutiny as the method of tenacity. Exposure to other beliefs undermines both methods, according to Peirce.[39]

The third method comes from philosophy. It is the '*a priori*' or 'metaphysical' method. Unlike the first two, the *a priori* method provides for content as well as procedures for expelling doubt:

> Systems of this sort have not usually rested upon any observed facts, at least not in any great degree. They have been chiefly adopted because their fundamental propositions seemed 'agreeable to reason.' This is an apt expression; it does not mean that which agrees with experience, but that with which we find ourselves inclined to agree.[40]

The *a priori* method 'resembles that by which conceptions of art have been brought to maturity.'[41] It possesses a rational symmetry that is agreeable to reason and, thus, aesthetically pleasing.

However, a proposition may be 'agreeable to reason' and facts. If the goal is a stability of belief that leads beyond doubt to action, history for Peirce illustrates that metaphysicians have never agreed. As for the *a priori* beliefs not changing, they have undergone transformation over time. For example, the idea that the distances between the heavenly spheres matched symmetrically the lengths of strings that produce chords was agreeable to Plato, and the notion that they match the proportions of inscribed and circumscribed spheres of the different regular solids was agreeable to Kepler. The on-going scientific community has overturned both views. In the end, the *a priori* method does not differ from that of authority. It merely exchanges the notion of taste for compulsion.[42]

38 *Ibid*., p. 117.
39 *Ibid*., p. 118.
40 *Ibid*., p. 119.
41 *Ibid*., p. 118.
42 *Ibid*., p. 119.

The final method for Peirce is that of 'science'. Unlike other methods, it connects belief to the 'external permanency' of the world of facts 'upon which our thinking has no effect':

> [The method of science's] fundamental hypothesis, restated in more familiar language is this: There are real things, whose characters are entirely independent of our opinions of them; those realities affect our senses according to regular laws, and, though our sensations are as different as our relations to the objects, yet, by taking advantage of the laws of perception, we can ascertain by reasoning how things really are. …The new conception involved is that of reality. [43]

Peirce's argument up to this point focused upon the effectiveness of the methods for assuaging doubt and thus moving to belief. Each technique – tenacity, authority, *a priori* – was progressively better at fixing belief. However, in the case of the method of science, Peirce did not claim such superiority. What recommends it is that it is the only method that eventually leads to true belief.

Whilst the others determine belief according to individual or collective preferences, science appeals to 'real things' 'entirely independent' of our opinions of them. It is more stable over the long haul because it is based upon the permanence of facts and scientific law.

Peirce dropped the question of the effectiveness of settling belief with the method of science. Whilst it leads to correct belief over time, is it actually better at securing normative judgements in the present? Peirce was ambivalent. The method of science has been useful in 'settling opinion' in the natural sciences, but progress can only be ascertained after the fact of belief. Drawing on the past, its success in the future can be inferred, but not necessarily. The laboratory for belief is always *in praxis*.[44]

The method of science has produced confusion and doubt in the short-term as it has secured belief in the long run. What recommends it is that it is the only method leading to long-term stability. Pragmatism, in spite of its caricature as a philosophy of expediency, according to Peirce, is in for the long haul.

Peirce touted the method of science, but it did not explain what it comprised, besides affirming the 'external reality' of our 'sense' conforming to 'regular laws'. Peirce was an experimental scientist and he took the form of scientific/logical/pragmatic inquiry for granted. *The scientific method of fixing belief for Peirce is what scientists do when inquiring into mind-independent truth*. Peirce later developed a complex theory that included 'abductive, deductive and inductive logic;' an 'experimental' and 'fallibilistic' self-critical attitude toward inquiry; and versions of anti-nominalist realism.[45] Today, a similar theory is seen in Karl Popper's 'hypothetico-deductive method', which drew upon Peirce's work.[46]

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43 *Ibid*., p. 120.

44 Neopragmatist Richard Rorty follows Peirce, but replaces the community of scientific inquirers with the democratic community. *Cf.* below Chapter 9.

45 Cf. especially Peirce's *Reasoning and the Logic of Things*, pp. 57f.

46 Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1992). *Cf.* Hilary Putnam in *Reasoning and the Logic of Things*, p. 57.

Whilst features of Peirce's scientific methodology developed, two constitutive elements are drawn in 'How to Make Our Ideas Clear'. The first is the trustworthiness of our senses and reason. Unlike dualistic philosophers like Descartes and Leibnitz, Peirce maintained the continuity between mind and nature and the subjection of the former to the laws of the physical universe.[47] According to Peirce, our ability to reason and inquire, even non-scientific methods of fixing belief, are reliable. Insofar as they have developed out of experience they have been retained because they have led to flourishing in the world.

Peirce was of the first few generations grappling with Lamarckian and Darwinian evolutionary theories and their implications for epistemology. Peirce's doubt/belief paradigm is itself a naturalistic interpretation of the reason for inquiry. If the method of science is superior it is because, at some biological level, we are more apt over time to believe and act on what is true rather than what only 'seems' true.[48] We are biologically-oriented towards belief because belief leads us to action and action leads to the formation of habits that allow us to prosper. This is the cash value of scientific inquiry, or any better method that comes along. True belief is ultimately more effective in leading to successful adaptation than arbitrary or coerced belief.

The Cartesian mistake is to rationally abstract consciousness from the economy of nature. Applying scepticism to everything but consciousness, modern philosophy backed itself into an epistemological corner. Consciousness was not treated as part of a mind-independent, evolving reality that gave rise to it and governs its operations. Peirce countered this scepticism by maintaining, on naturalistic and evolutionary grounds, a version of direct realism.[49]

The second feature of Peirce's scientific inquiry extends the evolutionary principle to the collective pursuit of truth. Peircean truth is not a property or a quality of inquiry but its 'goal' or 'destiny':

> The opinion which is fated (fate means merely that which is certain to come true, and can nohow be avoided) to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate, is what we mean by the truth, and the object represented in this opinion is the real.[50]

Two observations arise from this quote. First, what is 'true' is what finally cannot be avoided. Truth is 'predestinate' and independent of verification. Second, if what is true is not apparent, it is what is 'fated' if inquiry is infinitely extended. That is, truth is what inquiry *would* come to if undertaken by a community of investigators, over time. Truth is not what is presently accepted. What is true today may be overturned in the future.

Truth may be predestinate, but it is also has the character of a horizon. As we approach, making new discoveries and revising theories, it extends further ahead. Truth has a progressive, fallibilistic quality that appears inexhaustible, but eventually converges:

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47 'How to Make Our Ideas Clear', in *The Essential Peirce, Vol. 1*, pp. 125-26.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 128.

49 Skagestad, following Putnam, uses the term 'pragmatic realism' to describe Peirce's Scotist version of direct realism. *Cf.* Skagestad's *The Road of Inquiry,* p. 5, and Putnam's *Pragmatism: An Open Question* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 11f.

50 *Op. cit*., p. 139.

> …[T]hough in no possible state of knowledge can any number be great enough to express the relation between the amount of what rests unknown to the amount of the known, yet it is unphilosophical to suppose that, with regard to any given question (which has any clear meaning), investigation would not bring forth a solution of it, if it were carried far enough. …Who can be sure of what we shall not know in a few hundred years? Who can guess what would be the result of continuing the pursuit of science for ten thousand years, with the activity of the last hundred? And if it were to go on for a million, or a billion, or any number of years you please, how is it possible to say that there is any question which might not ultimately be solved? [51]

Peirce makes an historical point here. What was understood as true in the past has undergone significant change, especially recently. It can be reasonably inferred that similar will occur in the future. Things that seem insoluble now may be answered. Science, in contrast to *a priori* metaphysics, is predictably unpredictable.

The method of science over long periods, of 'a few hundred', 'thousands', 'a million, or a billion, or any number of years', itself is not clear, either. Aristotelian science is different from Newtonian, which is different from Darwinian, and so on. Methodologies evolve along with answers. There is no way to know beforehand, but we can assume the process of inquiry will continue, and that that process will necessitate future inquirers.

The scientific method *is* the community of inquirers for Peirce. They validate the norms and procedures of inquiry. They confirm or reject the results of research. The centrality of the community of inquirers, as well as his optimism, is an expression of the 'Schellingian' imprint on pragmatism that Peirce associated with Emerson. For Emerson, nature is thematised *sub specie aeternitatis*; for Peirce it is the mystical chain of inquiry extending from the past to the unknowable future.

The method of science is the work of scientists experimenting, discovering, imagining, revising and reinvestigating. It is open-ended, collective, unpredictable and, in this sense*, mysterious*, like Emerson's nature. We cannot even anticipate what that future community will look like. Peirce held out the possibility that it might be an evolved form of human beings, or other animals.[52]

Synechism, Tychism and Realism

The crux of Peirce's pragmatism is the tension between the fallibilistic verificationism of his views of science and the strong form of direct realism he drew from Duns Scotus and which he thought was necessary for the conduct of science. This position defines the difference between pragmatism and other types of philosophy. It is both the source of pragmatism's praise for reconciling what Bertrand Russell called 'the materialistic tendencies of psychology with the anti-materialistic tendencies of physics' and the source of pragmatism's dismissal as pseudo-philosophy by its critics.[53]

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51 *Ibid*., p. 140.

52 *Ibid.*, pp. 140-41.

53 Betrand Russell, *The Analysis of Mind* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1921), p. 22, quoted in Hilary Putnam, *Pragmatism: An Open Question*, p. 5.

The question whether verificationism and realism are mutually exclusive and, thus, self-contradictory is less controversial today when all epistemological foundations fall under criticism. Nevertheless, the balance between these seemingly conflicting attitudes continues to drive the discussions of neopragmatism.

The tension between the two forced Peirce to develop other areas of his philosophy that he considered separate from pragmatism as a scientific method, but are nonetheless tied to it. One is his three-category system of scientific logic described as quality/relation/sign, monadic/dyadic/triadic and firstness/secondness/thirdness. Peirce considered this system his highest achievement.[54]

Central to Peirce's logic are two countervailing ideas that give sense to the whole system as pragmatism and reconcile the verificationism-realism tension. One is 'synechism', or the notion that all ideas, like all objects in reality, are connected in a causal web of relations:

> …I have proposed to make *synechism* mean the tendency to regard everything as continuous.* (The Greek word means continuity of parts brought about by surgery.) For many years I have been endeavouring to develop this idea…I carry the doctrine so far as to maintain that continuity governs the whole domain of experience in every element of it.

And

> [Synechism is] that tendency of philosophical thought which insists upon the idea of continuity as of prime importance in philosophy and, in particular, upon the necessity of hypotheses involving true continuity.[55]

For Peirce, science and philosophy undervalued the 'continuity' between things and ideas. In the attempt to control nature, both emphasised the discrete. This prejudice involved more than preferring the analytic to the synthetic. It missed interconnectivity, the interrelatedness of all things and their effect upon each other creating a whole.

Synechism held two senses for Peirce. Originally, it was designed to oppose epistemological dualism. 'Synechism, even in its less stalwart forms, can never abide dualism, properly so called'. But synechism also expressed an important theological view for Peirce, in that '[a] man is capable of a spiritual consciousness, which constitutes him one of the eternal verities, which is embodied in the universe as a whole'.[56]

Peirce saw epistemological dualism, the separation of mind from nature, as a way of thinking with deleterious *spiritual* consequences. First, it posited a spiritual conflict between 'carnal consciousness' and rational consciousness, i.e. between body and mind. Second, it undervalued the relationship between the individual and society, the 'social consciousness' through which 'a man's spirit is embodied in others, and which continues to live and breathe and have its being very much longer than superficial observers think'. Third, dualism ignored the fact that

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54 'The Neglected Argument for the Reality of God', in *The Essential Peirce, Vol. 2*, p. 437.

55 'Immortality in the Light of Synechism', in *ibid.,* p. 1, and 'Synechism, Fallibilism, And Evolution', in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, p. 354.

56 *The Essential Peirce*, pp. 2 and 3.

'[a] man is capable of a spiritual consciousness, which constitutes him one of the eternal verities, which is embodied in the universe as a whole'.[57]

Synechism rethematises connection, relationship and identity over against the separation implicit in dualistic worldviews. It expresses epistemological holism, an idea shared with Emerson and the later classical pragmatists. It expresses theological holism, reconnecting subjectivity with a reenchanted universe.

Another notion central to Peirce's logic is 'tychism', or the idea that there is an irreducible element of 'free play' in reality and in subjective consciousness. This essential 'unpredictability' can never be explained away. It cannot be made 'predictable' and, thus, eliminate the intrinsic 'vagueness' and 'chance' in the world. Nonetheless it must be accounted for in how we think of ourselves and the world:

> Try to verify any law of nature, and you will find that the more precise your observations, the more certain they will be to show irregular departures from the law. …Trace their causes back far enough and you will be forced to admit they are always due to arbitrary determination, or chance.[58]

Similar to Emerson's notion of 'ecstasy', and anticipating contemporary chaos theory, tychism is an umbrella concept for the creative development of reality that outstrips the claim of any nomological theory.

Peirce invoked tychism against rationalism and empiricism for minimising those facts of scientific experience that would not fit neatly into their systems. He also used it against science in the form of materialism that dismissed 'specification' and 'diversification', i.e. individuality and pluralism, with 'hard, ultimate, inexplicable, immutable law'.[59] Peirce drew on the idea of chance, of tychism, to make room within science for the novelty arising in nature.

The analogue to tychism in reasoning is 'hypothesis'. For Peirce the method of science is a way of arriving at new hypotheses. Once doubt arises an elaborate 'play of musement' begins. Scientists construct imaginative alternatives and test them to re-establish belief. In this process, there is no way of knowing beforehand what will the new hypothesis will be, or what procedure will give birth to it, until the creative interchange occurs and ideas are reasonably meted out.

Although scientists think their enterprise is formalistic, Peirce refers to it as a 'game', 'play', or 'surprise' either played against oneself or other inquirers. Inquiry involves an element of 'whimsy', drawing on an artistic sensibility to arrive at innovation. Peirce's theory of hypothesis parallels Emersonian abandonment. The inquirer is not to rely upon conventional answers or accepted thinking:

> Upon this first, and in one sense this sole, rule of reason, that in order to learn you must desire to learn and in so desiring not be satisfied with what you already incline to think, there follows one corollary which itself deserves to be inscribed upon every wall of the city of philosophy, **Do not block the way of inquiry.**[60]

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57 *Ibid.*

58 'The Doctrine of Necessity Examined', in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, p. 331.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 337.

60 C. S. Peirce, 'The First Rule of Logic', in *op. cit*., p. 48.

The point is to entertain even wild possibilities. Not because doing so *will* provide insight, but because we cannot rule out ahead of time that it will not. What validates the best hypothesis, i.e. the one that is true at least provisionally, is not its origin, but its confirmation. That comes at the end.

Peirce's notions of synechism, tychism and hypothesis, and his architechtonic of logic and semeiotic, leads back to the Romantic ideal of the community of inquirers. The role of this community is to create, debate and revise better conceptions of the world until arriving at that 'predestinate opinion' which is truth. Their 'way' is not to be blocked. Furthermore, it is not that there is a single way, but that the way of inquiry as such is normative for the whole inquiring community. This view of rationality contains a necessary social character. What counts as a good argument, as well as the methods of reasoning themselves, are a function of inter-subjective debate. Because of this social character, collective criticism is something to be sought out rather than avoided, as it is in other methods of fixing belief. Peirce, like Emerson, advocated the ideal of an open community to cultivate the most creative hypotheses to assuage doubt.

This last observation returns to the issue of pragmatism as a method proper to science alone. Peirce's belief/doubt dynamic is predicated on the maxim that 'the entire meaning and significance of any conception lies in its *conceivably* practical bearings'.[61] If we trust a conception, we will act on it. But 'practice' and 'action' point towards an ideal to which they are directed:

> On the other hand, an ultimate end of action *deliberately* adopted,–that is to say, *reasonably* adopted,–must be a state of things that *reasonably recommends itself in itself* aside from any ulterior consideration. It must be an *admirable ideal*, having the only kind of goodness that such an ideal *can* have, namely, esthetic goodness. From this point of view the morally good appears as a particular species of the esthetically good.[62]

The guiding principle of a community of inquirers is a more and more proximate understanding of truth apart from particular conceptions. What is 'fated' may not be what we want, such as it might be in the case of the method of tenacity, authority or *a priori*.

Peirce felt the method of science needed a deeper rationale than its regulative notion of truth. Truth must be true, but pragmatically true. It must be practical, and for human that means it must be both moral and beautiful.

Peirce's 'admirable ideal' is the concrete increase of reasonableness in the world.[63] The community of inquirers brings about conceptions that are increasingly reasonable, i.e. deriving from reasons that are logical, inter-subjective and normative. This project is moral for Peirce, by its disinterested attitude towards particular hypotheses in the pursuit of truth, in distinction from the other methods. It also aesthetic because by contributing to increase of reasonableness, it mirrors the evolutionary development of the universe, that same universe which gave rise

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61 C. S. Peirce, 'On Phenomenology', in *ibid*., p. 145.

62 C. S. Peirce, 'The Three Normative Sciences', in *ibid*., p. 201. Italics are in Peirce's text.

63 Richard J. Bernstein, *Praxis and Action: Contemporary Philosophies of Human Activity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971, 1999), p. 193.

to the reasonableness of consciousness itself, which for Peirce exhibits divinity in synechism and tychism.

The result reverses the usual order of philosophical thought. Instead of logic providing the basis for aesthetics, ethics, and even theology, aesthetics, ethics and a theological view of the world are the basis for a logic that gives primacy to pragmatic rationality. And, whilst Peirce claimed limited scope for the pragmatic maxim, by reversing the order and expanding into an architechtonic philosophy, opened up pragmatism to larger regions of human thought.

Chapter 4

James

Charles Sanders Peirce was the first pragmatist. He was the first to describe it as a scientific method and articulate it in a comprehensive philosophy. Peirce was influenced by many sources, constructing an epistemology that was realist, fallibilistic, holistic and practical. This book recovers a principal undervalued source, one Peirce grudgingly recognised, Transcendentalism. This Emersonian interpretation of Romanticism expressed itself in key concepts in Peirce's pragmatism and underwrote his view of epistemology and scientific progress.

The previous chapter described that influence in detail. An important commonality includes the emphasis on the unity between nature and subjective consciousness, although Peirce approached it initially from the side of experimental science and non-materialistic evolutionism rather than Romantic philosophy. Peirce rejected that pragmatic holism gave up anything that was essential to the conduct of science. Rather, it confirmed science. Science, through the discoveries of Darwinian evolution, had illustrated the pragmatic realism position that human being was in a continuum with nature rather than set apart, as according to idealist or realist metaphysical views.

Peirce challenged the materialist bent in science that turned nature, and human nature, into a mechanism to be exhaustively mapped and predicted. Towards this end, Peirce formulated what he called the pragmatic maxim, which concretised philosophical thought by asserting that the significance of a conception lies in how it might modify practical behaviour. This maxim rejected what Peirce saw as the presumption of most philosophy up to that point, that what motivates inquiry is an abstract concept like 'truth'. What really matters in any philosophical investigation, according to him, is the relationship between belief and doubt. That is to say, it is not the notion of 'truth', *per se*, that starts a process of philosophical questioning, but the 'irritation' of doubt that arises when a conception is no longer adequate to sustain belief leading to action.

Peirce believed that science, over the long run, would bridge the gap between warranted belief and truth. In the meantime, we had trustworthy habits adapted through evolution. This is another example of the connection between human consciousness and the world. Some ways of fixing belief are better than others. Peirce described four, but ultimately the most effective is that of science, which leads to the 'predestinate' or 'fated' opinion. What that 'way' is, however, is not a set method, but the process of the community of inquirers testing, hypothesising, imagining, rejecting, revising and finally accepting truth according to inter-subjective standards. The view of truth as a process, rather than result grants a Romantic, fallibilistic sensibility to Peircean science, which is constantly correcting its understanding in light of new discoveries.

The scientist cuts a Romantic, even 'heroic' figure in Peirce's view, like the seeker of an 'original relation to the universe' in Emerson. The Peircean scientist manifests Christian virtues, such as 'self-sacrifice' for others, 'Charity, Faith, and Hope'. Peirce went beyond Emerson's individualism, conceiving of inquiry in communal terms, a process extending from time immemorial to the hopeful future.

Peirce's pragmatic sensibility, if not his maxim proper, grew beyond science to encompass other areas of human understanding. Two key notions that tie the disparate parts of his philosophy together also reflect a Romantic conception of the world. Synechism is his idea that everything in the world, from beings to concepts, are in 'continuity'. Like Emerson's transparent eyeball experience, synechism expresses ontological and epistemological holism against the dualism of sceptical philosophy. Tychism describes 'unpredictability' and 'chance' intrinsic to the universe, recalling Emerson's theory of ecstasy in the world and abandonment in subjective reason, overcoming given ends and developing in unforeseen directions.

For Peirce, pragmatism is a project, not a final system. He was a scientist and an Enlightenment thinker, more so than Emerson and later pragmatists. He believed the community of inquirers would eventually converge in truth. He was also Romantic-influenced and a religionist, shown in his penchant for neologisms and his theological rejection of materialism. He saw scientific thought as a concrete, holistic, experimental and self-corrective procedure that he was the first to call 'pragmatism'. But in order to think of pragmatism as science, he had to liberate it from the reductionist mould. He created an epistemology that made room for 'unpredictability' and 'vagueness'. He connected this epistemology to the aesthetic, ethical, and theological, couching pragmatism in religious- and Transcendentalist-inspired language.

James's Epistemological Pragmatism

William James (1842-1910), Peirce's contemporary, is the figure most associated with pragmatism. Notwithstanding his attribution to Peirce, it was James who championed pragmatism to the academic world, leaving his imprint upon it today. That James was in such a position shows his intellectual honesty, but also the range of his influence as a disseminator of the 'American difference'. James not only heeded Emerson's dictum to forgo the Anglo-European models, but also wrote the Emersonian quest for an 'original relation to the universe' into a cultural norm.

The 1890 publication of James's *Principles of Psychology* established him as a premier thinker in the new field that combined biology and philosophy of mind. In contrast to the scientific experimentalism of the nineteenth century academy, James's research led him deeper into philosophy for the epistemological origins of experience. That investigation, in turn, led him away from philosophy, of a certain kind. Just as his 'radically empirical' observations went beyond the limits of science for epistemology, he shunned *a priori* rationalism and Lockean- and Humean-style empiricism regnant at the time.

James begins the second chapter of *Pragmatism* recounting a philosophical dispute. Recalling Emerson's conundrum of the egg and chicken, he used it to poke fun at teleological thought:

> The *corpus* of the dispute was a squirrel – a live squirrel supposed to be clinging to one side of a tree-trunk; while over against the tree's opposite side a human being was imagined to stand. This human witness tries to get sight of the squirrel by moving rapidly around the tree, but no matter how fast he goes, the squirrel moves as fast in the opposite direction, and always keeps the tree between himself and the man, so that never a glimpse of him is caught. The resultant metaphysical problem is this: *Does the man go around the squirrel or not*?[1]

The scene was a satiric comment on the state of philosophy, which in James's view had argued itself into problems from which it could not extricate itself. Is the world 'one or many? – fated or free? – material or spiritual?'[2] James thought such questions were interminable, even self-contradictory considering the abstract character of their formulation. Like Emerson, James drew a simple problem in nature to show the practical impotence of traditional philosophy.

James resolved the dispute by applying the Scholastic adage to 'make a distinction'. The distinction, however, invoked the pragmatic maxim of Peirce: 'Which party is right…depends on what you *practically mean* by "going around" the squirrel'.[3] For James, it was senseless to argue right or wrong until agreement was reached on a definition establishing a point of practical reference. If one means 'circumambulating the tree that the squirrel is moving on', then indeed the person does 'go around' the squirrel. If one means that, relative to the squirrel, the person only stands opposite its underside as it clings to the tree moving around – not the squirrel's front, rear or back – then the person does not. The definition is interest-laden, but not arbitrary. It connects to the practical difference meant by 'going around'.

James's example also adapts Peirce's pragmatic method. The dispute is resolved according to the notion that 'the tangible fact at the root of 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*'.[4] To clear up the squirrel-tree issue, the group must conceive what relevant concrete effects believing in either definition would have on actual behaviour. These effects include what sensations might result and what reactions the observer might have, not only for the present, but in the distant future as well.

It is conceivable that rival views might not make a big difference in practice, or that the issue of what relevant practical effects cannot be decided upon in one direction or another. For James, as with Peirce, this ambiguity was not a problem, but an example of the adaptability of pragmatism over traditional philosophies requiring sharp either/or distinctions. Scientists often hold competing or even irreconcilable theories about the world and yet continue to make strong truth-claims and act upon them. Classic examples include light considered sometimes as a particle and sometimes as a wave, or observing the universe as simultaneously in evolutionary development and also dissolving according to the law of entropy.

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1 *Pragmatism* and *The Meaning of Truth*, p. 27.
2 *Ibid*., p. 28.
3 *Ibid.*, p. 27.
4 *Ibid.*, p. 29. Italics mine.

James's point is that differing conceptions are imaginably significant enough to effect change in *practical* outlook. Scientists manage amongst alternate theories about the nature of light or the developmental direction of the universe by hypothesising, experimenting and imaginatively meting out differences in particular situations, even if highly removed from the ordinary. In most contexts, the consideration of light as a wavelength is adequate because it supports theories regarding colour and vision. However, the notion of light as a particle is also useful because it explains the phenomenon of light bending over long distances, accounting for black holes. These differences not only matter for physicists. Cosmic notions hold implications for non-scientists, including philosophers and theologians, reflecting on the nature and meaning of the universe.

James, contrary to Peirce, unapologetically extends the pragmatic maxim across reason, including the spheres of philosophy and religion. 'Accordingly, in every genuine metaphysical debate some practical issue, however conjectural and remote, is involved.'[5] For him, it was a method both for clarifying conceptions and settling theoretical debates in all areas. Thus, James applied the maxim to a theological debate contemporary to his time:

> The notion of God, on the other hand, however inferior it may be in clearness to those mathematical notions so current in mechanical philosophy, has at least this practical superiority over them, that it guarantees an ideal order that shall be permanently preserved. …This need of an eternal moral order is one of the deepest in our breasts. …Here then, in these different emotional and practical appeals, in these adjustments of our concrete attitudes of hope and expectation, and all the delicate consequences which their differences entail, lie the real meanings of materialism and spiritualism–not in hair-splitting abstractions about matter's inner essence, or about the metaphysical attributes of God.[6]

The dispute between materialism and spiritualism rides on psychological and sociological effects. The materialist may hold solid, logically acceptable reasons for non-theistic belief, but the spiritualist holds the pragmatic advantage. A moral-salvific view grants individuals and society practical stability leading to action.

James appears to corroborate what critics charge pragmatism: belief, or expediency in belief, is exchanged for truth. However, for James, as Peirce, scientific truth is not something one can know ahead of the facts being considered. Truth *per se* is not something unchanging and arrived at by *a priori* rationality. It is only by observing the difference of a belief pragmatically, in this case the effect in the lived experience of theism, that truth about the belief can be meted out.

The lesson of science is instructive for expanding into other spheres. The pragmatic maxim shows 'that most, perhaps all, of our laws are only approximations' and that 'developments' in one region shade into another.[7] Discoveries frequently alter conceptions across understanding, problematising previously accepted truths and altering the notion of truth itself. For James, consciousness is stream-like, and

5 *Ibid*., p. 52.
6 *Ibid.*, p. 55.
7 *Ibid.*, p. 33.

rational divisions flow over and into each other. A new scientific idea could affect ethics, aesthetics and religious faith, or *vice versa,* but it cannot be known until applied in practice.

Traditional metaphysics, conversely, uses 'truth', 'Absolute' and 'first principles' to bring inquiry to a close, often in spite of new discoveries and revised conceptions. Pragmatism, reconceived as a general method, 'does not stand for any special results'.[8] Its understanding of truth is progressive, fallibilistic, and revisable. In James's version '[s]cience and metaphysics would come much nearer together, would in fact work absolutely hand in hand'.[9]

Peirce operates with a community of inquirers testing hypotheses against the notion of truth independent of inquiry. Peirce combined *progressive verification* and *realism*, assigning the notion of 'absolute truth' as a contrafactual limit by which any 'particular truth' could be critiqued, a view currently embodied in Jürgen Habermas's pragmatic speech-act theory.[10] This methodological control distinguishes science from other areas where rational sources, authority and method varied. The limitation of the pragmatic maxim to science, at least, is the basis of the disagreement between Peirce and James. It lead Peirce to break with James and temporarily rechristen his method 'pragmaticism'.

Yet, Peirce's architechtonic approach opened up for expanded application. He constructed pragmatism around a meta-scientific notion of progress. Peirce had to account for the *impetus* to proceed scientifically, rather than according to the method of tenacity or authority or in *a priori* manner. His faith in its long-term advantage grew from the view that the universe itself tends to increasing rationality, not as a *telos*, but as an evolutionary process, in which scientific truth was 'fated' to converge. Subjective consciousness participates as a biological entity inextricably tied to that process, existing under its laws and shaping its behaviour. For Peirce, 'Under this conception, the ideal of conduct will be to execute our little function in the operation of the creation by giving a hand toward rendering the world more reasonable whenever, as the slang is, it is "up to us" to do so.'[11]

'Reasonableness' contains not only logical, but aesthetic and moral valences. That it is 'right' and 'beautiful' to give 'a hand toward rendering the world more reasonable' shows that meta-scientific interests regulate inquiry, a view James shares. If interests like 'concrete reasonableness' influence inquiry, then pragmatism opens itself to claims against scientific outcome.

Peirce guarded against this charge, concerned it led to nominalism with its stress on particulars and 'percepts…complex feelings endowed with compulsiveness', a danger he believed was magnified as the pragmatic maxim was extended beyond science.[12] The balance between verificationism and realism might tip too much, undermining the notion of external truth.

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8 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

9 *Ibid.*

10 *Cf.* Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, 2 Volumes*, trans. by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1984, 1987).

11 'What Makes Reasoning Sound', in *The Essential Peirce, Vol. 2*, p. 255.

12 'Pragmatism', in *ibid.*, p. 419.

James's concerns were different. He was the first to define pragmatism as epistemology. He conceived of it as a third way between traditional realism and nominalism called 'natural realism'.[13] He recognised that even with Peirce's restriction of it to making conceptions clear in science and logic, interest plays an equal role in theory formation as the notion of external truth. Interest 'goes all the way down', even to the theoretical divisions between areas of knowledge, according to James. Truth in one area carries over because subjective reason is an interconnected complex:

> *[I]deas (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 them by conceptual short-cuts instead of following 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, liking things satisfactorily, working securely, simplifying, saving labor; is true for just so much, true in so far forth, true instrumentally.[14]

Truth, in the James' instrumental sense, is 'made' as much as it is 'discovered' by the process of inquiry. 'Truth *happens* to an idea. It *becomes* true, is *made* true by events' and is distributed across the fund of knowledge by subjectivity.[15] Pragmatic inquiry verifies, or validates the truth of a proposition according to the function of the difference it makes in our conception in practice – and practice encompasses its 'fit' with other knowledge. James epistemologically extends the pragmatic maxim of Peirce across reason.

James calls this 'fit' 'expediency'. 'The true*, to put it very briefly, is only the expedient in the way of our thinking, just as* the right *is only the expedient in the way of our behaving*'.[16] By expediency James does not mean whatever we want to believe, but what is conducive to the corroboration of truth alongside knowledge we already possess. Included in James's list of 'expedients' are meta-scientific qualities like Peirce's motivating belief in the 'increase of reasonableness' of the universe; the 'symmetry' of a new belief with the stock of previous ones; 'elegance'; an Ockham-like 'taste' for the simpler over 'more complicated' theories; 'testability'; and, ultimately, that a conception aids in terminating doubt. These types of characteristics make belief 'pragmatic'. They not only influence, but make possible the pragmatic notion of truth as practical.

James holds that moral, aesthetic and other judgements carry over into our conception of truth such that they are inextricable from it. Such holism of meaning

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13 William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 63f.

14 *Pragmatism* and *The Meaning of Truth*, p. 34.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 97.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 106. James is not equating truth with merely the expedient, a frequent caricature of pragmatism. Truth is identified as the 'fate' of inquiry, as with Peirce. The passage above continues: 'Expedience in almost any fashion; and expedient in the long run and on the whole of course, for what meets expediently all experience in sight won't necessarily meet all further experiences satisfactorily. Experience, as we know, has ways of *boiling over*, and making us correct our present formulas'.

was not problematic because, following Emerson's Transcendentalism, James sees identity between subjectivity and nature. Therefore these judgements must be accounted for, but they are not something from which truth must be insulated. Pragmatism redirects inquiry from the misguided attempt to dissociate knowledge from its embeddedness. Taking interest into account, vis-à-vis examining the effects of a change in conception in practice, we arrive at a clearer understanding of truth:

> It is quite evident that our obligation to acknowledge truth, so far from being unconditional, is tremendously conditioned. Truth with a big T, and in the singular, claims abstractly to be recognized, of course; but concrete truths in the plural need to be recognized only when their recognition is expedient. A truth must always be preferred to a falsehood when both relate to the situation; but when neither does, truth is as little a duty as falsehood.[17]

'Truth with a big T' for James always stands in the background, opening the possibility that particular 'concrete truths' are preliminary and revisable. It operates as a limit-concept. But 'Truth' is only meaningful because it connects to and is 'conditioned' by the warp and woof of lived experience. Dissociated from interest, it is 'discarnate truth…static, impotent, and relatively spectral'. It becomes the 'essential truth' of the 'intellectualists, the truth with no one thinking it, [which] is like the coat that fits tho no one has ever tried it on'. James replaces 'essential truth' with 'pragmatic,' 'full' and 'existential' truth, 'being the truth that energizes and does battle'.[18]

James goes beyond epistemological verificationism, inserting human participation in the truth process. Human consciousness shapes truth itself. Rather than the 'empty notion of a static relation of "correspondence"…between our minds and reality', the relationship is transformed 'into that of a rich and active commerce…between particular thoughts of ours, and the great universe of other experiences in which they play their parts and have their uses'.[19] James calls human consciousness an 'actor' or 'coefficient of truth on the one side, while the other he registers the truth which he helps to create'.[20] The knower is a participant in and co-creator of knowledge, confirming the truth registered in experience, not a passive 'mirror of nature' that is separate from subjectivity, as Rorty critiques.

Epistemological Holism and 'Radical Empiricism'

James's pragmatic epistemology re-weaves the division between consciousness and truth, facts and values, descriptions and prescriptions and related dualisms of modern philosophy. It also mollifies the central theoretical division, between *mind* and *world*. The 'nature of mind' and 'the nature of world' are 'wedded' for James. He begins, Emerson-like, from a view of their identity, rather than positing the division and then seeking empirical or rationalistic ways to overcome it.

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17 *Ibid.*, p. 111.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 276.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 39.

20 William James, 'Spencer's Definition of Mind as Correspondence,' p. 21. Quoted in Hilary Putnam, *Pragmatism: An Open Question*, p. 17.

Likewise, James's pragmatic understanding extended to a view of the operations of the universe. If the seeking truth is a corrigible process, and if truth is a 'property' or 'relation' determined within that process, then James's requires a parallel ontology:

> *The alternative between pragmatism and rationalism, in the shape in which we now have it before us, is no longer a question in the theory of knowledge, it concerns the structure of the universe itself*. On the pragmatist side we have only one edition of the universe, unfinished, growing in all sorts of places, especially in the places where thinking beings are at work.[21]

James's reality is a 'loose universe' where 'truth grows up inside all the finite experiences'. Truth is found in the human aspiration to seek it out and fashion it within the dynamics of experience. This pragmatic holism of self and world is a philosophical version of Emerson's transparent eyeball. Consciousness as 'coefficent' or 'co-creator' of truth in practice dissolves the fundamental theoretical distinction between 'external' and 'internal'. Just as the eyeball experiences 'the currents of the Universal Being' and becomes 'part and particle' of the greater reality, there is 'only one edition of the universe' for James. Thus, the operations of mind and nature are univocal. Their character is 'unfinished, growing', what Emerson called 'ecstatic' and Peirce 'tychic'.

James's development of pragmatism from scientific maxim to theory of truth carried him beyond critique of the traditional dualities of fact and value, consciousness and reality and verification and truth. It led to a holism he dubbed 'compenetration'. This theory of the *necessary* interconnectedness of all aspects of reality is an aspect of his theory of 'pure experience':[22]

> My thesis is that if we start with the supposition that there is only one primal stuff or material in the world, a stuff of which everything is composed, and if we call that stuff 'pure experience,' then knowing can easily be explained as a particular sort of relation towards one another into which portions of pure experience may enter. The relation itself is a part of pure experience; one of its 'terms' becomes the subject or bearer of the knowledge, the knower, the other becomes the object known.[23]

All of reality, of what Emerson collectively termed 'Nature', is of one and the same composition for James. It is all 'pure experience', whether of the one who is perceiving or of the object of perception. From a God's eye perspective it is the same event, 'counted twice over', once with respect to the 'knower' and once with respect to 'the object known'. What is being considered, therefore, are not two discrete existents, but a contiguous event made distinct by the relations that make it into subject and object.

For James, these relations include 'conjunctive' and 'cognitive' associations, like space-time, 'similarity', 'difference', serial 'change', 'tendency', 'resistance', 'continuity', 'disparateness' and so forth. They split events and objects into particulars and reconnect them as collectives to assign sense. 'Pure experience' is James's term for events and things in 'naif immediacy',[24] 'the immediate flux of life which furnishes

21 *Op. cit.*, p. 124.
22 'A World of Pure Experience', in *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 24.
23 'Does "Consciousness" Exist?', in *ibid.*, pp. 4-5.
24 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

the material to our later reflection with its conceptual categories'.[25] Inquiry into pure experience, not only as immediacy, but in terms of the relations that are also part of reality, constitutes 'radical empiricism'.

James explains this theory in a concrete example: thinking about Memorial Hall at Harvard.[26] One may have in mind the name 'Memorial Hall' or a 'clear' or 'dim' image of the building. In any case, these understandings have nothing to do with the 'cognitive function' the building holds. It is in the extrinsic 'conjunction' of the conception with the Hall itself that grants the image its 'knowing office'.

For example, if queried further, one might describe a different building, or a structure that resembled it. The similitude would be incorrrect, in the former case, or coincidental, in the latter, and meaningless. If, however, one could point out the Hall, or describe its architecture and history, or describe some unique detail about it, even imperfectly, the idea would be 'led to' and 'terminate' in the reality. If these relations of place, extension and detail 'of the image and of the felt hall run parallel, so that each term of the one context corresponds serially' then the 'percept was what I meant, for into my idea has passed by conjunctive experiences of sameness and fulfilled intention'. For James, if this becomes the case, then the conception of the Hall 'becomes' true.

These relations are not transcendental in the Kantian sense, but experiential and practical. Experience occurs and pragmatic needs justify certain relations and exclude others. 'Knowledge of sensible realities thus comes to life inside the tissue of experience'. James describes it sensually, as a feeling of 'fit' or the lack of a 'jar' when experience runs from the idea to the object. Radical empiricism shares with empiricism this emphasis on 'plural facts': 'the part, the element, the individual, and treats the whole as a collection and the universal as an abstraction'.[27] But radical empiricism is *radical* because it includes the numerous practical *relations* that order understanding. For James, they are as much a part of reality, of nature, as 'naif immediacy'.

Another entrée into James's theory of pure experience is through the notion of subjective consciousness. James began to conceive of the self less as a substantial entity than an on-going activity collected around, or constructed by, relations amongst 'chunks' of pure experience. This functional view arose from James's physical experiments and a growing psychological view of mind as brain activity – serial electrical events in the nervous system, rather than a distinct faculty or substantial *ego*. It was also a reaction against Kantian and empirical models that portrayed mind as a processor of discrete sensations. For James, this view could not account for the 'feeling' of self-continuity moving from experience to experience:

> Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. Such words as 'chain' or 'train' do not describe it fitly as it presents itself in the first instance. It is nothing jointed; it flows. A 'river' or 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. *In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life.*[28]

25 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

26 *Ibid*., pp. 28-29.

27 *Ibid*., p. 22.

28 William James, *The Principles of Psychology, Volume I* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 233.

The 'stream of consciousness' is James's most famous metaphor. It follows Emerson's Transcendentalist paradigm, reconstructing thought and likening it to nature. But more than expression, James connects with the content of Emerson's earlier notion. The activity of James's 'stream of consciousness' parallels Emerson's rational subjectivity in 'abandonment'. A 'stream' or river' exists in a constant state of movement, a 'flux' to use a favourite Jamesean descriptive.

The stream overcomes where it was before to attain its present position each moment. The stream has identity not in static existence, but in the process of flowing itself. Its identity is found in Emersonian 'ecstasy' or Peircean 'tychism', propelling forward, rolling over each momentary end. The ostensible 'goal' of the stream may be its arrival and joining of a lake or ocean, but then again this only raises the question of beginning a new Emersonian 'circle'. The content of the stream may evaporate, turn into rain, and rejoin as another stream at some future point, and so on, *ad infinitum*.

James's naturalistic metaphor balances two countervailing tendencies in pragmatism. The stream is a process conforming to natural laws. It flows in a direction. It affects and is affected by landscape, but nonetheless remains a *continuous* flow as a stream. This model incorporates the idea of continuity as a 'conjunctive relation' that exists in pure experience that traditional rationalistic and empirical descriptions frequently leave out or consider as superadded conceptual content. James conceived the stream of consciousness as 'the name for a series of experiences run together by definite transitions'.[29] Consciousness is organised by the manifest relations shaped by and shaping pure experience into fluid knowing.

Yet, as continuity exemplifies one type of relation, *discontinuity* is also important for James. In fact, multiple and over-lapping relations in pure experience illustrates that 'our universe is to a large extent chaotic'. Pure experience is also similar to Emerson's 'Nature'; it is a complex and 'ecstatic' process. It exhibits myriad continuities and discontinuities, combining order with apparent randomness. One experience leads to another, expanding in innumerable directions towards infinitely new possibilities. It is also reminiscent of Peirce's tychic universe, where there is always 'arbitrariness' and 'chance' at 'play' that is never exhausted:

> [E]xperience as a whole process in time, whereby innumerable particular terms lapse and are superseded by others that follow upon them by transitions which, whether disjunctive or conjunctive in content, are themselves experiences and must in general be accounted at least as real as the terms which they relate. …In such a world transitions and arrivals (or terminations) are the only events that happen, tho they happen by so many sorts of paths. …But the whole system of experiences as they are immediately given presents itself as a quasi-chaos through which one can pass out of an initial term in many directions and yet end in the same terminus, moving from next to next by a great many possible paths.[30]

James refers to radical empiricism, the philosophy of pure experience, as 'mosaic philosophy'. Like a mosaic artwork, pure experience is composed of innumerable, irregular shards, i.e. events, objects and thoughts, as well as the relations cementing

29 *Op. cit.*, p. 39.

30 *Ibid*., pp. 31-32.

pieces to each other. These edges describe the limit of every piece and disjunction from the other, yet they endow the texture and shape that creates the picture. James's radical empiricism, as the pragmatic philosophy of pure experience, sees meaning in disjunction and conjunction, ambiguity as well as certainty, 'in the transitions as much as in the terms connected'.[31]

'The Pluralistic Universe' and Religious Understanding

The culmination of James's pure experience is belief in the infinity of the universe. This infinity is theological, but not in the traditional sense. It is more like the mathematical infinity between two points or two moments rather than an infinity of another metaphysical order outside pure experience. Pure experience is not a closed system. It contains infinity within it. It is infinite in multifarious complexity:

> For pluralism, all that we are required to admit as the constitution of reality is what we ourselves find empirically realized in every minimum of finite life. Briefly, it is this, that nothing real is absolutely simple, that every smallest bit of experience is a *multum in parvo* plurally related, that each relation is one aspect, character, or function, way of its being taken, or way of its taking something else; and that bit of reality when actively engaged in one of these relations is not *by that very fact* engaged in all the other relations simultaneously.[32]

James describes this pluralistic universe as a 'multiverse'.[33] Its organisation is irreducible, ever-changing and incomplete. He contrasts this view with monism, i.e. epistemological monism, which explains away the 'manyness' by means of the concept of 'oneness', the result of which is to remove infinity from the realm of finite. According to James, monism leads to dualism because it sets the infinite over and against the finite: either in a philosophical notion such as Kant's noumenal realm, or in religious notions of heaven or hell, or in a wholly other deity.

For James, such views trivialise reality. Like Emerson, he sees the 'ordinary' as 'extraordinary' and his 'multiverse' does not need to refer outside itself. It contains the infinite internally and already possesses access to the divine. God is in the process of pure experience and, thus, cannot be unfamiliar or external to us. Echoing Emerson's transparent eyeball, James says:

> We are indeed internal parts of God and not external creations, on any possible reading of the panpsychic system. Yet because God is not the [monistic] absolute, but is himself a part when the system is conceived pluralistically, his functions can be taken as not wholly dissimilar to those of the other smaller parts – as similar to our functions consequently.[34]

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31 *Ibid.*, p. 42.

32 William James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 145.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 146.

34 *Ibid*., pp. 143-44.

God is immanent in James's multiverse. The notion of transcendence drops out. The immanent world of pure experience, in James's view, is infused with the holy. Likewise, if God is part of the pure experience in which subjectivity participates, we are also 'internal parts of God'.

The upshot of pure experience is recognition of this inherent theological dimension. For James, epistemologically-speaking, it is not that religious faith is one part of subjective reason, but that theological reason flows across all thought. All areas cross over and 'interpenetrate', to borrow Putnam's description of James's pragmatism.[35] This interpenetration is an expression of pragmatism's holism, and it is important to note that for James the paradigm is thinking about religious experience.

James's most famous discussion of pragmatism and religion was in his Gifford Lectures, published as *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. It was amongst his least philosophical, treating its subject in largely socio-psychological terms. Its popularity has diminished his consideration as a serious thinker and led to misinterpretation of his pragmatism.[36] Nonetheless, it continues to be heralded, recently by Charles Taylor, whose 1999 Gifford Lectures titled '*Varieties of Religion Today'* takes as its subject James's own of almost a century earlier.[37]

James summarised 'the characteristics of the religious life' in *The Varieties*:

1. That the visible world is part of a more spiritual universe from which it draws its chief significance;
2. That union or harmonious relation with that higher universe is our true end;
3. That prayer or inner communion with the spirit therefore of – be that spirit 'God' or 'law'– is a process wherein work is really done, and spiritual energy flows in and produces effects, psychological or material, within the phenomenal world. Religion includes also the following psychological characteristics:–
4. A new zest which adds itself like a gift to life, and takes the form either of appeal to earnestness or heroism.
5. An assurance of safety and a temper of peace, and, in relation to others, a preponderance of loving affections.[38]

James's interest is '[t]he intellectualism in religion which I wish to discredit' and the defence, especially in 4 and 5, of his unabashed 'sentimentalism'. In broad strokes, he applies 'the principle of pragmatism' to write off most 'dogmatic theology' as 'destitute of all intelligible significance'. [39] Such statements, albeit in the rhetorical setting of a lecture, imbue the *Varieties* with anti-intellectualism.

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35 *Pragmatism* and *The Meaning of Truth*, p. 7.

36 Nicholas Lash, drawing on the *Varieties*, considers James a 'latent' 'Cartesian' and a 'patron sage' for the 'displacement of religion from the realm of truth'. *Cf. The Beginning and End of 'Religion'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.105, 110.

37 Charles Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

38 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), p. 377.

39 *Ibid.*, pp. 339 and 348-49, respectively.

However, a deeper concern lies beneath his sentimentalising. First, was the creep of science into religion, especially the attempt to define religion 'scientifically'. For James, science's claim to 'escape subjective standards' in understanding 'theological constructions' was not only counter to pragmatism, but to even the most naïve religious experience. Science, in James's view, cannot define what is by definition mysterious. And for all his championing of the pragmatic maxim that arose from science, James was especially critical of theologians who fashioned doctrine into empirical science-like 'systematics'. He thought they undermined religious faith from within, theorising the ineffable out of faith.[40] James's hesitancy recalls Peirce, who wanted to protect the rational procedures of theology from the hegemony of science.

The second notion James resisted was the social and political power of institutional religion, which, in his view, sublated the dignity of the individual and pluriform religious experience in favour of the forms, categories and polities of established faith. James, like Emerson, was foremost a religionist of the individual. It was not that he was against organised religion *per se*, whether Roman Catholicism or Protestantism, for insisting experience conform to 'dogma'. It was just that James thought the latter remained more open for new possibilities than the former.[41]

James's pragmatic theology emphasises the democratic impulse against normalisation of religious experience. With Emerson, he saw this as the one area where freedom of individuals was sacrosanct. The individual experience, epitomised in the transparent eyeball, did not require a mediating body or formula. For James and Emerson, they stood in the way of authentic religious experience. They misled individuals by valorising the route of others instead of seeking out on one's own.

Finally, privileging of the norms of institutional religion led to a further problem for James. Institutions, religious and otherwise, posit particular roles and ends for their members. The stream of consciousness, however, meanders. What future religious experience, and therefore future religion, might look like is not something that can be anticipated beforehand. For James, religious experience typifies the highest human experience and aspiration. Following Emerson, he saw it as necessarily open-ended, and the language for it infinitely revisable.

This is the reason for the 'varieties of religious experience', rather than a single, paradigmatic experience. Religious experience was the ultimate expression of rational experience for James, which was, in turn, the ultimate *mysterium.* Its future varieties were unanticipatible and, like pure experience, its reconstructions limitless.

Some commentators, notably Nicholas Lash, correctly point out that James's methodology in the *Varieties* over-emphasises the importance of 'feeling' and 'sensation'.[42] This concern is partly epistemological and partly theological. It is epistemological in the sense that Lash believes it predisposes James and other pragmatists to submit theological reason to the primacy of differing subjective experiences rather than to its ostensible rational object, i.e. the notion of God.

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40 *Ibid*., pp. 14, 337f.

41 *Ibid.*, pp. 337-56.

42 Nicholas Lash, *Easter In Ordinary: Reflections on Human Experience and the Knowledge of God* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), pp. 71-77.

This issue has limited purchase, when it is recalled that James lived before the so-called Wittgensteinian turn to language, and because of the fact that Lash interprets James's epistemology as a Kant-syle 'dualism', whereas James understood himself as rejecting such dualism for holistic.[43]

Also, as David C. Lamberth points out, contrary to Lash, James's appeal to 'the "immediate experience of life" is clearly not a wholesale anti-rational move, but rather a balancing or recalibration of the whole philosophical enterprise…'.[44] In other words, given James's historical context, he was not making a wholesale appeal to 'immediate experience' over reason when it comes to religious faith, but re-thematising experience against the totalising rationalism of the day. James's aim was to restore 'conceptual thought to its "proper," practical context', bringing thought and experience together in a holistic pragmatic understanding.[45]

Lash is correct on the theological side, however, on two accounts. First, he rightly sees James's naturalistic imagery and practical emphasis leading in the direction of 'pantheism' (although more accurately pan*en*theism, to use H. Richard Niebuhr's term). This, of course, was a tendency inherited from the Transcendental and Romantic influences that went into James's thinking. It is not a necessary direction, as Peirce remained a committed Trinitarian even though, like James, he adopted the same 'exuberant use of physical imagery' that Lash disdains as borderline idolatrous.[46] Lash also has another concern, that the emphasis on personalistic experience and the sustained criticism of institutions leads James to an incipient anti-Roman Catholicism or, at least, pro-Protestantism.[47] Given James's panentheism, however, it is not at all clear that his Romantic-Transcendentalist thought would be amenable to orthodox Protestant theology and, in fact, it largely has not.

The Emerging Scientific-Romantic Understanding

James's pragmatism merges the Romantic-Transcendentalist epistemology of Emerson with the scientific-oriented methodology of Peirce. Peirce was also indebted to Emerson, and to Romantic epistemological behind him, even considering himself a 'Schellingian'. He created an intricate philosophy, with creative neologisms to describe his Romantic view of the operations of mind and nature. Yet, he was a scientist in the Enlightenment mode and ambivalent about extending the pragmatic maxim into other areas of inquiry. Peirce's pragmatism is best understood with a view towards his whole thought, as a corrigible, communal, holistic and practical approach to epistemology. James, although also an applied scientist, extended pragmatism as a general maxim for all rational inquiry. He followed Emerson and Peirce describing a Romantic view of mind and nature, adapting pragmatic methodology across the spectrum of subjective rationality, from science to religious faith.

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43 *Ibid.*, pp. 80-82.

44 David C. Lamberth, *William James and the Metaphysics of Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 182.

45 *Ibid.*

46 *Op. cit.*, p. 81.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 54, footnote 7.

Peirce and James share an Emersonian aversion to teleology, influenced by the Romantic theme of open-ended development and evolutionary thought. They also share anti-dualism, conceiving the relationship between mind and nature as a holistic identity. This combination of 'ecstasy' and 'abandonment' and 'tychism', combined with the connection of 'transparency' or 'synechism' is typified in religious experience.

They viewed knowledge as fallibilistic, revisable and progressive, and balanced this against a practical view of 'direct' or 'natural' realism. Rational subjectivity is not a spectator of the world, but a co-participant. Epistemological agency is informed by *praxis* in a world of constant 'flux'. For Peirce and James, this epistemology does not end in sceptical relativism or idealism. It makes possible the non-arbitrary character of rationality. Because of mind's situatedness it can assert strong truth-claims, even in a world of change.

A certain shape of classical pragmatism, and of its founders, is emerging. Pragmatism inherits from Emerson a Romantic theory of knowledge, portrayed in theological terms. It inherits from scientific practice a discipline and a theory of direct realism that grounds thought in ordinary experience.

Classical pragmatism develops from deep Anglo-European sources. It also reacts against them. On the surface, there is nothing peculiarly American about pragmatism. Indeed, from its earliest days it had proponents across the Atlantic, from F. C. S. Schiller at Oxford to Henri Bergson in France.[48] What classical pragmatism conceived was not an American way of thinking, but a right way of conducting philosophy. Yet, these influences were brought together and expressed in constructive epistemology in the particular intellectual matrix of a country trying to account for its difference.

James and Dewey, like Emerson, also share a pragmatic experimentalism with respect to the theological. Even Peirce, who resisted the outright expansion of the pragmatic maxim, reconstructed notions about the world such as 'synechism' and 'tychism' that have a Romantic theological connection. But Peirce experimented more around the edges of theology, whereas James dove straight in. The theological was central to James's conception of thought as a whole, and his theological reconstructions saturate the entire project.

48 Betrand Russell calls Jamesian pragmatism a form of 'Bergsonianism'. *Cf. History of Western Philosophy* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1946), p. 846.

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Chapter 5

Dewey

John Dewey (1859-1952) is the middle figure in the roll-call of pragmatists, commanding the American philosophical scene from a generation after Peirce and James to a generation before the revival known as 'neopragmatism'. But as a one-time student of Peirce, Dewey saw little prospect for his thought:

> I am not taking the course in Logic. The course is very mathematical, & by Logic, Mr. Peirce means only an account of the methods of physical sciences, put in mathematical form as far as possible. It's more of a scientific, than philosophical course. In fact, I think Mr. Peirce don't [sic] think there is any Phil. outside the generalizations of physical science.[1]

It would be another twenty years before Dewey reassessed Peirce's philosophy and really encountered him for the first time. By then, the 'generalizations of physical science' themselves changed in light of Darwin, Heisenberg and Schrödinger and he found in Peirce's scientifically-oriented pragmatism the ideals of democratic, fallibilistic inquiry to develop further in his own pragmatic epistemology.

Dewey's over-riding belief is that philosophy should model itself on the methodological success of the natural sciences. All areas of inquiry – 'morality', 'politics', 'economics', the 'fine arts' and 'religion' – should learn from science, specifically as it has developed since the Enlightenment.

Dewey's Evolutionary Pragmatism

For Dewey, the emblematic figure of the modern world is Francis Bacon.[2] Bacon's aphorism 'Knowledge is power' is the historical antecedent of the pragmatic maxim. It sums up the practical impulse in epistemology tracing from Aristotle to Kant, but that has been subordinate to the theoretical. Bacon, however, recognised that knowledge *qua* knowledge must be activated in practice. It cannot remain abstract, the Cartesian activity of reason thinking about itself. To constitute *real* knowledge, it must be based upon and promote *actual* change in the world.

Dewey took up Bacon because of Bacon's championing of the new 'inductive' science over the view of truth promoted by earlier philosophy. Classical and medieval science directed inquiry towards the conquest of mind rather than nature. Reason possessed an ideal method proceeding from itself, analytic or *a priori* reason,

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1 Cited from correspondence in Alan Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), p. 74.

2 John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), pp. 28-29.

such that only that which is already known implicitly can be learned. Knowledge, according to this view, unites particular truths of the senses with the universal truths of reason.[3]

For Dewey, traditional philosophical logic is a species of such inquiry, from syllogistic demonstration of the universal in the particular to entailment of the particular from the universal. This mode of inquiry is rational-theoretical, the *a priori* type also criticised by Peirce. It marks physical change as of imperfection, either the decadent result of unification of matter with the ideal in reality, the Platonic view, or the limited progress from potentiality to actuality and, ultimately, its logically prior and rationally identified *telos*, the Aristotelian view.

Post-Baconian science overturns these views and their ensconced hierarchies. First amongst them is the primacy of idea/form/reason over matter/nature/physical reality.[4] The former grouping is the realm of pure thought and the latter, the realm of *praxis* or action. Pure activity was sharply delineated from the practical, which it subordinated, according to this view.

For Dewey this unjustifiable epistemological prejudice leads to the second notion modern science overturned: stability for thought requires that truth must be unchanging. The practical world by its nature changes, change is always contingent and therefore it is untrustworthy, in this view. The pure theoretical, conversely, is constant, or at least admits of less 'real' change since it is ideal, thus more perfect. Truth conceived as universal and unchanging resides in realm of thought and can only be discerned through the disinterested faculty of pure reason. This view is true not only in the pre-Baconian model, but in modern epistemologies like Kant's.

This points to the third notion modern science rejects, the strict epistemological distinction between mind and world. Reason in earlier philosophy reflected upon what was antecedent to practical experience and, largely indifferent to what was outside the mental act of observation, epistemologically 'certified' reality in all its qualitatively different and ontologically hierarchical manifestations. This theory of mind, according to Dewey, was the 'spectator view of knowledge', criticised by Peirce and James. It assumed a fundamental distinction between knower and the known, an epistemological division reverting to the first primacy of pre-Baconian science, that of thought over nature:

> The division of the world into two kinds of Being, one superior, accessible only to reason and ideal in nature, the other inferior, material, changeable, empirical, accessible to sense-observation, turns inevitably into the idea that knowledge is contemplative in nature. It assumes a contrast between theory and practice which was all to the disadvantage of the latter. But in the actual course of the development of science, a tremendous change has come about. When the practice of knowledge ceased to be dialectical and became experimental, knowing became preoccupied with changes and the test of knowledge became the ability to bring about certain changes.[5]

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3 *Ibid*., p. 31.

4 John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty: A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1930), pp. 20f.

5 *Op. cit*., p. 121.

Modern science's experimental attitude exploded the division between mind and nature, observer and observed, change and truth, for Dewey. The observer, in the example of the experiment, is in James's term a 'human coefficient' of the truth being observed.[6] The 'observer' is not an observer *per se*, but an epistemological 'participant'.

Furthermore, after Bacon scientific truth was formulated with at least the possibility of provisionality, rather than as quality. Modern scientific methods, with new hypotheses and experiments, revise the notion of truth all the time. Truth had been reconfigured in terms of the dynamic rather than the static, positing a world shown to be observationally relative by Einstein and infinitely variable by Darwin.[7]

The result affirms the practical over the theoretical, exemplified in the experimental spirit and creative techniques of modern science. Theory involves modification of the environment of which the scientist is an intrinsic part as agent of change. This is the nature of scientific 'testing'. Science cannot proceed if the scientist is a 'spectator', as in the earlier paradigm. For Dewey and the other pragmatists, the test of the truth means more than instrumental involvement in the process. It means live investment in the consequences of an experiment, tied to real change in effect. The impact of theory in ordinary life was the pragmatic value by which science is judged for Dewey. Like Emerson, except from the side of science, he recuperated the value of the ordinary and the role of practical action in bringing about change.

One modification exchanges the notion of 'data' for the components of experience.[8] Weather, molecules, soils, behaviour and so forth temporarily become 'data' in the course of scientific inquiry. They are not intrinsically one thing or another; rather they are tools producing a specific change to be tested. Their value is relative to the experiment in effects, both predicted and unexpected. For the experiment, they cannot hold independent identity, whether phrased in terms of a 'pre-existent' nature, or something else. The 'nature' of data is a function of the experiment, i.e. what changes it can be utilised to bring about. This value can only be determined from the result of the experiment, not prior to it.

Modern science also inverts a number of suppositions not only of earlier science, but philosophy. For Dewey, the most important of these included the primacy of the practical over the theoretical, the promotion of the notion of change over the ideal of fixity and characterising the thinker as agent, interdependent with the reality acted upon rather than an objective. This final inversion for Dewey jettisoned the central metaphysical dualism of philosophy, the separation of rational consciousness and nature.

As with James, mind is embedded in larger natural processes. Manipulation, modification and interaction with reality make possible the claims of rationality. Modern science exemplifies this in its experimental practice and in its view of truth. Truth is testable, revisable and, therefore, corrigible and progressive. It does away with metaphysical essence and kind. As modern science did away with the

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6 *Pragmatism* and *The Meaning of Truth*, p. 281.

7 John Dewey, *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy and Other Essays* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1997), pp.1-19 and *Reconstruction in Philosoph.*, pp. 140-41.

8 *Ibid*., pp. 165-66.

mechanics of Aristotelian and medieval causality, especially the notion of 'final cause', so should philosophy and theology, in Dewey's view.

Dewey extends the features of scientific methodology into other areas, following James's augmentation of Peirce's pragmatic maxim. However, for James and Peirce the pragmatic maxim derives as much from the theory of direct realism as the methodological success of science. Science provides the most effective explanation for the verification of truths and their subsequent revision, given new discoveries. Always tied to this scientific side of pragmatism, to pragmatism seen as a verification process, was the common-sense view towards our ordinary stock of beliefs relating to the way the world actually is.

For the two earlier pragmatists, authentic doubt, as opposed to the forced philosophical doubt of Descartes or Hume, is what originates inquiry. Belief is what brings doubt and, therefore, inquiry to end. For Peirce especially, one cannot force doubt onto non-controversial issues, such as the reality of the world around us, the existence of other minds and so forth.

The pragmatist position turned the tables on the sceptics, requiring doubt at least as much justification as belief. Peirce called this position 'critical common-senseism'. Scientists create doubt artificially, but only in the context of hypothesising in 'thought experiments' tested against reality. James developed 'natural' realism, a direct epistemology that, although revisable, connects truth to the reality.[9]

Dewey distinguishes himself not by giving up direct realism, but in shifting emphasis to the verificationist side of pragmatism. If, for Emerson and the other classical pragmatists, epistemology balances at the mid-point between verificationism and direct realism, Dewey moves closer to verificationism. Dewey expands the fallibilistic method of science into other spheres of inquiry and qualifies the notion of 'belief' and 'knowledge with 'warranted assertion' and 'warranted assertibility':

> What has been said helps to explain why the term 'warranted assertion' is preferred to the terms *belief* and *knowledge*. It is free from the ambiguity of these latter terms, and it involves reference to inquiry as that which warrants assertion. When knowledge is taken as a general abstract term related to inquiry in the abstract, it means 'warranted assertibility.' The use of a term that designates a potentiality rather than an actuality involves recognition that all special conclusions of special inquiries are part of an enterprise that is continually renewed, or is a going concern.[10]

For Dewey, the concept 'truth' itself is problematic in a way not found in Peirce and James. It carried the metaphysical baggage of a one-to-one correspondence theory of truth of the pre-Baconian philosophy he wanted to overcome. Instead of 'Truth', Dewey sees multiple concrete 'truths' provisionally accepted by a community of inquirers. Even after they confirm a theory 'true' it is subject to further revision, evidence permitting.

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9 *Op. cit.*, pp. 270-73.

10 John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, in *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953, Volume 12: 1938*, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), pp. 16-17.

Dewey calls this process of revamping truth 'warranted assertibility', in preference to the notion that inquiry ends in 'the truth' itself.[11] He considers the Peircean notion of an ideal end-point of inquiry not simply wrong, but wrong-headed. It posits closure to what is in practice an open-ended process of inquiry.

Modern science presents for Dewey a view of truth that is testable and revisable, as opposed to the *a priori* method of the middle ages or even the monological, synthetic *a priori* method of Kant. For him, this difference means that truth has a *public* character. That is, truth must be 'assertibly warranted' by others in order to be true. The process involves the submission of truth-claims, and the methodology, for confirmation or rejection by what Peirce characterises the 'community of inquirers'.

Pragmatism and Democracy

If inquiry requires inter-subjective verification, then for Dewey this also entails revision of the notions of 'inquirer' and 'community'. A new scientific-inspired anthropology must give primacy to free, creative and critical inquiry, and a new scientific-inspired politics must create an environment for the greatest degree of exchange amongst individuals. Inquiry must be unrestricted and democratic, rather than privilege a pre-established thinking class. Dewey's conception of the democratic community of inquirers is a collection of Emersonian perfectionists reflecting upon the ecstatic universe:

> A philosophy animated, be it unconsciously or consciously, by the strivings of men to achieve democracy will construe liberty as meaning a universe in which there is real uncertainty and contingency, a world which is not all in, and never will be, a world which in some respect is incomplete and in the making, and which in these respects may be made this way or that according as men judge, prize, love and labor.[12]

Dewey's criticism of pre-Baconian science has less to do with viability for its time, than with residual social implications. For Dewey, features of the medieval worldview, such as the qualitatively ordered and hierarchical ontology, had continuing effects in political and economic life. Examples of this reactionary strain include the strict separation between ruler/ruling class and subject and the professionalisation of an intellectual class, such as clerics and scholars and, Dewey adds, their modern-day equivalent, the specialised scientist.

The public nature of truth in modern science upends traditional sources of authority and problematises the social systems deriving from their metaphysics. The principal reason philosophy, art, politics and religion did not enjoy the success of the natural sciences for Dewey is because they retain institutionalised norms and authorities that are essentially premodern.[13] Instead of adopting the methodology

11 Dewey used the anomalous spelling *'assertibility'* and its cognates.

12 John Dewey, 'Philosophy and Democracy', in *The Political Writings of John Dewey*, ed. by Debra Morris and Ian Shapiro (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), p. 44.

13 *The Quest for Certainty*, pp. 52-54.

of the natural sciences, they took its success as a threat to their own domains of meaning. They entrenched themselves in systems of thought with sharp territorial divisions, where a fund of 'special' knowledge (e.g. philosophical or theological) is made cognitively inaccessible. Kant's attempt at a 'truce' between pure scientific and practical knowledge is the paradigmatic example for Dewey.[14] It is a false truce leading to spheres of knowledge treated as second-class.

The most pernicious convictions of philosophy derive from its anti-democratic, *a priori* epistemological background for Dewey. Like Emerson, Peirce and James he especially attacked teleology. Teleological thinking leads philosophy into a collective psychological determinism, even 'fatalism', about the ends of human life. Teleological thinking had run its course as a viable system, falling into self-contradiction in the modern scientific and democratic context, but its influence was still felt.[15] For Dewey, philosophy and theology retain the notion of a pre-established goal of existence in the model of eternal truth. That model encourages people to defer freedom to make creative and responsible choices about goods and ends to ameliorate practical human problems.

The 'uncertainty' he believes motivates the teleological view should not, cannot, be avoided in life. Instead, uncertainty needs to be epistemologically reclaimed. Following Emerson, Peirce and James, Dewey conceives of it as a positive. For science, uncertainty in the form of questioning is the catalyst for discovery. It propels the creation of new theories and leads to technologies to improve the material conditions of existence. 'Uncertainty', 'vagueness' and so forth do not threaten rationality; for Dewey they are its *raison d'être*.

Dewey sees the advent of modernity as a collective coming-to-terms with the human condition of uncertainty, in much the same way as the existentialists.[16] It is a transitional time when we are forced to discover resources and answers to human problems amongst ourselves, rather than in metaphysical constructs. It is a time of opportunity to radically reconceive the view towards 'ends' in the fashion of Emerson, Peirce and Dewey. Before, they were considered *a priori*. Now we should see them as goals we decide upon collectively, and then bring about through direct action in human affairs.

Radical change in worldview has to begin from the ground up. The leading figure of progressive education in twentieth century America, Dewey emphasised critical thinking skills over content, creativity over memorisation and social co-operation over individualistic competition. Such an education would prepare people for active participation in inquiry, not submit to the authority of scientists and politicians:

> The best guarantee of collective efficiency and power is liberation and use of the diversity of individual capacities in initiative, planning, foresight, vigor and endurance. Personality must be educated, and personality cannot be educated by confining its operations to technical and specialized things, or to the less important relationships of life. Full education

14 *Ibid*., p. 59.

15 John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover Books, 1958), pp. 149-51.

16 *Cf*. especially Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), and Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1956).

> comes only when there is a responsible share on the part of each person, in proportion to capacity, in shaping the aims and policies of the social groups to which he belongs. This fact fixes the significance of democracy.[17]

Epistemology and politics are inextricably connected for Dewey. Whereas ancient and medieval cultures viewed knowledge, like society, as hierarchical and strictly delineable, the modern scientific world models thinks along a continuum. Democracy is the polity for inquiry in the modern scientific age for Dewey. But it holds a deeper epistemological significance as well as the background notion to the idea of truth as 'warranted assertibility'. If truth has a public character, the better educated and more creative society aids it in determining better warrant, leading to more effective action in the world.

Dewey sounds overly optimistic of the benefits of scientific methodology. His criticism of pre-modern inquiry is thoroughgoing, and his admiration of the technological mastery of modernity so extensive. He appears to replace the hegemony of *a priori* reason with a scientific culture that Peirce warned would mean the colonisation of religion. The revised introduction to *Reconstruction in Philosophy* addresses this concern:

> Those who maintain this premise [the dystopian view of science] refuse to note that 'science' has a copartner in producing our critical situation. It takes an eye single to the facts to observe that science, instead of operating in a void, works within an institutional state of affairs developed in pre-scientific days, one which is not modified by scientific inquiry into the moral principles that were then formed and were, presumably, appropriate to it.[18]

Dewey's position is that the inhumane application of scientific methodology is not the fault of science alone. It points equally to the failure of philosophy and theology. The effect of these changes for is largely technological and pragmatic, *i.e.* they brought about a *practical* difference in the way we experience our lives. Philosophy and theology did not properly account for and provide an adequate reconstruction of human powers in the changed world. For Dewey a proper accounting and reconstruction require a critique of the most basic concepts we use to order our lives.

The Second World War looms behind Dewey's reissue introduction. Prior to the war, technology did not exist to effectively wipe out entire cities and regions. But the advent of heavy ordnance, especially atomic weaponry, changed that picture. Humans now hold the power to accomplish what before was conceived possible only through catastrophic natural disaster or divine prerogative. The proliferation of nuclear technology in particular now gave humankind the ultimate power of global apocalypse. The rise of modern technological warfare now effectively arrogates a mythic, even a divine power, to humankind. Doing so, it also radically alters the notion of humanity.

The effect of nuclear consciousness, now perhaps the analogue is environmental consciousness, should carry over to every sphere of human knowledge, especially

17 *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, p. 209.

18 *Ibid.*, p. xxiv. Originally published in 1920; reissued in 1948.

into philosophy and theology, according to Dewey. The changed conditions should lead them to revise notions of appropriate ends of human nature and conduct. In Deweyan terms, if we now hold apocalyptic power, we should revise not only our ideas of what it means to act humanely, but to also be human.

Likewise, such reconsideration should lead to other spheres of human understanding. For Dewey, it should cause a refiguration of political alliances and even political structures, governments and economies. Such a reconstruction has further implications for larger collective concepts like 'international community' and 'global environment'. And since nuclear awareness brings with it a new sense of our collective contingency and welfare, it also brings with it new dimensions to the moral and aesthetic and, ultimately, the religious, requiring the rethinking of all rationality against the new backdrop.

The failure of philosophy and theology to adapt to the rapidly changing world is not only a sign of their increasing irrelevance in modern society, but their growing immorality for Dewey. Disconnecting from lived experience, they retreat into anachronistic, premodern forms of thought, such as classical teleology. Taking the cue from the success of modern science, philosophy and theology could undertake a redescriptive self-inventory of their fund of categories and concepts, revising them in light of the changed reality. In this manner, according to Dewey, all thought could become 'scientific', i.e., *pragmatic*, *experimental* and *reconstructive*.

Deweyan philosophical reconstruction is an architectonic cultural project, where earlier conceptions of human understanding are tested pragmatically against the changed reality. To the extent that notions explain and direct activity effectively, they should be retained. If not, they should be discarded or reconstructed. In that case, new notions can be sought in experimentation and subjected to evaluation in practical experience. An epistemology proceeding in such a way would bring about a true 'Copernican revolution' in thought, relevant to evolving human needs.[19]

Evolution, Modern Physics and Pragmatist Epistemology

Dewey identifies three major and interconnected conceptual changes in the worldview for philosophy to accommodate. The first, democratic pluralism in methodology, is discussed above. The other two are Darwinian biology, a change earlier incorporated into Peircean and Jamesean pragmatism, and Einsteinian physics. These last two influences combine to take human self-understanding beyond the ancient and medieval worldview, and the Newtonian as well.

Darwin changed the view of reality by showing that the biological universe is in a constant state of flux adapting to and modifying its environment. Instead of conceiving of the world as rooted in eternally changeless ideals, the new Darwinian paradigm promotes what Emersonian Transcendentalism drew from earlier Romanticism, not only the ideal, but the necessity of eternal changeability.[20] The Greek notion of *eidos*

19 *Ibid*., p. 276. Dewey considers Kant's revolution to be 'Ptolemaic' rather than 'Copernican'. Kant's philosophical method places the independent rational thinker in the centre of the philosophical universe, rather than the democratic society.

20 *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy*, pp. 1-19.

(species), fundamental to ancient and mediaeval science and understood as formally established differentiation in being, was now understood as open-ended.

If these absolute divisions within reality break down, then the notion of *telos* proper to each level must be revised as well. Dewey thought Darwin encourages philosophy to think of the organisation and goal of human life in open-ended development, the collective choice of humans rather than biologically or supernaturally directed. This change requires deciding upon and seeking of our collective ends in reality, with the *caveat* that as the conditions of experience change, so too should the goals to which we aspire.

For Dewey, Einsteinian physics likewise alters our understanding of self, refuting the traditional understanding of space and time.[21] The Newtonian world measured change against a mathematically constant notion of space and time, within any field of observation. Einstein, however, challenged this core notion from within science itself. He attempted to reconcile Newtonian physics with the problem of simultaneity in light dynamics in two different fields of observation.

Einstein's experiment runs like this: two flashes of light occur in separate fields at different times and are reflected into a mirror placed midway between the origin of the two flashes. They are simultaneous if they are then included in the same field of observation.[22] This arrangement reverses the order of Newtonian science. It measures space, time and motion as functions of the characters within the experiment, rather than as constants. Whereas Newtonian physics depends upon observed consequences of experiment set against these constants, the new science altered those putative constants as a function of its practice.

Einstein's insight was revolutionary, accomplishing for the measurement of space and time what Darwin did for the traditional notions of species and ends. Space and time did not possess inherent properties, rather they specified for particular relations of events. Lost is the fixed notion of the most basic laws of physics, at least on an inter-stellar scale. Gained is a way of translating events, formerly understood as discrete, in terms of their relation to each other. For Dewey, after Einstein, understanding such a physical event now *required* consideration of relationality of event to event, and observer to event.

As with Darwin, this practical scientific discovery held further epistemological implications for philosophy and theology. Einstein broke down the theoretical separation of the human and natural world, already argued for by Emerson, Peirce and James, at least in part on Romantic grounds arising from religious experience. Now that connection was confirmed by science, in a revised conception of mind. Subjective rationality transformed from disinterested observer, to participant and agent in change, even to the level of the laws of physics. Even compared to Peirce's tychism and James's pure experience, both of which assumed basic physical laws as foundational, Einstein's understanding of the connection between human reason and nature was a revolutionary departure.

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21 *The Quest for Certainty*, pp. 139-41.

22 *Ibid*., pp. 194-95. Relationality/relativity is identified alternately by Dewey in Heisenberg's principle of indeterminancy.

Dewey and Theological Understanding

Dewey criticises philosophy's resistance to the modern view of the world, but theology even more so. Of all the classical pragmatists, including the pantheistically-inclined James, his views on traditional religion are the most unsalutary. He excoriates the metaphysical theories of philosophy of religion, especially scholasticism, and the religious institutions, Roman Catholic and Protestant, that he thinks maintains them for their own benefit, following James in the *Varieties*. 'Religions', for Dewey, promote the permanence of dogma at the expense of pragmatic awareness, which he thinks could liberate humankind from theology's outmoded epistemological presumptions.

Nonetheless, Dewey never dismisses the religious impulse. Instead, he urges the re-evaluation of what constitutes 'the religious', undertaking a reconstruction of religious conceptions in his book *A Common Faith*. Originally delivered as lectures in 1933, the sixty-page treatise constitutes Dewey's only explicitly constructive theological writing. In its few pages, however, is the most concise précis of Dewey's pragmatic reconstructive programme found anywhere in his encyclopaedic *corpus*.

Dewey follows James, rejecting the idea of a single universal thing called 'religion'. According to him, the prevalence of so many different forms of worship and so many diverse understandings of the sacred throughout history decline its characterisation in a single anthropological or sociological concept. Dewey, like Peirce, is sensitive to the distinctiveness of religious faith and its misinterpretation by science. The attempt to prove the universality of the notion, as is the tendency of modern liberal religionists, fails in Dewey's view because it either says too little or too much in attempting to extract a shared characteristic across diverse faiths. Rather, 'religions' exist, but not 'religion', a theological response paralleling his philosophical attitude toward 'truths' and 'Truth'.[23] Dewey speaks of the 'religious' as 'adjectival', rather than as a substantive noun, although doing so he takes licence in universalistic statements about such things as the 'religious attitude' and 'religious morality'.

The religious for Dewey is super-added to experience, not intrinsic to an area of life or particular experience of reality. It is spread across the spectrum of human experience and reflection. It resembles a particularly intense disposition that for Dewey can be taken up with respect to almost anything. A moral experience, for example, can be a religious experience. Reaching the goal of a moral belief gives rise to strong emotions, delivering the subject to rational unification of the self and reconciling it with other people and the world. Likewise, an experience of beauty can spur a religious experience, or a sublime understanding of truth. Dewey describes this quality in typically pragmatic terms:

> The actual religious quality in the experience…is the *effect* produced, the better adjustment in life and its conditions, not the manner and cause of its production. The way in which the experience operated, its function, determines its religious value.[24]

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23 John Dewey, *A Common Faith* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 7.

24 *Ibid*., p. 11.

For Dewey, the religious element of an experience, like the truth of a proposition, arises from the practical situation and is determined after-the-fact. What *precisely* constitutes an experience's religious aspect is not always clear, even then. Dewey was careful not to reduce it to personal feeling in the manner of Schleiermacher, yet for him the religious always carries a strong sense of 'unification' with the wider community or world.[25] This unification, or 'transcendence' can occur in virtually any sphere of life, even for Dewey, mimicking Emerson's transcendental eyeball, in mundane activities like physical labour.

The religious is also closely connected to imagination for Dewey, as for Emerson. Imagination is tied to the ideal, and it is the actualisation of the ideal in reality that constitutes what he calls the 'religious impulse'. In traditional religion, this actualisation is brought about by an external metaphysical force, i.e. God acting in history. In Dewey's reconstructed view, following Emerson and the other classical pragmatists, the ideal is brought about immanently, by human beings imagining goals beyond their present condition and imagining creative ways of carrying out the transformation.

This religious ideal was future-oriented and sublime for Dewey, but he posited the source of the creative orientation in humankind, not the supernatural.[26] Even more than Emerson and James, who also argue for an immanentised view of divinity, Dewey's position is what he calls the 'naturalised' understanding of the religious. It is an anthropomorphised understanding of God. Dewey replaces the sense of awe and reverence toward supernatural reality with a sense of the dignity of human nature when humans strive to imagine the better, and act in creative and co-operative ways to make the better concrete:

> An unseen power controlling our destiny becomes the power of an ideal. All possibilities, as possibilities, are ideal in character. The artist, scientist, citizen, parent, as far as they are actuated by the spirit of their callings, are controlled by the unseen. …Any activity pursued in behalf of an ideal end against obstacles and in spite of threats of personal loss because of conviction of its general and enduring value is religious in quality.[27]

Dewey does not use the word 'mysterious' or 'serendipitous' like James, but it is clear he sees something ineffable in the religious process of imaginative discovery and creative application to reach ideal ends. New ideas and ideals arise in the process of imagining that can never be anticipated and, therefore, it is 'uncertain' and 'ambiguous'. Again, these characteristics are not portrayed as epistemologically deleterious, as in traditional foundational theology, but, following Emerson and the other classical pragmatists, they are the prior possibility for novel theological reconstruction.

The problem with religions institutions for Dewey extends beyond their faith in the supernatural. Even when they hold an immanentised or spiritualised theology, in his view they formulate uncertainty out of it. They attempt to explain away the inexplicable in creed or confession in order to normalise imaginative practice in a

25 *Cf.* F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1948).

26 *Op. cit.*, p. 19.

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 17 and 19.

specific *cultus* and polity. Recalling Emerson's admonitions in the 'Divinity School Address', they treated the religious as a matter of intellectual assent rather than imaginative experience and action.

Dewey ironically saw something anti-religious in the institution of religions. The religious for him was always unpredictable, surprising and risky, aspects normally untenable by institutions. Dewey saw religions as, by their nature, structured, bureaucratic, and stable. They conserve their favoured position for the future and, whilst they cannot predict conditions because of the intrinsic flux of existence, they project the need for stability to a transcendent reality to manage it. To become religious for Dewey, religions would have to surrender what they hold as constitutive, the notion of 'special truth' or revelation to which they are the point of access:

> The positive lesson is that religious qualities and values if they are real at all are not bound up with any single item of intellectual assent, not even that of the existence of the God of theism; and that, under existing conditions, the religious function in experience can be emancipated only through surrender of the whole notion of special truths that are religious by their own nature, together with the idea of peculiar avenues of access to such truths.[28]

Freeing themselves of this guiding principle, and the institutional structures that support it, religions could reconstruct their theology and organisation. For Dewey, abandoning the idea of a reserve of 'revelation' or 'special truth', the religious impulse could then grow into a pragmatic movement to unite the actual and the ideal in imaginative ways in every area of human life.[29]

Dewey's reconstructive logic develops from an evolutionary historical analysis of religious faith. In the past, faith was associated with particular rites and narratives where religious activity was coterminous with participation in the larger community. In a democratic and religiously plural world, however, religion is *voluntary*. In the twentieth century, at least in America, there is both a notional and lived experience of separation of the secular from the sacred.

This separation between faith-community and society, church and state is the most important social change for religion in thousands of years for Dewey. It even eclipses the modern conflict between scientific and religious knowledge. For the first time in history, *personal choice* is involved in deciding how religious beliefs influence worldly action. This choice allows for independence of the religious attitude from religion as an institution. For Dewey, the rise of democratic consciousness opens the way to democratisation of religious consciousness.

The effect of this change paradoxically liberates religion from the dualism between the sacred and profane that Dewey thinks is fundamental to supernaturalistic religion.[30] It allows the locus of the religious to move from the metaphysically transcendent to the immanent, or even the ordinary, as in Emerson and James. It frees humankind to reconceive of the holy within its own operations, rather than in that which is external and wholly other, and more effectively bring about democratically chosen and humane ideal ends.

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28 *Ibid*., p. 23.
29 *Ibid*., p. 35.
30 *Ibid*., p. 48.

The success of such a theological construction is not guaranteed for Dewey. His evolutionary, open-ended view of the religious impulse extends to the future viability of faith. For him, it is just as conceivable that religion, however understood, could prove unproductive in applying intelligence to the ordering of human life. Then religious faith would not be 'disproved'; rather, it would in pragmatic terms simply cease to make a practical difference in lived experience. Religion would lose its relevance and, therefore, cease to be. Once society becomes democratised, people vote with their feet. In Dewey's day, they already were, with respect to traditional religion. Religion's only hope is to reconstruct itself according to the scientific and political worldview of the modern/postmodern world, that is, to make religion more pragmatic if it has a real future at all.

Dewey's pragmatic philosophy of religion holds a number of significant implications for theological epistemology. The first is found in his notion of conceptual reconstruction that, by extension, ties the use of symbols and doctrines to their capacity for successful human adaptation. In Dewey's view, the stock of Christian language and symbols should be reconstructed toward a visioning of ideal ends of human activity that are excellent, but do not exceed our moral ability. The test-field is in their practical application in life, not in a notional limit, such as divine judgement, as he saw in the traditional monotheistic paradigm. A strategic difference from science, however, is the absence of a controlled laboratory in which to experiment. This, for Dewey, only makes it, like philosophy, all the more existentially and pragmatically important to do right, utilising our best and most imaginative capabilities and submitting them to the democratic community in practice.

Dewey thinks that unless new theological conceptions resonate with lived experience, they too should be reconstructed until productive ones are found. This requires honest and risky experimentation on the part of theology, for which it has not been particularly well known in the past. It also necessitates a revisionist *ethos*. This is Dewey's, and perhaps pragmatism's, greatest potential contribution to theological understanding. The real issue is not that people vote with their feet, but with their imaginations. Either theology will revise its stock of concepts in ways that resonate imaginatively with the practical experience of contemporary life, or even the notion of the 'religious' itself and not just 'religion' will be lost.

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PART II

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Chapter 6

Early Neopragmatism

The Scientifico-Romantic Inheritance of Neopragmatism

Classical pragmatism is a product of its day. It arose in a distinctive late nineteenth-, early twentieth-century largely American environment. It reacted against the excessive abstraction of Continental rationalism and sceptical thinness of British empiricism. It recovered ordinary experience by thematising the connection between mind and nature, expressing it in religious language and reconstructing it as theological reason.

But classical pragmatism possesses antecedents beyond America, and in a more than purely negative sense. This book argues it is within the tension, balance and frequent co-operation between two inextricable epistemological strands, the scientific and the Transcendental-Romantic, that classical pragmatism was constituted. The rest of this book extends that position. It argues that neopragmatism is properly a scientifico-Romantic, realist theological epistemology, reconstructed to the present situation.

Behind this claim is the methodological prerogative that neopragmatism, like other intellectual traditions, is meaningful only in light of its historical context. This statement is, philosophically-speaking, trivial, but it bears reiteration. Many enthusiasts are inclined to grant neopragmatism special status. As Morris Dickstein writes:

> [P]ragmatism has become a key point of reference around which contemporary debates in social thought, law, and literary theory as well as philosophy have been unfolded. It has appealed to philosophers moving beyond analytic philosophy, European theorists looking for an alternative to Marxism, and postmodernists seeking native roots for their critique of absolutes and universals.[1]

The failure of the Enlightenment project of philosophy and the rise of new 'deconstructive', 'anti-foundationalist' and 'anti-realist' critiques under the rubric of 'postmodernism' have left epistemology in a precarious state. In such an environment, the temptation is to see in neopragmatism a simple way out, a *tertium aliquid* avoiding the very issues that threaten contemporary epistemology.

All reconstructive approaches, including that of this book, involve some recuperation of relevant propositions and features from the past. Such recuperation is precisely what makes them epistemologically attractive. This is true whether the approach invokes the preferred modern/postmodern metaphors of 'reparation', 'archaeology' or 'recovery' adequate to some 'broken', 'subterranean' or 'ill' state

1 *The Revival of Pragmatism*, p. 1.

of knowledge, or calls on other more conventional descriptives. All reconstructive views imply 'overcoming', even Nietzschean and deconstructionist versions, where overcoming recognises those conditions that indict reason's transcendence.

Any philosophical approach requires rational justification for what it passes over and what it carries over. Thus, it is important to identify and criticise how this tendency to grant neopragmatism special epistemological status plays out. Especially how it serves a myth that at the same time undermines neopragmatism's distinctive noetic claims.

Earlier, this book attributed the myth to the on-going project to conceive of classical pragmatism as distinctively American philosophy, avoiding the *aporias* of the empiricist and rationalist thought of the day. But classical pragmatism's success, as has been shown, was not due to avoidance. It was a product of its constructive engagement with the intellectual environment that gave it birth. That environment included the epistemological breakdown of empiricism and rationalism. It also included changes in scientific worldview and a recovery of a theological view connecting nature and rational subjectivity informed by Romantic-Transcendentalist thought.

If neopragmatism is to be viable today, it must follow classical pragmatism not only in addressing such epistemological threats, but in offering a constructive model in continuity with its tradition. It would not be *pragmatism* if neopragmatism avoids its history and the context in which it is situated.

The current chapter examines the rise of neopragmatism. It traces it to the breakdown of positivist analytical philosophy that opened the way for reconsidering pragmatist themes, from anti-dualism and anti-scepticism, epistemological holism and naturalism, practicalism and theism, whilst retaining a strong sense of its procedure as 'scientific' and 'realist', based upon applied experimentation. Therefore, the transition from analytic thought to early neopragmatism is not so much a rupture as a conversion based on scientific practice, as such philosophy was conceived at the time. The key figure is W. V. O. Quine, whose conversion follows and draws on Peirce, James and Dewey. This chapter also traces the origins of neopragmatism to the allied insights of Wilfrid Sellars, Donald Davidson and Ludwig Wittgenstein. [2]

Quine and the Beginnings of the Revival

W. V. O. Quine avoided the self-assignment of 'neopragmatist' as carefully as he allowed the movement to be associated with him. From the earliest, neopragmatism was fashioned along the lines of a coherentist theory of truth, largely because of Quine. Neopragmatism was originally tied to coherentism, which arose from analytical philosophy's failure to secure logical rules, notoriously those of inference, and to intelligibly reckon how terms following such rules 'hook up' to the realities they name.

2 Prof. Rorty suggested for this chapter a larger background role for Sellars, whose influence he believes has been undervalued in the neopragmatic revival. A consequence of following this suggestion is that it strengthens the critique of the Sellars-influenced thought of John McDowell in the next chapter.

Reference rode on a metaphysical understanding of the world that, for Quine, had become problematic in light of recent science. Following Peirce and Dewey, he traced these logical notions not just to Enlightenment modernity, but to earlier medieval and Greek philosophy. Chief amongst them was the logical distinction between the 'analytic' and 'synthetic', which he famously rejected as circular in 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism' [1951].[3]

This rejection was significant on its own, but it had further methodological effects. It undermined the traditional scientific way philosophy was carried out, challenging rationality that treated divisions like '*a priori*' and '*a posteriori*' as absolute. Analytical philosophy believed that such nomological conceptions were precisely what made thought possible. However, science in the form of relativity theory and now quantum mechanics regularly transgressed such divisions as a function of its own inquiry.

Quine parallels Dewey's earlier critique in *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy* [1891] and *Reconstruction in Philosophy* [1920] of scholastic philosophy and Newtonian physics as failing to account for, amongst other things, pluralism, change and the implication of the observer in experimental outcome. Like Dewey, Quine was not trying to undermine science, nor logic, nor commonsense notions such as a mind-independent world, but to make scientific continuity possible amongst these changes in scientific outlook.[4] Quine called on *practical* experience to modify scientific results and those 'laws' thought constitutive of rational inquiry. The analytic/synthetic distinction was the first in a long line, including fact/value, observer/observed, subject/object, descriptive/prescriptive and mind/world that Quine's critique would call into question.

The rejection of this so-called 'dogma of empiricism' was also a critique of the foundations underpinning rationalism. But instead of leading to radical scepticism, as it did for the deconstructionists later, Quine set his programme in a *pragmatist* context. He revived the Peircean notion of the methodological fallibilism of science, redescribing it in a more comprehensive form. Quine extended Peirce's corrigible approach from theory to methodology and, finally, to those logical notions and categories previously taken as epistemologically basic. All truths, even those held to make thought possible, were at least potentially subject to revision, according to this view.

It is important to point out that fallibilism, for Quine and Peirce, was not invoked as an abstract law of inquiry. Fallibilism was conceived as openness to the possibility of corrigibility in science. It arises in practice and is tied to both a tradition of inquiry and a community of inquirers to which it is accountable. For Peirce, this meant the continuous traditions of science and critical philosophy and its practitioners, described in quasi-mystical fashion as extending from the mythic past to the unknowable future. Although Peirce conceived of this community of

3 Reprinted in *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), pp. 20-46.

4 Neither for that matter was the identification of the sociological element in the production of scientific theories in Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* [1954], which was heavily indebted to Quinean coherentism for the philosophical environment in which it was received.

inquirers Romantically, it was nonetheless a concrete body of individuals challenging and revising theories as a function of practical experience.

As much as this community accomplishes its work through scientific discipline, it is by its nature an unpredictable, even serendipitous activity. New discoveries, the production of novel theories, the development of innovative techniques and so forth, are all results of a process that is unpredictable, sometimes accidental, but nonetheless rigorously critical with respect to the norms of the regulative community.

Quine took over this Romantic Peircean notion of scientific process and applied it to the community of inquirers. For him, their activity undercuts any pre-established notion of what the community should look like:

> The scientific community is no private club. In principle, and in the best and broadest sense of the words, scientific inquiry can be undertaken by anyone on almost any subject matter. Practically speaking, such inquiry often demands a vast fund of background knowledge and a sizable team of cooperating inquirers, not to mention sophisticated equipment; this is because human knowledge has already progressed so far. But at root what is needed for scientific inquiry is just receptivity to data, skill in reasoning, and yearning for truth. Admittedly, ingenuity can help too.[5]

Quine's scientific community is open with respect to certain knowledges, proficiencies or, at least incidental 'ingenuities'. This effects two major epistemological changes. First, is the turn from apodictic certainty, secured by means of metaphysical foundations, to a fallibilistic process constituted by the critical rationality of an inquiring community. This repudiates the Enlightenment modernist epistemology common to Descartes, Locke and Kant, which founds reason in pure subjectivity *via* the structure of mind, experience or some combination thereof. Both the transcendental subject and the metaphysical worldview behind it drops out of the equation, leaving for Quine a bare ontology conceived as a 'naïve' or 'robust' realism.[6]

Quine adopts a certain type of community. He appropriates the Peircean 'community of inquiry', redescribing it as more plastic in its membership, but avoiding the open conception of Dewey and, later, Rorty. Quine instead focuses on intellectual virtues leading to greater knowledge. Amongst such virtues or, perhaps, knacks, are co-operation, receptivity to data, reasonability and ingenuity, which build into inquiry the idea of *qualitative* difference.

This qualitative aspect is lacking in Dewey's version. Dewey conceives of truth according to consensus, or 'warranted assertibility'. Truths are beliefs warranted by the theoretical agreement of all competent language-users. For Quine, such democratised epistemology opens reason up to a cultural relativism or ethnocentrism,[7] undercutting the strength of truth claims. 'Truth is one thing, warranted belief another', for Quine,

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5 W. V. Quine and J. S. Ullian, *The Web of Belief* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), pp. 3-4.

6 *Ibid.* and W. V. O. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 233-38.

7 'Ethnocentrism' is Richard Rorty's term for cultural relativism. Rorty is the most prominent neopragmatist to take up the Deweyan notion of community of inquirers.

and the former requires more than majority rule to make something true.[8] Better and worse, right and wrong are indexed to the notion of a world independent of our choosing, mediated with respect to inquiry.

Quine adapts the scientifico-Romantic community of classical pragmatism, identifying its self-perpetuation in the development of better theories and techniques. This community figures individual identity in a quasi-mystical, continuous tradition. The inquirer participates in a community conceived of as in a process continual creation and recreation. Quine privileges the role of imagination, even serendipity, in the collective advancement of knowledge. The image of philosopher as positivist logician is replaced with such characteristics usually reserved for poets and artists.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Quine's famous dubbing of 'the web of belief', a phrase come to be tantamount to his coherence theory of truth and the theory of 'double relativity' of ontology. But Quine invokes other naturalistic metaphors, including the notion of 'naturalism' itself. That notion, itself so controversial after G. E. Moore's criticism, describes Quine's understanding of meaning holism across the web of belief. Such organic descriptions write ambiguity and dynamism into the conception of subjective reason, replacing normative mathematical-constructivist typologies and the analytical positivist quest for certainty.

The use of naturalistic language, of mythical and aesthetic epistemological imagery is not unknown in the history of philosophy, although it is atypical of most twentieth century thought. It is characteristic of Romanticism and classical pragmatism, exemplified by James's image of consciousness as 'stream'. However, it *is* remarkable for Quine, whose positivist training and temperament do not incline him in such a direction. In the introduction to 'Ontological Relativity' he reveals a previously unacknowledged influence, the classical pragmatism of John Dewey:

> I listened to Dewey on Art as Experience when I was a graduate student in the spring of 1931. …Philosophically I am bound to Dewey by the naturalism that dominated his last three decades. With Dewey I hold that knowledge, mind, and meaning are part of the same world that they have to do with, and that they are to be studied in the same empirical spirit that animates natural science.[9]

Quine continues, ascribing the origins of the 'linguistic turn' in philosophy to classical pragmatism, rather than Wittgenstein, and the rejection of the logic of the private language argument to Dewey some twenty-five years before *Philosophical Investigations*. Quine's deference to Dewey's *Art as Experience* is salient in that it was in this book that Dewey fashioned his epistemology in bio-naturalistic terms. Specifically, he modelled it after the unities of *religious and aesthetic experience in nature*, rather than according to mathematical-positivistic science.

This leads to Quine's second major epistemological change, from a metaphysical object theory of reference to semantical reference, or making the 'linguistic turn' usually associated, *pace* Quine, with the later Wittgenstein. This 'turn' is misleading

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8 W. V. Quine, *Pursuit of Truth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 94.

9 W. V. Quine, *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), p. 26. 'Ontological Relativity' was the first John Dewey Lecture, delivered in 1968 in Columbia University.

if taken, as it frequently is, as a twentieth-century development. Philosophy had an increasingly linguistified understanding of mental phenomena, especially since Kant, but even earlier thinkers like Locke conceived the relations between words and ideas, if not words and physical objects, as arbitrarily bound by linguistic conventions.

Quine critiques the analytic/synthetic distinction by extending the community of inquiry's theorising to rational divisions reputed to make thought possible. This is the first 'dogma 'of empiricism he undercuts. But the critique extends beyond empiricism to rationalistic accounts as well. His neglected critique of the second dogma refutes the empiricist assumption that meaning connects to logical terms that boil down eventually to discrete units of unmediated experience. Quine points out that no pure 'sense-data' or specifying language could be found. Even 'basic' experiences such as seeing a colour, the classic example, involves allied concepts, such as other colours and indexing shades in between.

Both dogmas, in Quine's view, 'are at root identical'.[10] The dogma of absolute logical distinctions and the dogma of materialist reductionism deny the holism of meaning implicated by language. Meaning is linguistified, and language implies a community of language-users in an interwoven 'web' that holds meaning together by holding it in tension across language. This social-linguistic characterisation of knowledge, as well as Quine's naturalistic imagery, calls on the classical pragmatist, Jamesian notion that to understand the truth of a statement one must look to how it is used. Quine associates this view with Wittgenstein, quoting his aphorism 'Understanding a sentence means understanding a language', which in pragmatic terms is equivalent to understanding how the language is *used*.[11]

A linguistified view of knowledge, however, does not imply the loss of the view that things are actually 'thus and such' and 'facts', for Quine, just the loss of *metaphysical* realism. Thus, he advocates 'naïve realism' as a replacement for magical 'correspondence' theories of reference. Naïve realism requires a pragmatic, anti-sceptical attitude with respect to truth. The truth of a proposition is a function of its relation to other truths, criss-crossing and interpenetrating across the web of language. For Quine, meaning normally equates to a term's use, which evolves as inquirers press the edge of knowledge, spinning out new theories and reweaving sections of the web. This view combines aspects of coherentism and realism. Like Peirce, he locates this view somewhere between Platonism and nominalism, likening it to 'a more thorough pragmatism'.[12]

Quine's 'Two Dogmas' repudiates analytical positivism on generally pragmatist, incipiently neopragmatist, grounds. But the manner in which he accomplishes it illustrates that the roots run far more deeply. Quine reconstructs epistemology along the success of modern science, but he modifies it in light of a naturalistic, Romantic conception of mind, language and world.

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10 *From a Logical Point of View*, p. 41.

11 *Word and Object*, pp. 76-77.

12 *Op. cit.*, p. 46.

Sellars and the 'Myth of the Given'

Quine's naturalistic imagery set the tone for neopragmatism, but other thinkers influenced that early history as well. In 1956, Wilfrid Sellars published *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, which also transformed post-analytic philosophy. Sellars inclined neopragmatic thought towards a reconsideration of Kantian epistemological themes. He drew on the Kant-reconstructed pragmatism of his teacher C. I. Lewis, charting a course for neopragmatism through philosophy of language to philosophy of mind.

Sellars's most important contribution is the attack on the concept of 'givenness' itself. Up to then, post-positivist philosophers, including Quine, argued against the notion that thought or experiential entities like 'universals', 'first principles', 'protocol statements' and 'sense-data' are directly available to rational consciousness. Sellars argues against the idea of any unmediated knowledge in thought or experience at all. Following Wittgenstein's opening remarks in the *Investigations*, he attacks the Augustinian model of language acquisition as the source of the 'Myth of the Given':

> §30 …This is the fact that when we picture a child – or a carrier of slabs – learning his *first* language, *we*, of course, locate the language learner in a structured logical space in which we are at home. Thus, we conceive of him as a person (or, at least, a potential person) in a world of physical objects, colored, producing sounds, existing in Space and Time. But though it is *we* who are familiar with this logical space, we run the danger, if we are not careful, of picturing the language user as having *ab initio* some degree of awareness – "pre-analytic," limited and fragmentary though it may be – of this logical space. …In other words, unless we are careful, we can easily take for granted that the process of teaching a child to use a language is that of teaching it to discriminate elements within a logical space of particulars, universals, facts, etc., of which it is already undiscriminatingly aware, and to associate these discriminated elements with verbal symbols. And this mistake is in principle the same whether the logical space of which the child is supposed to have this undiscriminating awareness is conceived by *us* to be that of physical objects or of private sense contents.[13]

The Myth of the Given is the empiricist belief that there is some access to a world independent of and prior to the linguistic categories of mind. According to it, sense-experiences such as that of 'physical objects, colored, producing sounds' are pre-conceptual and constitute the basis for the notion of world. Experience in the Myth of the Given is what is 'given' to the child and learnt: immediate or precognitive knowledge. Experience is raw material for subsequent reflection and organisation in thought.

From the outset, this view divides experience from thought and extends the dichotomy in the separation of body and mind, nature and rational subjectivity. Yet evolutionary biology shows this is not the case, that there is a broad continuum along which consciousness can be assigned. The classical pragmatists recognised this, rejecting the separation and arguing for a theory of holism.

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13 Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 64-65.

Sellars likewise rejects the dualism required by the Myth of the Given. He argues that even experience requires conceptual content to be counted as understanding. For the child in the example to 'understand' an experience, it is not a matter of taking in a bare experience, but making sense of it within what Sellars calls the 'logical space of reasons'. That is, one knows the child masters the knowledge by the ability to justify it, which implies a social practice. Knowledge is not presupposed by practice, but comes about with it, for Sellars.

Sellars does not oppose the notion of a pre-reflective world 'out there' because, like the classical pragmatists, he considers that notion necessary for scientific inquiry. Rather, he denies that that world is given to understanding without conceptual content. Sellars retains the division between what he calls 'the space of nature' and 'the space of reasons'. The former is the realm of physical receptivity, or, what he calls 'manifest' or 'commonsensical' image', and the latter the realm of thought, or 'scientific image'. This intrinsic dualism makes it difficult to consider Sellars in a pragmatist light, although he characterises the division according to the Peircean conception of truth where the two images would eventually converge. Sellars sees in the Kantian notion of the unity of the subject a way to reconcile the bifurcation of experience and thought.

Sellars's point is that if a pre-conceptual 'given' only makes sense against a conceptual-linguistic framework, the idea of givenness itself loses intelligibility. For Sellars, it makes little sense for epistemology to pursue Kantian *noumena*, things-in-themselves, when meaning requires a rational, conceptual-linguistic context for its operation. The cost, however, is a holistic understanding of the mind-world relationship. Sellars, like Kant, adopts a dualistic notion of understanding to maintain the autonomy of mind over against a scientifically determinable natural world.

Sellars combines the commonsensical notion that the mind-independent world contributes to knowledge *via* receptivity in experience, on the one hand, with the proposition that reason retains its own sphere of free determination *qua* consciousness. Subjective rationality for him is the mechanism that integrates the two. Mind reconciles and creates understanding in the tension between sensibility and freedom. This move, however, requires Sellars to reject the naturalism of Quine's epistemology and the conceptual identity between mind and nature shared by Emerson and the classical pragmatists. Naturalism is a threat to reason's autonomy for Sellars because the operations of nature are mathematically predictable in theory. Emerson, the classical pragmatists and even Quine posit an open-ended, non-teleological and mathematically irreducible understanding of nature. Sellars covers the 'space of nature' under the umbrella of physics.

For Sellars, this 'space of nature' is logically independent of the 'space of reasons' and thus epistemologically separate. The former was the realm of science, the latter of epistemology. This bifurcation means that philosophy is not obliged to follow the natural sciences and can model its rationality in different ways, appropriate to different spheres of life. Again, Sellars takes his cue from Kant, who of course followed this route, describing pluriform rationalities for the scientific, practical and aesthetic in the three *Critiques*, and the religious in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason*. By dividing rationality, each sphere of consciousness is open to develop in relative autonomy.

The project of drawing deep connections between reason and freedom was taken up by Romanticism and classical pragmatism, but in the opposite direction to that of Kant and Sellars. The pluralism of reason was for them an extension of the 'ecstatic' or 'tychic' character that mind shares as part of the natural world. The autonomy of subjective rationality is not threatened by its connection to nature. That very connection makes freedom possible. Furthermore, the integrity of reason does not need to be underwritten by means of epistemological division and subdivision. Classical pragmatism saw notional overlap and Jamesean rational 'interpenetration' in the lifeworld. Quine, too, describes understanding as a web where meaning weaves across the whole. Sellars's neoKantian emphasis on rational distinctions reverses this integrated view.

Sellars does follow the scientific-Romantic strain of pragmatism in his consideration of 'scientific realism' and the construction of new theories. For him, scientific understanding and all specialised spheres of thought are an extension of the practical faculty of common sense:

> §51 …The truth of the matter…is that science is continuous with common sense and the ways in which the scientist seeks to explain empirical phenomena are refinements of the ways in which plain men, however crudely and schematically, have attempted to understand their environment and their fellow men since the dawn of intelligence.[14]

Deriving scientific reason from common sense, Sellars promotes ordinary language to the position of transcendental subjectivity occupied in Kant. According to Rorty, Sellars was the first to conceive of mind in this way as a 'hypostatization' of language.[15] For Sellars, it is in the use of language that the unity of sensibility and reflection is found. Ordinary language is also the origin of any specialised language, such as science. Sellars, like Quine, was a scientific realist, but far more suspicious of its truth. This attitude is also characteristic of classical pragmatism in its Romantic-theological critique, especially the Emersonian valorisation of the ordinary.

The most pragmatist feature of Sellars's work also mirrors Quine. Throughout *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, Sellars argues against the analytical Myth of the Given, but he critiques it with a Myth of his own, the Myth of Jones:

> §63 I have used a myth to kill a myth – the Myth of the Given. But is my myth really a myth? Or does the reader not recognize Jones as Man himself in the middle of his journey from the grunts and groans of the cave to the subtle and polydimensional discourse of the drawing room, the laboratory, and the study, the language of Henry and William James, of Einstein and the philosophers who, in their efforts to break out of discourse to an *arche´* beyond discourse, have provided the most curious dimension of all.[16]

The Myth of Jones is Sellars's story of the adequacy of a methodological behaviourism in epistemology, that specialised concepts could be introduced to thought through an ordinary vocabulary. Ordinary language is adaptable enough to account for the new scientific worldview without having to refer to the so-called 'given' behind it.

14 *Ibid*., p. 97.
15 *Ibid*., p. 7.
16 *Ibid*., p. 117.

The Myth of Jones is about the epistemological *sufficiency* of ordinary language , the language of Jones-the-Everyman, for understanding. It is Sellars's capsule of the linguistic turn.

The manner in which he employs the Myth of Jones is significant. Sellars uses 'a myth to kill a myth', but it is more than a simple exchange. He raises it in the context of the most famous myth in philosophy, Plato's epistemological ascent from the cave. He likens Jones to the person coming into philosophical maturity who turns his back on the shadowy world of appearances and, thus, of mythology itself. Sellars plays the Myth of Jones off the Myth of the Given and into the Myth of the Cave, in order to deliver epistemology from myth-making to linguistic truth.

Jones is for Sellars an emblem of the philosophical project, especially the evolution of human thinking about its rationality. The Myth of Jones is a narrative of the sufficiency of narrative to that project: from the 'grunts and groans' of language acquisition, to the philosophically underappreciated 'subtle' and 'polydimensional[ity]' of non-technical conversation, to scientific and artistic expression moving, if not beyond language, then to a recognition of a 'boiling over' of experience. This Jamesian image recognises in superfluity of language the provisionality of truth and the possibility of epistemological progress, of 'ascent' from Plato's cave, sought in the '*arché* beyond discourse' of metaphysics.

Sellars's specific inclusion of Henry and William James and Einstein is instructive. Each in his own area rewrote the relational character of the subject in the transition from a traditional metaphysical worldview to the present understanding. Of the three, however, only William explicitly understood this project as epistemology. The juxtaposition of these three thinkers by Sellars shows that post-metaphysical anxiety is unwarranted. The defeat of the Myth of the Given opens up the web of the ordinary which becomes the possibility for new epistemological thinking from non-traditional sources, such as the literary. The first figure Sellars mentions is the celebrated writer Henry James. Like Quine, Sellars is by training and disposition the least inclined towards the aesthetic, yet it is to this literary figure and through the literary trope of the Myth of Jones that he appeals as an epistemological source. It is another example of the scientifico-Romantic strand expressing itself in the neopragmatic revival.

Wittgenstein's Pragmatic Interest

Wittgenstein is the most prominent thinker to fit into the story of the influences on neopragmatism. The English version of the *Investigations* was published in 1954, two years after Quine's 'Two Dogmas' and two years before Sellars's *Empiricism*. Together, these three writings contain the most important thought on epistemology at the beginning of the neopragmatic renaissance. Of the three, the *Investigations* continues to enjoy the greatest influence on post-analytic philosophy.

Wittgenstein was notoriously unread in the history of philosophy, but according to Fergus Kerr: 'William James…was one of the [few] philosophers to whom Wittgenstein often referred. His *Principles of Psychology*…is alluded to more frequently than

any other text in the whole course of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*'.[17] This supports the influence of classical pragmatism on Wittgenstein's ordinary language philosophy, although Kerr interprets that influence in a negative sense.

For Kerr, pragmatism and pragmatist epistemology, embodied in James's 'stream of consciousness', are an extension of 'the modern philosophy of the self' with its assault upon rational subjectivity. Kerr recognises the metaphor's theological character, but understands it as an expression of the gossamer, 'diaphanous self'. In a stream there is no definitive centre, nor stable edge, but rather a tumbling chaos of internal motion eroding the riverbanks and emptying into the sea.[18]

There is good reason to reject Kerr's interpretation and to see that Wittgenstein was interested in James for deeper and more positive epistemological reasons. For one, Kerr ignores the central argument of the *Principles*, which criticises the 'solipsism' of the 'Cartesian *cogito*' that Wittgenstein also attacks. When it was published in 1890, the *Principles* was a an early psychological text arguing back to epistemology. James wrote against the reductive functionalism of 'mind as machine' becoming the dominant paradigm in behaviourist psychology.

Kerr rejects the 'stream of consciousness' metaphor without appreciating this context. James appealed to naturalistic images like 'stream' and 'river' against the materialist reification of mind. Kerr misses this point. Rather than seeing in James a *rejection* of modern/postmodern reductionism of the self, Kerr takes James's model as its *apotheosis*.

Furthermore, Kerr ignores the internal evidence of the metaphor itself. The flow of a stream may appear irrational, but, of course, it is not. It is 'fluid' in the sense of 'free-flowing', but it is also 'a fluid', subject to the laws of physics and in organic relationship with the world. A 'stream' both moulds and is moulded by the contours of the larger environment. Its flow is a source of life that is one of the basic features sustaining the organic world. Yet, a stream is difficult to navigate and can be as much a source of danger as of wonder. As with the operations of rational subjectivity, there is something of the unfathomable, even mysterious, about the stream absent in the scientific materialist view.

Kerr correctly understands the modern/postmodern 'diaphanous' subject he caricatures as what Wittgenstein sought to overcome. However, attributing such a view to James and, by extension, pragmatism is wrong-headed. Part of the problem is that Kerr buys Rorty's anti-realism as representative of the epistemological tradition of pragmatism.[19] This move allows him to lump Rorty with other anti-realist interpreters of Wittgenstein, such as Michael Dummett and Saul Kripke, and to treat the pragmatist tradition, as Rorty does, as a version of postmodern deconstructionism.

This points to another problem with Kerr's reading. He traces postmodernist anti-realism to two figures associated with modernist dualism, Descartes and Kant. For Kerr, Wittgenstein is the key figure to break their dualism and move into epistemological holism. Thus, a pragmatist like James, a neopragmatist like Rorty and even a pragmatist

17 Fergus Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein, Second Edition* (London: SPCK, 1997), p. 5.

18 *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

19 *Ibid*., p. 130.

and neopragmatist-influenced theologian like Gordon Kaufman, though vastly different in approach, are treated the same by Kerr.[20] They are covered by the long shadow of 'the Cartesian era', rather than enlightened by the Wittgensteinian one.

Whilst some truth obtains in this criticism, at least with respect to certain Kant-inspired neopragmatists, it misinterprets the tradition, especially the scientifico-Romantic theological epistemology described by this book.[21] Kerr ignores the anti-dualism central to classical and neopragmatist accounts, aimed at the same Enlightenment philosophy he criticises. The problem lies in his view of the singularity of Wittgenstein's contribution. Kerr ignores other holistic epistemologies, such as that of classical pragmatism, that predate Wittgenstein and also criticise the dualism of Descartes and Kant.[22]

Other contemporary thinkers interpret the pragmatist influence upon Wittgenstein in a more salutary light, if for different purposes. Richard Rorty, particularly in *Consequences of Pragmatism* [1982], and Hilary Putnam in 'Was Wittgenstein a Pragmatist?' [1995], portray Wittgensteinian thought as continuous with pragmatism. The desire, if not to baldly impress him into the early neopragmatist camp, is to see his philosophy as epistemologically parallel. This is especially true concerning Wittgenstein's 'later' work emphasising 'grammar' and the web of language. They identify commonalities in the rejection of a theoretically neutral point within language from which to view truth (what Kerr, borrowing Bernard Williams' term, calls an 'absolute conception of reality') and the theorising of a holism between fact, theory and value.

Viewed in this light, classical pragmatism did positively influence Wittgenstein, *pace* Kerr, especially James in the *Principles*. Thus, the 'stream of consciousness' reference Wittgenstein broaches in §413f. of the *Investigations* should be read constructively. But the extent to which Wittgenstein's 'linguistic turn', exemplified by his troping of 'language game' and 'family resemblance', for example, is the result of the scientifico-Romantic literary experimentation of classical pragmatism is impossible to assess. Wittgenstein was more oblique about intellectual debts than Quine or Sellars, making Putnam's question 'Was Wittgenstein a pragmatist' a dubious matter.

Both Kerr and Putnam miss the one candidate to support the connection, the Cambridge pragmatist Frank Ramsey. Ramsey was amongst a handful of acknowledged influences on Wittgenstein's later thought:

> …I have been forced to recognize grave mistakes in what I wrote in that first book [the *Tractatus*]. I was helped to realize these mistakes – to a degree which I myself am hardly able to estimate – by the criticism of my ideas encountered from Frank Ramsey, with whom I discussed them in innumerable conversations during the last two years of his life.[23]

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20 *Ibid*., pp. 21-22.

21 An anti-Kantian criticism of John McDowell, Hilary Putnam and Richard Rorty follows in the next chapter.

22 Kerr favours Hegel as a predecessor, albeit indirectly by pointing out 'Wittgenstein reversed the anti-Hegelian atomism of the founding fathers of analytic philosophy'. This anti-anti-Hegelianism is less than a ringing endorsement. Kerr also cites the positive influence of certain of Wittgenstein's friends who were advocates of variant Marxism.

23 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), p. viii.

The reason for Kerr's omission of Ramsey's pragmatist connection is not clear. The reason for Putnam's is less murky, but might be attributed to the fact that James is his central pragmatist and Ramsey was a pragmatist of the Peircean variety. In any event, neither thinker traces this more plausible intellectual connection.

In any case, this book reverses such an approach, showing how Wittgenstein, regardless of how he was influenced by classical pragmatism, forms the backdrop for neopragmatism. According to this reading, Wittgenstein shares a range of beliefs common to pragmatism, making him an attractive parallel source for neopragmatism. But his relevance does not end there. Wittgenstein stands out in post-analytic thought as a thinker who simply cannot be avoided. He is, following Kerr, a thinker for whom epistemology is measured in terms of 'before' and 'after'. Thus, a realist like Putnam and an anti-realist like Rorty can disagree about the significance of Emerson, or even of the 'father of pragmatism' Peirce, yet neither can ignore Wittgenstein's contribution.[24]

A remarkable development is summed up in a phrase recently touted by Alice Crary in the eponymous book: the 'new Wittgenstein'.[25] What is 'new', according to thirteen of the contributors to the volume, over half of whom, including Stanley Cavell, John McDowell, James Conant and Hilary Putnam, are leading neopragmatists, is the rejection of the predominant view of Wittgenstein's philosophical development and philosophical legacy:

> The most well-known version of this narrative runs as follows: in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein advocates a *truth-conditional* [i.e. metaphysical correspondence] theory of meaning which has the characteristic features of *realism*, and later on he rejects it and embraces a theory of meaning consisting of *assertibility-conditions* [i.e. language-coherentist conditions] which has the characteristic features of *anti-realism*.[26]

This is the 'old' interpretation of Wittgenstein. The new, for Crary, maintains a closer connection in the project of the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations* than previously thought. This project was, on the one hand, generally 'therapeutic'. It is the view that Wittgenstein held that the proper direction for philosophy was to cure it from its compulsion to search for an Archimedean point of reference, whether in metaphysics or language.

It was, on the other hand, to relieve it from a symptom of the cure, namely the concern that it abandons the idea of, in Crary's term, 'full-blooded objectivity'. That objectivity must be sacrificed, or is somehow entailed, by fixing meaning in the 'language-game', or according to 'grammar', is evidence of a lingering desire for an Archimedean viewpoint:

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24 Putnam is hesitant to acknowledge Emerson. Rorty famously omits Peirce from the pragmatist genealogy.

25 *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. by Alice Crary and Rupert Read (London: Routledge, 2000).

26 *Ibid*., p. 2. Interestingly, Crary selects the Deweyan term 'assertibility-conditions' with respect to meaning and equates this with a view leading to anti-realism.

> These papers claim that one of Wittgenstein's main aims throughout his work is getting us to see that the idea of an external standpoint…is thoroughly confused and that its abandonment is accordingly *without consequences* for our entitlement to our basic epistemic ideals.[27]

To state it another way, in the 'new Wittgenstein' there is *rapprochement* of the earlier and later Wittgenstein. Rather than leading away from realism into a Dummet- or Rorty-style anti-realism, Wittgenstein overall advocates a modest form of commonsense realism in his ordinary language philosophy. Accordingly, terms like 'objectivity' and 'truth' can be non-arbitrarily meaningful and yet also understood as gaining their sense from their place in the language-game, in grammar or, in Quinean terms, the 'web of belief'.

The result is we can speak confidently that things are 'thus and such' and ascribe to statements truth-value or certainty, just not in the apodictic or metaphysical sense. Commonsensical notions like the existence of other minds, the reality of the 'external world', the notion of the mind-independence or at least recognition-independence of truth, in short the concerns raised by Dummet- and Rorty-style anti-realism, are not problematic on this reading of Wittgenstein. Glossing §133 of the *Investigations*, the appeal to relativism is an overreaction, transferring anxiety from one philosophical form to another, rather than a cure. It leads to a Kripkean scepticism as pernicious to ordinary experience as that of Descartes or Hume.[28]

Wittgenstein pre-dates Quine and Sellars, and each develops along distinctive lines, but all common philosophical concerns. All recognise the epistemological failure of logical analysis, emphasise a greater role for the agent's point of view and regard the centrality of language for truth. But all deny that these features entail the loss of practical epistemological certainty.

The relationship between the open-endedness of language and its embeddedness in concrete forms of life are what make knowledge secure for all three thinkers. They share a common rejection of metaphysical foundations, whether logically secure'dogmatic' divisions between the analytic and synthetic in Quine's view, or empirical ones in Sellars's Myth of the Given, or in the impulse to secure epistemology in metaphysics, for Wittgenstein.

All three thinkers reject the conclusion that the 'linguistic turn', or conceiving of reference across the 'web of belief', undercuts commonsensical notions about the world. Truth-claims and moral judgements are enhanced, rather than problematised, according to this view. Truth grows in 'clarity', according to Wittgenstein, when a linguistified view of thought causes such concerns to 'disappear'.[29] In this sense, Quine, Sellars and Wittgenstein offer versions of naïve, modest or commonsensical realism through their linguistification of knowledge, not anti-realism.

Earlier in this chapter, the connection between neopragmatism and epistemological coherentism was identified in Quine's invocation of the 'web of belief'. Similar inferences are drawn from Sellars's rejection of the 'Myth of the Given' and

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27 *Ibid*., p. 4.

28 Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 70-71.

29 *Philosophical Investigations*, §133.

Wittgenstein's linguistic turn. But if each of them advocates coherentism, it must be stressed that they do not jettison realism for neopragmatism. They combine both in a sense captured by Susan Haack's neologism 'foundherentism'.[30] She points to an epistemological position found in the tension between coherentism and realism, linguistification and practical experience, rather than treating them as mutually irreconcilable positions.

This chapter investigated the beginnings of neopragmatism. It examined the epistemological controversies leading to a crisis in epistemology that made possible its revival. Early neopragmatism developed from the same mid-century concerns over the stability of knowledge, the unity of the subject, the linguistification of meaning and the loss of the metaphysical worldview giving rise to Anglo-American anti-realism and Continental deconstruction. But where these latter views find destabilisation of knowledge, dissolution of the subject, the deferral of meaning and the loss of the world, Quine, Sellars and Wittgenstein, thinkers so critical to early neopragmatism, affirm ordinary experience and thought to account for the changing worldview. Their insights support the scientifico-Romantic strain of pragmatism. They make possible a consideration of scientifico-Romantic neopragmatism as religious epistemology.

30 *Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate*, p. 85.

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Chapter 7

Neokantianism and Neopragmatism

The previous chapter examined the origins of the neopragmatic revival, showing how the failure of analytical epistemology opens the way for a reconsideration of pragmatic themes. It combats a counter-historicist view that imports classical pragmatists into the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, as a way around the epistemological problems of modernity/postmodernity. This view portrays Peirce, James and Dewey as presciently avoiding this scene, with its 'losses' of self, world, text and meaning, without falling into the metaphysical absolutism or cultural relativism typifying other responses. [1]

The irony is that this view predicates neopragmatism's capability in avoiding the context it is supposed to overcome. Neopragmatism thus portrayed, however, is *un*pragmatic. It nullifies that which makes neopragmatism a viable epistemological option: the contextual, commonsensical and practical it preserves.

The tension between the desire to start afresh, and the knowledge that any 'new' beginning involves *praxes* that are also embedded in history, is as old as pragmatism. It is found in the tension between Emerson's aspiration to 'American philosopher' and Peirce's 'critical commonsensism', between James's radical empiricism and Dewey's radical experimentation.

The point is not to deny a type of transcendence or, rather, intellectual *continuity* linking pragmatism and neopragmatism, but to show how the neopragmatic renaissance is, and continues to be shaped by both its past and the philosophical concerns of the present.

The recent conflict over reference is a prime example. Literary-influenced neopragmatists like Stanley Fish and Richard Rorty take Quine beyond his own position, treating neopragmatism purely as a coherentist theory of truth. They throw out the commonsensical notion that when we talk, we are talking about things as 'thus and such', and not only about language. Their position rejects the central pragmatic idea of anti-sceptical, commonsense realism.

The issue of correspondence v. coherence theories of truth has now resurfaced in the realist/anti-realist debate over epistemology, in spite of the fact that such either/or dualisms are what classical pragmatism rejected in its scientifico-Romantic understanding of mind. Early neopragmatism did not avoid these epistemological issues. It appropriated the classical pragmatist view of mind to challenge them.

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1 James P. Mackey argues the retreat into premodern metaphysics and postmodernist relativism leads to the same 'loss of the self'. This postmodern nihilism is, according to him, more epistemologically pernicious than the cultural relativism, which recurs frequently in Western philosophy. *Cf. The Critique of Theological Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 5f.

The death of analytical positivism and the concomitant rise of ordinary language philosophy allowed for the reconsideration of pragmatist thought, influencing its reconstruction into neopragmatism. As it did, it retained features of the scientifico-Romantic strain traced in the first part of this book. Reflections of this epistemology are seen in Quine and Sellars, and a parallel development was drawn in the case of Wittgenstein. All three reject abstract or mechanical views of mind, invoking a practical, contextual epistemology. All emphasise open-endedness and unpredictability in inquiry. All seek holism in the relationship between thought, language and the world. All share a linguistified, conceptualised view of subjective reason, invoking naturalistic-Romantic tropes for understanding. But of all three, an inherent dualism in the neoKantian reconstruction of Sellars works against the scientifico-Romantic view, threatening versions of neopragmatism deriving from him.

This chapter critiques the Sellars-influenced, neoKantian neopragmatism of John McDowell and others. The issue is that in taking the Sellars route, McDowell trades away the very elements of a scientifico-Romantic epistemology that make neopragmatism a viable option in modernity/postmodernity. Amongst these elements are a range of inter-related positions falling under the umbrella of meaning holism including the implication of the subject in observation and judgement, the provisionality of theoretical divisions within rationality and an open-ended, corrigible view of social rationality.

McDowell and the NeoKantian Turn

John McDowell, like Hilary Putnam, recently identified himself with neopragmatism. His earlier philosophy is post-analytic, although he trained under the analytic regime. McDowell has re-evaluated Aristotelian philosophy, empiricism and Kantianism, and their relevance for current ethical and epistemological issues.

By the early nineties, McDowell began to associate this style with neopragmatism. He now understands it as a neopragmatic alternative to Rorty:

> So what I recommend in the lectures [collected as *Mind and World*] could be represented as a pragmatism in Rorty's sense, even though, in trying to give expression to it, I borrow from thinkers like Kant…. And I am claiming that Rorty's own pragmatism is half-baked, according to standards set by his own account of what pragmatism is.[2]

McDowell is influenced by Rorty, but also by neopragmatists Davidson and Putnam, as well as the earlier Quine, Sellars and Wittgenstein. His version has grown increasingly influential on the revival, especially after the success of *Mind and World*.[3]

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2 John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 154-55.

3 'I made my first sketches of the formulation I have arrived at here…in an attempt to get under control my usual excited reaction to a reading – my third or fourth – of Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. I think it was an earlier reading of Rorty that put

McDowell uses the term 'recoil' in that book to describe over-reactions against empiricist insights that he thinks could benefit post-analytic thought. He uses it to criticise deconstructionists and anti-realists like Rorty and Davidson, whose recoil rejects traditional philosophy and its concerns. He also uses it against 'bald naturalists', like Daniel Dennett, whose recoil from deconstructionism turns cognitive science into a new version of positivism. In form, McDowell's critique of recoil mirrors the anti-dualist view of the classical pragmatists. His goal is a *tertium aliquid*, respecting insights of rationalism and empiricism, but ultimately moving beyond them.

Putnam takes up McDowell's notion of 'recoil' in *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World* [1999]. For Putnam, it describes philosophy's 'leap[ing] from frying pan to fire, from fire to a different frying pan, from different frying pan to a different fire, and so on, apparently without end'.[4] The withdrawal from metaphysical realism into counter-intuitive positions, such as Nelson Goodman's 'irrealism', Michael Dummet's 'anti-realism' and Rorty's anti-realism exemplify this dance. A reasonable response for Putnam is a reconstruction of 'Deweyan' and 'Jamesean' 'pragmatic' or 'natural realism' that eschews realist metaphysics, whilst conserving a commonsense realism.

The neopragmatic 'search for a middle way between reactionary metaphysics and irresponsible relativism' unites Putnam and McDowell.[5] But where McDowell and Putnam find that middle way in Kant and Sellars, this book argues neopragmatism as scientifico-Romantic theological epistemology, rejecting the neoKantian approach as fundamentally dualistic and, therefore, unpragmatic.

McDowell describes his position as 'minimal empiricism', 'the idea that experience must constitute a tribunal, mediating the way our thinking is answerable to how things are, as if it must be if we are to make sense of it as thinking at all'.[6] He imputes the 'tribunal of experience' to Quine, and it is instructive to see his approach as akin to Quine's. Quine sought a form of empiricism, whilst rejecting two of its 'dogmas'.

McDowell likewise re-evaluates empirical experience to undo a frame of mind that, in his view, makes it impossible for experience to 'function as a tribunal, standing in judgement over our beliefs'.[7] He wants a pragmatic, commonsensical understanding of how experience and knowledge relate and 'hook up' to the world. McDowell's concern is not just empiricism, but also deconstructive/postmodern thought. In ethics, he advocates 'moral realism', although he is ambivalent about that term because what he urges 'is more negative than positive; my stance…is better described as "anti-anti-realism"'.[8] He adopts pragmatic anti-scepticism,

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me on to Sellars; and it will be obvious that Rorty's work is in any case central for the way I define my stance here', in *ibid*., pp. ix-x.

4 Hilary Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 3.

5 *Ibid*., p. 5. *Cf.* also *Ethics Without Ontology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

6 *Op. cit.*, p xii.

7 *Ibid*., pp. xiii and xvi.

8 John McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. viii.

doubting the forced scepticism of anti-realism. Like Peirce, McDowell counters deconstructive/postmodern thought by reversing the burden of proof, transferring it to the sceptics.

This points to another pragmatic echo. McDowell's description of 'minimal empiricism' is reminiscent of James's 'radical empiricism', not in the contrast between 'minimal' and 'radical', but in what they share as 'empirical' approaches. James's radical empiricism incorporates the traditionally nominalist way of characterising meaning holism, what he termed 'compenetration', or the coherence of fact, value and theory. The whole of reality, in James's understanding was 'Nature' or 'pure experience'. This included the 'terms' of pure experience, 'the subject or bearer of knowledge, the knower' and the 'object known', along with the cognitive and conjunctive relations that unite them in thought.[9] For James, this allowed radical empiricism to be realism, but of a direct kind.

Likewise, McDowell's 'minimal empiricism' describes the commonsensical notion that what we experience plays a significant role in judging whether our thoughts are correct. In McDowell's 'anti-anti-realism', the goal is not to reinstate old orthodoxies of empiricism or rationalism, but to draw on aspects of both to affirm ordinary experience over epistemological relativism. McDowell rejects the anti-empirical coherentism of Davidson as well as the more explicit deconstructionism of Rorty along such lines. Likewise, he rejects materialist appeals to 'bare presences', 'data' and so forth that supposedly underpin language.

McDowell's strategy is also similar to James and Dewey. Both earlier thinkers rehabilitated positions generally associated with non-empiricist philosophy, reconstructing them into a new understanding of what they considered empiricist-based thought. This is the opposite of Kant, who sought transcendental laws of reason to underpin thought. The reconstructive impulse is also pragmatist in its reconstruction, rather than typically 'constructivist' in the Kantian sense. Rather than appeal to *a prioristic* foundations in logic, language, experience and the mind to ground epistemology, McDowell bootstraps aspects of all these areas, drawing on thinkers from classical antiquity to the present for this account.

McDowell's reconstructed epistemology lies between what he calls the 'rampant platonism' which underwrites much of modern philosophy's constructivism and the therapeutic or 'quietist' model sometimes assigned, inappropriately in his view, to Wittgenstein, but correctly applying to postmodern and deconstructionist thought.[10] Both positions create the impasse of modern/postmodern philosophy that he claims to avoid.

McDowell believes the main roadblock to the model of 'experience as tribunal' is the fact that philosophy still largely buys into Sellars's Myth of the Given. The Myth of the Given, elaborated upon earlier, is the epistemological position that behind experience there exists a pre-experiential, pre-cognitivised world to which we have access and which, in turn, grounds our experience, language and notions of truth. For Sellars, 'the Given' is a 'third dogma' of empiricism, but one that thinkers from Kant to Wittgenstein have shown cannot be true. Language, to follow the idiom, 'goes all

9 William James, 'Does Consciousness Exist?', in *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, pp. 4f.

10 *Mind and World*, pp. 92-93.

the way down'. No pre-linguistic access opens up at the bottom and the search for epistemological grounds in that 'foundation' is misplaced.

For McDowell, both the search for such grounding and the 'anxiety' that compels it are symptoms of a deeper Wittgenstein-like problem. This problem is a philosophically undermining mentality that insists on the commonsensical empiricism of ordinary experience, whilst at the same time denying its possibility by subsuming epistemology under the philosophy of language and drawing up full coherentist theories of meaning. This is the central difficulty at the heart of current epistemology, in McDowell's view. Anxiety over it leads philosophers to recoil into nonsensical flights of deconstructive fantasy and anti-realism that likewise cannot be sustained.[11]

McDowell's answer is an intermediate, pragmatic position between the two. He follows Sellars's indictment of the Myth of the Given, accepting the linguistified view of knowledge, but he rejects how Sellars and others, especially Donald Davidson and Richard Rorty, connect that to wholesale coherentism. In particular, he criticises this interpretation of the Myth of the Given according to the 'naturalistic fallacy'. Coined by G. E. Moore to reject the identification of the scientific with the metaphysical in ethical theory, McDowell extends it to coherentist epistemology.

The naturalistic fallacy is the tendency, especially within empiricism, to collapse the distinction between the realm of nature and the realm of thought. That is, it is the *fallacy pertaining to naturalism*, where naturalism is the view that nature is properly understood according to the terms of scientific materialism. Such an understanding, of course, is opposite the scientifico-Romantic neopragmatist view, with its appreciation of the open-ended, ecstatic development of nature. Moore's 'naturalism' is rather 'scientific reductionism', where nature is defined by empirical science.

The logical space of mind for McDowell is the notionally distinctive sphere of reason governed by the rules of warranted assertibility and social convention. The logical space of nature is the sphere governed by empirical science. It is the mind-independent world where physical laws and other theories of science hold sway in the form of physics, chemistry and biology. The former regulates the realm of reflective thought, the latter of experience. Scientific naturalism/reductionism ignores this distinction, which McDowell thinks necessary. It succumbs, according to him, to the 'naturalistic fallacy':

> First, there is bald naturalism, which aims to domesticate conceptual capacities within nature conceived as the realm of law. …In the most straightforward version of this approach, the task is to *reduce* the structure of the space of reasons to something that is already unproblematically natural on the relevant conception. But I do not want to limit the approach to such reductionism. What matters is just that ideas whose primary home is the space of reasons are depicted as, after all, serving to place things in nature in the relevant sense. On these lines, we can equate nature with the realm of law, but deny that nature so conceived is utterly disenchanted. The claim is that, even so conceived, naturalness does not exclude the intelligibility that belongs to meaning.[12]

11 *Ibid*., pp. xvii-xviii.

12 *Ibid*., p. 73.

For McDowell, one naturalist/reductionist way around the logical space of reason/mind division is to simply reject its validity, like the anti-realist interpreters of Sellars. If there is no such thing as a material 'given', or at least there is no such thing as a pure access to it, then there is no reason believe the laws of nature are mind-independent. The logical space of reasons absorbs the logical space of nature. This is the epistemological position of coherentism, which, for McDowell, leads to the relativism of Davidson and Rorty.

Other elisions of the two spheres work in the opposite direction. 'Bald naturalism' and its variants treat the rules of reason as an extension or special case of those operating in nature. McDowell dismisses these options because they contravene a *sui generis* understanding of the logical space of reasons. Following Kant and Sellars, his concern is to secure the epistemological integrity of the free subject against scientific determinism, from the genetic determinism of Richard Dawkins to the cognitivism of Daniel Dennett to the fundamental ontology of John Searle. Similar concerns forced Kant to recognise not only the independence of the logical space of reasons from the natural, of 'pure reason' from 'pure practical reason', and led to further divisions within reason, including the aesthetic and religious spheres.

For McDowell, there are necessary minimal empiricist reasons to posit the Kantian/Sellarsian division. It comprises the background to such notions as the logical principle of non-identity, grammatical rules that differentiate subject from object and mind from world and the commonsensical distinction between that which is thinking or acting from that which is thought or acted upon. These positions require independence of the logical space of nature from the logical space of reason, in his view.

McDowell does not think he has to refute scientific naturalism/materialism or bald naturalism, or even to argue that each do not present a reasonable account of its epistemology. The real issue for him is to show how his minimal empiricism addresses 'anxiety' over the contradiction in current epistemology that results from holding a commonsensical view of reality, but employing empirical and rational structures that contradict it:

> The point is just that the availability of my alternative and, I claim, more satisfying exorcism [of the anxiety] undercuts a philosophical motivation, the only one relevant to my concerns in this book, for supposing the program must be feasible. [13]

This explanation smacks of circularity, but it is neopragmatic, as well as Wittgensteinian, in its therapeutic view. The underpinning anxiety is over coherentist and scientific naturalist/reductionist views undercutting rational subjectivity. In wholesale coherentism, autonomy is lost in a network of socially constructed meaning apart from causal relationship with the world. In scientific reductionism, the subject is a product of material laws that determine the direction of every part of identity, from the biological to the psychological. The logical space of reason where subjectivity holds cognitive freedom is colonised by science and lost for autonomy.

13 *Ibid*., p. xxiii.

The social determinism of coherentism is traded for the material determinism of scientific reduction.

Before discussing McDowell's neoKantian, neopragmatist alternative, it is important to address the pragmatist sense of naturalism he ignores. This is the sense this book identifies with commonsense or natural realism, discussed earlier. In the scientifico-Romantic epistemology, borrowing McDowell's terminology, the logical space of reasons and the logical space of nature are effectively identical, co-operative, rather than subsumed by one or the other, as in wholesale coherentism or naturalism/material reductionism. They key metaphor is Emerson's transparent eyeball, where identity with 'ecstatic' nature is the source of the rational subjectivity's free self-transcendence in 'abandonment'. This holistic view of the relationship between mind and world rejects the dualistic opposition from the outset, without the materialist reduction of either nature or mind.

For example, in James 'pure experience' and 'Nature' are the same reality, viewed from different sides. Thus, the realm of physical laws and the realm of mental and linguistic conjunctions where terms 'become' subject or object are the same field. This is not a one-way taking up of the logical space of nature into the logical space of reasons, as with McDowell's criticism of coherentism. Nor is it a taking up of the logical space of reasons into that of nature, as scientific naturalism, bald or otherwise, in a 'bare given'. Rather it is a pragmatic rejection of the dualistic logic that bifurcates the natural and mental spheres, conceiving them as opposed in the first place.

The commonsense, natural realism of pragmatism also rejects the logic of the naturalistic fallacy. That is, it does not deny *a fortiori* the notional separation of the space of reason and nature. In practice it is a frequently made distinction. However, it dismisses a Kantian-style *a priori* positing of the distinction as logically necessary, as with McDowell, and it rejects such an approach as logically necessary to safeguard free and creative rational subjectivity.

Contrary to the commonsensism and holism of pragmatism, McDowell extends the parameters of the naturalistic fallacy's critique, maintaining the rational division between the logical space of nature and reason. He builds his version of minimal empiricism by agreeing with Sellars, but along the line of Moore's observation: there is no access to the Given because what is given in nature is posited in the logical space of nature, and for it to be cognised it must be brought into a separate logical space governed by subjectivity.

This division, and McDowell's dualistic language, reflects an earlier absolute distinction that Kant made between the noumenal and phenomenal realms. The noumenal realm corresponds to the logical space of reasons and rational freedom, and the phenomenal to the logical space of nature and experiential determinism. As with Kant, for McDowell the structure of rational subjectivity assumes the role of the mediator, or in his terms 'tribunal' between both realms.

For McDowell, Kant's great insight was seeing empirical knowledge as the result of a balance between 'receptivity' and 'spontaneity' or, alternately, between 'sensibility' and 'understanding' or 'intuition' and 'the faculty which enables us to think of the object of sensible intuition' manifest in rational subjectivity:

> The original Kantian thought was that empirical knowledge results from co-operation between receptivity and spontaneity. (Here 'spontaneity' can be simply a label for the involvement of conceptual capacities.) We can dismount from the seesaw if we can achieve a firm grip on this thought: receptivity does not make an even notionally separate contribution to the co-operation. The relevant conceptual capacities are drawn on *in* receptivity. …We should understand what Kant calls 'intuition' – experiential intake – not as a bare getting of an extra-conceptual Given, but as a kind of occurrence or state that already has conceptual content. In experience one takes in, for instance sees, *that things are thus and so*. That is the sort of thing one can also, for instance, judge.[14]

McDowell makes several important epistemological points in this passage. First, he understands the significant Kantian insight to be that the activity of subjectivity itself is the *locus* of understanding, at least, in this case, with respect to 'empirical knowledge'. This view favours at least provisionally a Kantian-style monological model for reason, rather than a dialogical understanding.

For McDowell, certainty in empirical knowledge is primarily the function of individual consciousness, not a social process. Subjectivity judges experience in light of the categories of thought that provide for experience and its validation. In McDowell's terms, the truth of experience and its categories is contained within the 'cooperation' between experience and thought affected within the self, rather than in confirmation by the inter-subjective standards of the community. This sets him initially at odds with the Peircean and Wittgensteinian linguistified view of truth he draws on, following Sellars, to reject the Myth of the Given.

This leads to a second point, concerning the form of 'cooperation'. McDowell attempts to add back something of the social-linguistic dimension of knowledge that in his account is missing. The problem with modern/postmodern epistemology for him arises from the seemingly irreconcilable choice between coherentism and materialist naturalism. Neither option balances the notion that all knowledge qualifying as empirical experience is linguistified with the commonsensical understanding of a mind-independent, extra-linguistic reality without sacrificing the epistemological integrity of the self. McDowell's solution is to place the self at the intersection of experience and thought, such that its rational activity reconciles them in the act of empirical knowing. To accomplish this, however, he must account for the coherentist critique, with its rejection of the Given.

For McDowell, cooperation between consciousness and receptivity occurs only if experience brings with it, *qua* experience, conceptual content and if that conceptual content is understood as phenomenal experience rather than pure mentation. Such a conception conforms to the view that empirical experience is linguistified, since experience is not reception of a bare given, but is accompanied by the form or idea of that experience. It would also conform to the notion of the external limit of a reality that is experienced and that guides ordinary understanding. This cooperation allows rational subjectivity to be conceived of as a *sui generis*, independent, substantial, not dissolved in a complex of social relations, nor having its autonomy lost in the operations of a larger scientific determinism:

14 *Ibid*., p. 9.

> I have been urging that we must conceive experiences as states or occurrences in which capacities that belong to spontaneity [the autonomy of thought] are in play in the actualizations of receptivity [the external constraint imposed by what is experienced]. Experiences have their content by virtue of the fact that conceptual capacities are operative in them, and that means capacities that genuinely belong to the understanding: it is essential to their being the capacities they are that they can be exploited in active and potentially self-critical thinking. But when these capacities come into play in experience, the experiencing subject is passive, acted on by independent reality.[15]

McDowell describes experience as 'double-barrelled' and 'neoplatonic'. He means that it delivers conceptual content, in some reduced sense linguistified and therefore social content, along with its receptiveness to external reality in an experience. The experiencing subject then holds together what it receives and actively reflects upon these two sides of every experience. The ability to reconcile the demands of spontaneity and receptivity defines the autonomy of the self, solving for him the conflict between coherentism and naturalism/material reductionism

A significant epistemological problem remains for McDowell. It is his twofold conception of experience itself. Part of any experience, in his view, is 'receptivity' or the external constraint imposed by what is experienced. Part is also the activation of 'conceptual capacities' within subjective consciousness itself. In the former, 'the experiencing subject is passive', and the latter, 'active' in the operation of those capacities in thinking. Conceptual content, as it were, is superadded by thought onto raw sensation to create an experience proper.

But this understanding is mechanistic and one-directional. For classical pragmatism, especially that of Peirce and James, what is being received in an experience, whether an event or object, and the source of the conceptual content of an experience, subjective reason, are part of the same reality. This includes not only the perceiver as a physical object, a sensing body in the world, but those operations of consciousness that give interpretive content to what is sensed. They flow together as part of the same continuum in classical pragmatist epistemology, and there is neither a necessary nor a natural opposition between receptivity and spontaneity in such a conception.

Furthermore, contrary to McDowell, what is received in perception is not a static, 'passive' thing, whether an object or event. It is *qua* nature, active. It has the character of 'ecstasy' for Emerson, or 'tychism' for Perice. That is, even if it is a discrete thing perceived, i.e. seeing a colour, it is not a mere reception of a something that 'is'. That colour exists is only because of the activity of light interacting with other particles/waves to produce a wavelength that is itself a fluctuation. This counts as conceptual content for McDowell, but in the scientifico-Romantic view that content is already there, constituted by the creative action prior to experience.

Still further, it is not only because of the action, but of what Peirce would call the 'synechism', the *inter*action, the relationality of a constantly unfolding reality in all of its rich and manifold parts that brings it into being, at that particular moment, a particular colour in a field of vision. Another way of thinking of this is that nature, in a sense, participates in creating a field of vision as red to a viewer, rather than that

15 *Ibid*., pp. 66-67.

the viewer, distinct from nature in McDowell's conception, receives a perception and then adds conceptual understanding afterward making it red.

McDowell, following Kant and Sellars, treats these spheres and the two sides of experience as separate and opposed in order to preserve the spontaneity of rational subjectivity. But this view implies that an experience 'of' something is a disruption of autonomy and impediment to free thinking. Neopragmatism in the scientifico-Romantic mould of this book, on the other hand, sees the open-ended development of nature, and of those items of perception that make up reality for us, as the source of rational subjectivity's own open-endedness and freedom. The field of nature in which subjectivity is a part does not hem it in; rather it makes possible the self's development and self-transcendence. And it is especially in the perception of nature in its religious dimension that, following Emerson, this self-overcoming is thematised.

Such a neopragmatist epistemology also conceives of reality as a field of experience that is open for new development and interpretation of perception itself. This is not to say our thoughts about what is perceived can run in any direction, but that McDowell's neoKantian explanation minimises the fact that the so-called 'passive' 'conceptual content' activated in perception can and does change all the time. Thinking about an experience of the colour red in a brilliant-coloured sunset at one moment, and then thinking about it in the next can alter meaning when different conceptual content is brought to it in reflection.

McDowell might answer that this example indeed expresses thought's spontaneity, but for the scientifico-Romantic neopragmatist it is not just the conceptual content that has changed, but the possibility that reflection has clarified what was really received in perception. The conceptual influence is fluid and moves in both ways and therefore, in a real sense, the experience of what is perceived itself thus changes. McDowell might, on the other hand, answer that the example mistakes memory for experience. But that is part of the point as well. The difference between the thinking *in* an experience and thinking *about* an experience is also fluid. If, in McDowell's view, conceptual content is what is added after receptivity in perception, then logically and temporally, experience and memory are both species of reflection.

For the scientifico-Romantic neopragmatist, the difference between the initial experience of seeing the red sunset and further thinking about that experience, if there is one, can only be meted out in practice, in any case. The reason for its brilliance might have initially been attributed to the angle of its rays in a northern latitude close to the summer solstice. The truth of that experience might be confirmed, or it might be falsified if it turns out later that smoke from a distant forest fire imparted to the sunset a ruddy glow.

The NeoKantian Turn and Epistemological Dualism

McDowell's controlling metaphor for subjectivity is as a 'tribunal' judging thought against receptivity in experience. Tied to this image is a neoKantianism that evaluates subjectivity according to the exercise of freedom. This concern forced Kant to posit a series of self-derived, *a priori* foundations for knowledge, including a radical split between the free, rationally self-founding logical sphere of *noumena* and the empirical

and experiential logical sphere of *phenomena*. In parallel fashion, McDowell applies the critique of the naturalistic fallacy to the structure of experience, resulting in a theory of knowledge with an original division in reality between two spheres, the logical space of nature and the logical space of reason. For Kant and McDowell, the experiencing subject is at the conjunction of these two spheres. But Kant recognised the limitations of this approach to 'pure' reason with respect to experience, and was forced to posit further divisions within the rational subject where autonomy could be lived out, including the moral-practical, aesthetic and religious. The serious and well-rehearsed difficulty arising from Kant's approach is that the bifurcating tendency carries over into the structure of the rational subject, threatening a unified understanding of rational subjectivity that it was originally supposed to secure.

The Kantian problematic arises from the varying conceptions of what constitutes external constraint to which reason is responsible, begging the question of the source of the subject's autonomy. Kant envisaged it in all areas of lived experience as an adapted, self-founding autonomy. The Romantics later rejected this monological model for rationality, but it can be argued that even Kant's own understanding of all knowledge as conceptualised or linguistified points to a source of autonomy that takes the subject beyond itself. Hilary Putnam follows McDowell in recognising the importance of this insight for neopragmatism:

> Kant was the first really to see that describing the world is not simply copying it. Kant saw that whenever human beings describe anything in the world, our description is shaped by our own conceptual choices. …Kant appreciated that we describe the world for different purposes, for example, for scientific purposes and also for moral purposes, and that neither of these descriptions is reducible to each other, although he believed, and I think he was right, that our moral images and our scientific images can both be right.[16]

Besides arguing for pluralism in reason, this quote expresses a common neopragmatist understanding of Kant as pointing from concept to language to a corporate understanding of rationality, which stands as both an additional source of external constraint for subjectivity and a source of its autonomy.

Kant, according to this interpretation, is a proto-coherentist, which is a view McDowell relies upon for his next move. Yet, it should be recalled that Kant does not follow this route himself. In fact, Kant's insistence on the self-grounding autonomy of the subject and the positing of a noumenal realm to insure it stands against such an interpretation. This tension threatens to collapse neoKantian epistemologies, including that of McDowell and Putnam. The tension is that between the desire to maintain the integrity of the autonomous self and the recognition that the self requires more than its own self-grounding to constitute its freedom. Ultimately, it is a pressure that could not be sustained by Kant without referring to the very metaphysical notions, such as *noumena*, that Putnam's and other post-analytic philosophy disallows. On top of that, the Kantian approach of creating divisions within reason tended to lead to more divisions, undercutting the very stability meant to be preserved.

16 *Pragmatism: An Open Question*, pp. 28-29.

McDowell's epistemology falls into the same trap. Beyond the dualisms of mind and world, receptivity and spontaneity, passivity and activity, he appeals to two older dualistic and metaphysically-laden ideas to add back the social dimension to his thought: the Aristotelian notion of potentialities and the German Romantic notion of *Bildung*. In the first case, the self is reread as a project aiming towards *logos*, rather than a purely free-standing subjectivity that already possesses what it needs to express it. That is to say, the rational self is constituted by the acquisition of, in McDowell's terms, a 'second nature', which in Aristotelian and Kantian terms is the education that comes about through practical reason:

> In acquiring one's second nature – that is, in acquiring *logos* – one learned to take a distinctive pleasure in acting in certain ways, and one acquired conceptual equipment suited to characterize a distinctive worthwhileness one learned to see in such actions, that is, a distinctive range of reasons one learned to see for acting in those ways.[17]

The acquisition of second nature is another way of understanding the natural course of human maturation, where the individual is acculturated to a peculiar corporate rationality and acquires conceptual content that is later activated in experience. The classical Aristotelian example of this is in the inculcation of rational and moral virtues such that the subject will be inclined to wilfully act towards those ends. McDowell's concept of 'second nature', whilst not a name known to Aristotle, is clearly meant to follow that form and enrich the monological neoKantian self with an implicit dynamism.

But this Aristotelian move does not allay the problem with McDowell's core Kantianism. It raises new difficulties by positing two levels of understanding within consciousness. Aristotle's understanding of virtue acquisition, of the subject's process of growing to full self-reflective maturity, is along a continuum based upon a prior understanding of the proper ends of human being. What stands as 'second nature' in Aristotle is based on a pre-identified teleology, where the metaphysically antecedent nature is brought to fruition from potentiality to actuality. Indeed, this is precisely what is 'practical' about virtue acquisition: it is brought from formal, notional existence into reality by means of its exercise *in mundo*.

Such a teleology implies a pre-existent metaphysical structure and a proper form and end to human being that the contemporary evolutionary model of human development overturns. McDowell wants to augment his Kant-inspired subject with a dynamism described by the Aristotelian example of virtue acquisition, but presumably does not want to bring with it the metaphysical implications of a teleology that works against subjectivity's open-endedness. This is another epistemological dilemma that his neoKantianism invites, but that the scientifico-Romantic realist view answers from the beginning with its view of the 'abandonment' of ends.

Likewise, McDowell draws on the German Romantic notion of *Bildung*, literally of 'building' or construction of the self, to impart a socio-linguistic dimension to the self not present in it alone. *Bildung* is his gloss for the social upbringing which provides a structure in which to place meaning and which constitutes the distinctiveness of human thought:

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17 John McDowell, 'Two Sorts of Naturalism', in *Mind, Value, and Reality*, p. 188. *Cf.* also *op. cit*., pp. 84-86.

> Human beings are not ['born at home in the space of reasons']: they are born mere animals, and they are transformed into thinkers and intentional agents in the course of coming to maturity. This transformation risks looking mysterious. But we can take it in our stride if, in our conception of the *Bildung* that is a central element in the normal maturation of human beings, we give pride of place to the learning of language. In being initiated into a language, a human being is introduced into something that already embodies putatively rational linkages between concepts, putatively constitutive of the layout of the space of reasons, before she comes on the scene.[18]

In this quote, McDowell uses the notion of socialisation or upbringing not only to fructify a conception of human being, but to define it. Human reason becomes autonomous, literally becomes human through the acquisition of language and initiation into the language-game. Humanness is superadded to an initial 'mere' animalness *via* the process of *Bildung*.

Again, this conception runs up against McDowell's neoKantianism. It appeals to what is essentially a continuous and, in the scientifico-Romantic understanding, never-ending process of development and then reconceives of it in terms of a strict Kant-like dichotomy between potentiality and actuality, between animalness and humanness. It falls into the conceptual trap of the dualism between nature and nurture or, in McDowell's parlance, 'the space of nature' and 'the space of reason'.

Further, it is not clear how 'being initiated into a language' itself is enough to secure autonomy of the self that McDowell wants to preserve. The literary notion of *Bildungsroman* is a valuable descriptive for how a self becomes a member of a particular society, or subset in a society, like scientists, through instruction into what counts within that 'logical space'. But there is nothing in this account that 'initiates' into rational autonomy to become what McDowell calls 'intentional agents', or explains how initiation into the logical space of reason initiates the subject into freedom. Individuals may be educated to be good Wittgensteinian language-game rule-followers, but that alone cannot be what makes them autonomous. The dynamics of free choice and creativity are not accounted for in McDowell's explanation, as they are in the scientifico-Romantic view.

The classical pragmatists learnt from Darwin that speaking about the ultimate ends of human being was no longer a plausible language. They also learnt from Emerson and the Romantic-religious strain behind pragmatism that such language was not desirable in the first place. That way of thinking about human rationality constrained the possibilities for creative thought, and Emerson even advocated the notion of 'whim' in choice and 'abandonment' of ends as liberating from such thinking.

The classical pragmatists saw this as a scientific understanding, post-Darwin, but they also understood it as a religious truism and thematised it as such. Rational subjectivity, like all of reality, was in a process of flux and development towards ends that were not predetermined, and that very ambiguity was the precondition for spontaneity and creativity. Likewise, the scientifico-Romantic neopragmatism of this book reconstructs epistemology along the same lines and does not treat ambiguity and vagueness as threats that reason has to divide itself against in order to manage. It rejects the original neoKantian, Sellarsian division that McDowell adopts between

18 *Mind and World*, p. 125.

mind and world in favour of an epistemological holism. And it rejects the impulse to further dualisms that thinkers from Descartes to McDowell create in reason as the real threat to understanding.

Putnam likewise reverts to Kant-inspired dualism, appealing to internal realism[19] although recently mollifying this as natural or pragmatic realism.[20] Circumscribing the question of rational justification to relations amongst beliefs, internalism can either skirt the question of the connection of those beliefs to a mind-independent reality or ascribe a metaphysical theory of reference. In either case, there is no unmediated access to the world, and such relations cannot be shown outside of their own language anyway.

Putnam opts for the former, nonmetaphysicalist option, but even doing so keeps in play the dualistic structure that cannot appeal to that which would make its account secure: the fact that things are actually thus and such. He holds that the agent-point-of-view validates better and worse, right and wrong and even true and false views.[21] But his neoKantian internalism runs into the problem of legitimation when judging amongst competing versions of reality. If all that is being referred to is internal to a language, competing language games and different, incommensurable orders of value threaten to devolve his epistemology into Rorty-like 'ethnocentrism' or even solipsism, as critics of Kantian methodology claim it ends up as anyway. To be fair, Putnam moves closer to the commonsensical realism of scientifico-Romantic neopragmatism in recent writings, but he has yet to explore it fully or recognise the theological sources behind such a view.

Even Rorty, for all his anti-Kantian posturing incorporates strict neoKantian dualisms. His split between the public and private sphere to insure space for subjective autonomy mirrors Sellars's division of the logical space of nature and reason. It likewise threatens the unity of the self it is ostensibly supposed to preserve, as will be addressed below.

Criticisms of Kant-inspired epistemological approaches are legion. The most trenchant for this book arise from its dualistic view of the world and monological methodology, which lead to the fracturing of subjectivity into increasing separate spheres of thought when taken up in the neopragmatism of McDowell, Putnam and Rorty. An alternate view, a scientifico-Romantic shaped epistemology growing from classical pragmatism, has been developed by this book appropriate to the contemporary context. It rejects the Myth of the Given, adopting a Wittgensteinian linguistified view of reality, but rejects the extension of the naturalistic fallacy to the type of open-ended, ecstatic and theological naturalism it promotes. It looks at language, like rational subjectivity, as a part of an enchanted nature from which it both possesses its dynamism and free creative possibilities, as well as accesses as commonsense reality.

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19 Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 61-64; *Representation and Reality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), pp. 113-16 and *Realism With a Human Face* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

20 *The Threefold Cord*, pp. 10-11.

21 Hilary Putnam, *The Many Faces of Realism* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1987), p. 77.

Chapter 8

Literary Neopragmatism

The previous chapter traced one trajectory emerging from the neopragmatic renaissance. That trajectory, the dominant philosophical strain, considers neopragmatism an extension of Enlightenment empirico-rationalism, constructing neopragmatism along what Stanley Cavell calls 'the Kantian settlement'.[1] That compromise, famously expressed in the first *Critique*, is 'to deny *knowledge*, in order to make room for faith'.[2] NeoKantian neopragmatism secures understanding by bifurcating the world into a sphere of lived experience and a sphere of pure speculation, dividing rational subjectivity along the same lines. That bifurcation, however, creates a divide that threatens Kant's foundationalist project, dichotomising rationality and keeping part of reality in reserve. Following Cavell, if the cost of 'knowledge of the world' is 'the world', then 'Thanks for nothing'.[3]

This book argues for a scientifico-Romantic realist version of neopragmatism not beholden to the neoKantian programme and its associated epistemological problems. It rejects the presumed dualism between mind and world, and the legalistic-mechanistic depiction of rational subjectivity. The scientifico-Romantic self is a unified force, rather than substantive object or function split between incommensurable epistemological sides. It is part of the world, as in James's stream of consciousness, and it is part of society as participant in a quasi-spiritual corporate activity, as in Peirce's community of inquirers. The world and other people are not, to borrow McDowell's term, the 'friction' exerting itself against the self's autonomy. They are the liberative possibility for subjectivity's freedom.

In spite of its near-regnant position, Kantian-influenced neopragmatism is breaking down. To a certain degree, this is occurring internally, especially as result of 'new Wittgenstein' interpretations, such as those of Putnam and Cavell, writing common language into neopragmatism. It is also resulting from the anti-Kantian tendency of literary criticism-influenced neopragmatism that is developing outside of the philosophy faculty.

The neopragmatism of McDowell, Putnam and Rorty grow out of the beginnings of the neopragmatic philosophical revival. The impetus was the failure of logical positivism to make analytic philosophy 'scientific' in the same way that experimental science understood 'scientific' as apodictic. The neoKantian approach traces to Sellars's attack on the Myth of the Given underwriting the positivist project. But this strand of neopragmatism is no less influenced by the Enlightenment model of

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1 Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 31.

2 *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 29.

3 *Op. cit.*

reforming philosophy in the image of Enlightenment science. It simply exchanges the apoditicity of logical positivism for Kant-style *a prioristic* and dualistic rational forms.

The degree to which philosophical neopragmatism, from its origins to its current major thinkers, has been organised around this view traces to this post-positivist context. This historical idiosyncrasy arises from the fact that these neopragmatists, as much as they distinguish themselves, were trained as analytic philosophers. Their resistance or inability to conceive of neopragmatism outside of this idiom leads to severe epistemological deficiencies described earlier. In a striking autobiographical moment, Rorty attributes this development to the failure of philosophy as a discipline:

> Philosophy in the English-speaking world became [in two generations] "analytic," anti-metaphysical, unromantic, and highly professional. Analytic philosophy still attracts first-rate minds, but most of these minds are busy solving problems no nonphilosopher recognizes as problems: problems which hook up with nothing outside the discipline. So what goes on in Anglophone philosophy departments has become largely invisible to the academy, and thus to the culture as a whole.[4]

Rorty derides Anglo-American philosophy for its lack of critical imagination, but, more importantly, for its lack of being *philosophy* and remaining relevant to lived experience. One of its failures is not taking literature philosophically seriously and, thus, ignoring epistemological developments in literary criticism. Rorty is thinking specifically of Anglo-American philosophy's lack of engagement with Continental thought, especially with the deconstructionist criticism of figures like Derrida. For him, this dialogue prevented literature faculties, unlike those of philosophy, from succumbing to the equivalent of Kantianism in the academy. Philosophy cordoned itself off into an insulated departmental sphere with little direct connection and relevance to the larger university, or society, as a whole.[5]

Meaning, Intention and Neopragmatism

Thus, neopragmatism enjoys a recent cachet, but largely independent of Anglo-American philosophy.[6] Literary theory and criticism have taken up pragmatic themes in response to postmodern readings of literature. This interest is primarily methodological, recovering the text and meaning, but it holds an epistemological significance as well. Literary neopragmatism engages the socio-linguistic turn, rejecting the French Nietzscheans who think that it presents an insuperable crisis for textual interpretation, authorial intention and reader agency.

Literary neopragmatism recovers the undervalued Romantic-literary understanding as a constituent of the pragmatic tradition. It recoups commonsensical realism,

4 Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country* (London: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 129.

5 *Ibid.*

6 Figures like Rorty and Stanley Cavell, notwithstanding. They are cross-over thinkers in neopragmatist philosophy and aesthetic-literary criticism precisely because in form and content they are atypical philosophers.

applying it to the integrity of language, and to the creation and interpretation of texts. In this sense, it advances beyond the neoKantian paradigm, avoiding its epistemological difficulties, such as providing for knowledge by means of a *denial* to understanding and splitting rationality into increasingly discrete spheres. Where the 'Kantian settlement' is arrived at in order to prevent epistemological scepticism, the Romantic or, in the construction of this book, the scientifico-Romantic, resolution follows classical pragmatism by refusing to acknowledge such scepticism as a real problem in practice.

Literary neopragmatism accuses both metaphysical philosophy and deconstruction of erring, *qua* 'theory'. It satirises their perceived epistemological predicaments as problems with no purchase in the real life of writing and reading. Crises over the 'loss of meaning' and concerns about 'shoring up meaning' only exist in the rarefied context of literature *about* literature. They are the false analyses of 'theorists' on all sides who seek to impose an over-arching theory of interpretation:

> By 'theory' we mean a special project in literary criticism: the attempt to govern interpretations of particular texts by appealing to an account of interpretation in general. …Theory attempts to solve – or to celebrate the impossibility of solving – a set of familiar problems: the function of authorial intention, the status of literary language, the role of interpretive assumptions, and so on. We will not attempt to solve these problems, nor will we be concerned with tracing their history or surveying the range of arguments they have stimulated. In our view, *the mistake on which all critical theory rests has been to imagine that these problems are real*. In fact, we will claim such problems only seem real – and theory itself only seems possible or relevant – when theorists fail to recognize the fundamental inseparability of the elements involved.[7]

This quote from the manifesto of literary neopragmatism *Against Theory* identifies three inter-related neopragmatic characteristics.[8] First, is its rhetorical boldness. Knapp and Michaels tap into the anti-sceptical contrarianism that classical pragmatism inherited from Emerson.

This inheritance was seen in Peirce's commonsensical refusal to grant Cartesian-style scepticism epistemological ground. He reversed the burden of proof, requiring the sceptic to provide as good reasons for such a stance as the sceptic requires of doubt. Doubt of the global philosophical variety is false, imposed doubt, for Peirce. Its imposition, as with Descartes and Hume, make possible a host of unnecessary epistemological problems that plague both the empirical and rationalistic traditions. The specific difficulty for scepticism arises from practical experience. Real doubt, like authentic belief, is not something that can be faked. When it comes to issues like the existence of other minds or the reality of the physical world, behaviour betrays what common sense tells us is true.

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7 'Against Theory', by Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels, in *Against Theory*, ed. by W. J. T. Mitchell (London: University of Chicago, 1985), pp. 11-12. Italics are mine.

8 The book *Against Theory* began as three issues of *Critical Theory*: Summer 1982, Volume 8, no. 4; June 1983, Volume 9, no. 4 and March 1985, Volume 11, no. 3, constituting Knapp and Michaels's original article, outside responses to it and the authors' counter-responses.

Just as the cultivation of such an artificial global doubt grows an alternate philosophical world of problems for Peirce, the cultivation of literary doubt sprouts an alternate sphere of 'theory' for Knapp and Michaels. Like Peirce, they resist it by removing the first logical step of the theorist. Where theory assumes a connection to something outside it, i.e. the world of writing, reading and literary meaning, they simply deny such a connection exists. Ordinary language practices outside of the academy are not experiencing the same concern over loss of meaning, from doubting 'authorial intention', the 'status' of language, 'interpretive assumptions' and so forth. The non-academic world not only does not share these problems, it does not succumb to a debilitating anxiety over them.

Knapp and Michaels accuse literary theory of imparting false issues to literature, and to language as a whole. They indict it for creating theoretical problems that can only be answered by theory. Literary theorists 'attempt to govern interpretation of particular texts by appealing to an account of interpretation in general'. Thus, it is not any real problem with language, but the incipient need of theorists to theorise, to regularise and universalise according to overarching principles, that is the real issue. It is therefore the literary theorist, not the 'new pragmatist' who has the burden of proof to show that what concerns them relates to the actual practice of language and literature, according to Knapp and Michaels.

This criticism is in part a professional argument about the legacy of literary theory. Knapp and Michaels raise fears about the future of their profession. It has created for them a *corpus* so technical and removed from the writing and reading of literature that it fractures their study from other academic departments and threatens the relationship of criticism to the culture as a whole. Their fear parallels that of Rorty, who indicts analytical philosophy for the same reason, although, ironically, appealing to literary theory for a better model.

Concern over 'professionalisation' points to a second trait. Anxiety over the possible loss of meaning is evidence for Knapp and Michaels of the fact that theory has grown too 'theoretical'. Theory has lost its living relationship to the cultural inheritance that is literature and to a subjective rationality rooted in *praxis*. Their definition of theory as 'an account of interpretation in general' is extremely broad, identifying it in the tendency towards greater abstraction, rather than awareness of the contextual, concrete and *pragmatic* character of interpretation.

Theory thus conceived assumes a basic dualism, the split between literature, on the one hand, and theory for 'getting the interpretation of literature right', on the other. This bifurcation mirrors the Kantian dualism between the noumenal and phenomenal, where the application of correct theory by the subject leads to correct interpretation. The self-as-tribunal, or the self-as-theorist, stands between text and transparent meaning.

Knapp and Michaels fault literary theory for spinning off an industry that is not about literature, but about the criticism of criticism and the theorising of theory. Literary theory expends itself 'generating a difference where none in fact exists'.[9] This development of literary criticism is not neutral. It has 'always been in the service of an epistemological goal', creating an educated elite empowered by their knowledge

9 *Op. cit*., p. 24.

of theory at the expense of other language users. That is why literary theory has now 'more often taken the form of arguments about the epistemological situation of the interpreter than about the ontological status of the text'.[10] The dualising mentality of theory, in other words, places the literary text, the ostensible object of interpretation, at an increasing distance from interpretation and inserts in the gap its own language of theory and authoritative interpretive community.

As that distance increases, the language of the text and the language of interpretation become more and more distinct, less literary than philosophical in Knapp and Michaels's view, until the text is finally lost as literature. The text becomes increasingly foreign until inaccessible to experience, like *noumena*, and the only thing talked about is theory itself. This shift from literature to theory leads from the 'ontology' of language to the 'epistemology'[11] of the language user.

The observation that literary theory creates 'a difference where none in fact exists', manufacturing the very dualisms that deliver its present dilemma parallels the criticism of classical pragmatism, especially William James. But where James's concern was the epistemological division between mind and world, for Knapp and Michaels the original interpretive bifurcation is between meaning and text:

> The clearest example of the tendency to generate theoretical problems by splitting apart terms that are in fact inseparable is the persistent debate over the relation between authorial intention and the meaning of texts. Some theorists have claimed that valid interpretations can only be obtained through an appeal to authorial intentions. This assumption is shared by theorists who, denying the possibility of recovering authorial intentions, also deny the possibility of valid interpretations. But once it is seen that the meaning of a text is simply identical to the author's intended meaning, the project of *grounding* meaning in intention becomes incoherent. Since the project itself is incoherent, it can neither succeed nor fail; hence both theoretical attitudes toward intention are irrelevant. The mistake made by theorists has been to imagine the possibility or desirability of moving from one term (the author's intended meaning) to a second term (the text's meaning), when actually the two terms are the same.[12]

This passage points out a third literary neopragmatic observation of Knapp and Michaels. The dualising tendency of all theory in their view reveals that the original intentionalist and the deconstructionist, however far apart they claim to be, are at root identical when it comes to interpretation. Both rely on a primordial division between the meaning intended by the author of the text and the meaning of the text itself. The theorist arguing for original intention values one side of the dualism, whilst the theorist arguing for the impossibility of reconstructing such meaning or for the interpretive autonomy of the text or for the interpreter, promotes the other.

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10 *Ibid*., pp. 24-25.

11 Epistemology is a dirty word for Knapp and Michaels, who equate it with theory *per se*. Yet, even their argument against theory presupposes epistemology, of a contextualised variety. They correctly observe that the emphasis on generalising epistemological theory has marginalised literary texts and interpretation in literature departments. This transformation of the literary critic into philosopher is a matter of regret for Knapp and Michaels, but a matter of celebration for Rorty.

12 *Op. cit*., p. 12.

Again, the problem is with the initial neoKantian characterisation that splits authorial intention from meaning in the first place and then posits the rational subjectivity as the tribunal reconciling them, whether leaning to one side of the division or the other. For Knapp and Michaels, '[M]eaning is just another name for expressed intention'.[13] The equation or, rather, identification of the two terms as one and the same brings about a unity that is prior to any theorising, denying the split which makes theory, however constructed, incapable of benefiting or impeding interpretation. Rather, it avoids interpretation, because for Knapp and Michaels it is theory.

In one sense, this identification is non-controversial. It is, epistemologically-speaking, trivial to say that the meaning of a text is determined by what its author meant to say. All but the most ardent reader-response theorists[14] and deconstructionists index for authorial intention in their accounts. What is problematic, however, is Knapp and Michaels' bald identification of meaning and authorial intention, even if argued for on the pragmatic grounds of anti-dualism.

What happens before the split is interpretation, what happens after is theory, but for them the dissociation of meaning and authorial intention does not end there. As with neoKantianism, further dualisms develop from it, like the distinction between 'author's meaning' and 'reader's meaning'. Knapp and Michaels likewise treat this division not just as false, but 'empty'.[15] For them, meaning prior to a theoretical split is the *author's meaning*. Treating interpretation as if there is a choice of any other locus of meaning is not only wrong, but unintelligible, since the dissociation transforms the activity from interpretation to theory.

However important such distinctions are for literary theory, they are ultimately irrelevant to determining the meaning of a text, in their view. Following Peirce's pragmatic maxim, echoed by Stanley Fish in *Is There a Text in This Class?*, Knapp and Michaels maintain that such distinctions have no practical consequences for interpretation *per se*. In spite of theorists' claims that they are really 'theorising interpretation', such distinctions occur, as it were, outside the realm of interpretation in the speculative realm of theory itself.

Knapp and Michaels do not refute the dualism between intention and meaning, authorial intention and reader's meaning, nor do they see a need to. They simply refuse to acknowledge it as real distinction germane to interpretation and then they pragmatically shift the burden of proof to those who argue for it. They charge theorists to prove that what they are doing is really interpretation and not theory. Of course, the burden of proof is impossible to sustain, because the dualism on which it is based is disallowed by Knapp and Michaels in the first place.

A rhetorical gimmick is involved in this reasoning, arising from a misunderstanding of the pragmatic tradition's attitude towards theory. Classical pragmatism was not opposed to theory. Rather, it was opposed to theory not informed by practice or, rather, any interpretive model that methodologically prioritised the abstract over the concrete.

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13 *Ibid*., p. 30.

14 *Cf.* literary neopragmatist Stanley Fish in *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980). His cultural relativist approach is, however, eccentric to classical and contemporary realist versions of pragmatism.

15 *Op. cit*., pp. 14-15.

Such a view is contextual and adaptive, but, nonetheless it is also a form of theory. A truly holistic neopragmatism, therefore, would reject Knapp and Michaels's aversion to theory and thematise the connection between practice and theory. Despite Knapp and Michaels's and, by extension, Fish's, reluctance to admit it, even positing an anti-theoretical position requires the prior existence of the dichotomy between theory and practice they do not want to countenance. As much as they refuse the dichotomies, thematising them even negatively is not only acknowledgement, but also a continuing sign of their real epistemological power.

Neopragmatic Interpretation and the Indispensability of Epistemology

These thinkers would not deny that what they are doing when criticising theory for its pretensions to interpretation is theory and not actually interpretation. But even the modest interpretive stance that 'meaning equals intention' requires an epistemology to explain why this view is, or should be, the case. Even this position is a theory, and requires theorising as why interpretation should be conceived of in this manner and not another.

Their position requires a theory of how you get to authorial intention, if it is to be holistic and not merely anti-dualistic. Knapp and Michaels desire an interpretive equivalent of pragmatism's direct realism to preserve the integrity of the text and direct access to authorial intention. But even classical pragmatism required an explanation in terms of theory. It was not that they were 'against theory' or against epistemology, as Knapp and Michaels proffer, but against theories and epistemologies that conflict with commonsense realism or do not account for the difference that theory makes in practice. The classical pragmatists saw their anti-dualism connected to methodology that was empirically realist and scientific, fallibilistic and progressive, yet also tied inextricably to the existential situation of the subject and community. Beyond this, they embodied thought in the type of naturalistic metaphors that kept mind in identity with the operations of the world. Their theory was anti-abstract, recovering the world through a revaluation of *praxis*, and frequently emblematising it in religious experience.

The neopragmatism of this book adopts the Romantic-influenced view of language, deriving from its tradition, found in the literary neopragmatist Richard Poirier. Accepting the problematics that cause Derrideans to deconstruct not only language, but also the self, Poirier counters:

> [W]e ought to be grateful to language…for making life messier than ever, more blurred than we pretend we want it to be, but also therefore more malleable. Within even a single word, language can create that vagueness that puts us at rest inside contradictions, contradictions which, if more precisely drawn, would prove unendurable. We willingly live with the fact that by its beneficent betrayals language constantly delivers us to ourselves, and makes us known to others within a comforting haze.[16]

16 Richard Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 30.

For Poirier, drawing on what he calls 'Emersonian pragmatism', it is not in language's tidy metaphysical referentiality that meaning and stability is to be found. It is its Emersonian and Cavellian 'superfluity', Jamesean 'vagueness' and other such 'beneficent betrayals' of the text. Language's ability to reconstruct and reinvent itself, not out of nothingness but out of the 'contradictions' which critics use to theorise it away, is what keeps it fresh. The creative troping and reinterpretation of language is also constitutive of the subject. In this view, an author's intention is predicated on the existence of a language where meaning can be massaged, where words play off each other, and which open up new possible meanings for a text.

Although Poirier associates this view with Emerson in particular, this Romantic understanding is also found, for example, in Peirce's view of science. The community of inquirers imagine and experiment, playing new ideas off the old and just as frequently increasing knowledge by serendipitous accident, and stating them, as Peirce did, in creative neologisms. This view of neopragmatism goes far beyond Knapp and Michaels. It sees neopragmatism not only as a reconciler of dualism, but as a proponent of a deeper holism uniting Romantic-aesthetic and scientific aspects in interpretation and epistemology. It builds into neopragmatism a holism between theory and interpretation, rather than like Knapp and Michaels its denial in a choice between either-or.

Despite the philosophical simplism of their approach, Knapp and Michaels have a precedent in the anti-scepticism of the classical pragmatists. It is commonsensical that what a text means is what its author intended, since that is the *raison d'être* for its having been written in the first place. This is a truism for all but the most zealous Freudian or deconstructionist critics, and the burden of proof should be upon them to prove otherwise. Knapp and Michaels adopt this concretising, anti-sceptical commonsensism from classical pragmatism, but with a sense of postmodern irony not found in thinkers like Peirce, James and Dewey. When they lump theorists of all stripes, deconstructionist and otherwise, into the same category, branding them with the categorial mistake of rending intention from meaning and chastising them for 'doing theory' at all, it is clear the pair aspire to both more and less than their classical pragmatist antecedents.

They make a Nietzschean revel of trash-binning theory, refusing to take sides in the debate. But even a negative stance is still a stance, requiring an account beyond a tautology of theory and intention. Knapp and Michaels go halfway, limiting their observations to the most basic stance of critical anti-dualism, failing to tease out a holistic position that would necessarily imply theory in the form of epistemology.

Knapp and Michaels claim they do not have to advance to the reconstructive moment, positing the identity and leaving theory to work out how it might be accomplished, since that is what theorists do anyway. But their refusal leaves them open to charges of their own dualism, imagining that theory 'has no practical consequences, positive or negative' for interpretation in the 'web of belief'.[17]

Knapp and Michaels do, however, go further than interpretation, even by their own definition. They surreptitiously venture into theory and undercut their position when they specify the missteps of theory. They criticise John Searle, for example,

17 *Against Theory*, p. 25.

the figure whose development of the understanding of speech-acts has helped to contextualise the use of language as an activity of the intentional self, for inadvertently perpetuating the meaning-intention distinction:

> After insisting…on the inescapability of intention, he [Searle] goes on to say that 'in serious literal speech the sentences are precisely the realizations of the intentions' and that 'there need be no *gulf* between the illocutionary intention and its expression'. The point, however, is not that there *need* be no gulf between intention and the meaning of its expression but that there *can* be no gulf. Not only in serious literal speech but in *all* speech what is intended and what is meant are identical. In separating the two Searle imagines the possibility of expression without intention and so… misses the point of his own claim that when it comes to language 'there is no getting away from intentionality.' Missing this point, and hence imagining the possibility of two different *kinds* of meaning, is more than a theoretical mistake; it is the sort of mistake that makes theory possible. It makes theory possible because it creates the illusion of a choice between alternative methods of interpreting.[18]

Knapp and Michaels uncover what they believe to be a dualism built into Searle's speech-acts theory. This dualism is not in the actual division between intention and meaning according to how Searle conceives of linguistic activity as *praxis*. Rather it is in opening up a space for the division to occupy, creating the possibility of conceiving of the division in the first place that opens the way to the charge of an incipient dualism. Speech-act theory, according to them, in spite of its desire to reframe linguistic understanding as use and recover intentionality, keeps in play the division which prevents it from achieving what it desires: correct interpretation. For them, Searle and other speech-act theorists like H. P. Grice and even Wittgenstein, succumb to the meaning-intention dichotomy and its linguistic equivalent: the split between language *per se* and language conceived of as speech-acts.[19]

These philosophers, in order to provide for 'an objectively valid method of literary interpretation' are forced to imagine intentionless meanings or, in more general terms, to imagine a separation of speech acts and meaning'.[20] By this, Knapp and Michaels characterise them as thinking of speech-acts and, thus, intentionality as being delivered *to* language rather than something that language already has. Intention, super-added by means of discursive speech-acts (perlocutionary, illocutionary, locutionary and so forth), allows the interpreter to discern meaning. This, however, imagines a static thing called 'language' that speech-acts activate by adding intention. For Knapp and Michaels, speech-acts and language are inseparable, just as meaning and intention are inseparable. It is not possible for them to conceive of a language that is not intentional, and does not function according to the intentionality described by speech-acts.[21]

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18 *Ibid*., pp. 17-18. Knapp and Michaels quote from Searle's 'Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida', *Glyph* 1, (1977).

19 *Ibid*., p. 21.

20 *Ibid.*

21 Knapp and Michaels adapt E. D. Hirsh's and P. D. Juhl's example of discovering a stanza from Wordsworth's 'A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal' in the sand after the retreat of a tide. In their view, unless a plausible explanation that ascribes an agent with intention to the

Knapp and Michaels also take on Rorty for what they characterise as a dualism in his approach. Whilst Rorty does not fall into the intention-meaning dichotomy for them, he does buy into a more nuanced dualism in asserting a difference adopted from E. D. Hirsch, between '"a text's meaning …must always be what *an* author intends it to mean" and not that it "must always be what *its* author intended it to mean"'.[22] The difference here is between the intention of 'an' author and 'the' author of the text or, borrowing Grice's distinction, 'between what sentences mean and what a given utterer means by them on a given occasion…':

> For Grice's distinction opens up the logical space they want to close: the space in which one asks the traditional interpretive question 'Granted that a sentence means such and such, did its author mean that on this particular occasion?' Since I regard this as a useful question, I should like to keep with Grice. So I would urge that anything – a wave pattern, an arrangement of stars, the spots on a rock – can be treated not only as language but as any given sentence of English if one can find some way to map its features onto the semantic and syntactic features of that sentence.[23]

Rorty opens up the space that Knapp and Michaels want to close with the identification of meaning with intention, a space that leads interpretation to theory. By adding the distinction between '*an*' author and '*the*' author to interpretation, it raises the question of exactly *whose* intention is being determined, in Rorty's view. It establishes a distinction between the general meaning of an utterance in its sense in ordinary language and how the author meant it in a particular context. For Knapp and Michaels, this is a counter-intuitive argument, since interpreting any text is an interpretation of a particular text of the particular author who wrote it.

It is not that Knapp and Michaels deny that any particular language follows the rules of the language game, although 'narratology, stylistics and prosody' significantly do not qualify as 'theory' for them, but that any interpretation moves beyond generality to the particular meaning of the instance of their utterance and, thus, moves away from any totalising system that would need to posit the distinction in the first place.[24]

Knapp and Michaels traverse a slippery semantical slope, denying the validity of this distinction, at least as a provisional tool in support of interpretation. Their pragmatic literary maxim identifying meaning solely with intention is precisely the view that posits a dualism between theorising and interpretation. Rorty, for his part, correctly rejects any view of language that 'will make it illicit to form a general theory of interpretation', but in doing so accepts on face value the Knapp and Michaels's theory-interpretation dualism.[25] Where Knapp and Michaels distinguish between the two and excise theory from interpretation, Rorty acknowledges the distinction and

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phenomenon, it does not have meaning, is not poetry and does not even constitute language. It is just marks that accidentally resemble a Wordsworth poem. This example has become a classic test for literary theorists who maintain the importance of authorial intention.

22 *Ibid*., p. 140.

23 *Ibid*., p. 133.

24 *Ibid*., p. 11.

25 *Ibid*., p. 134.

shifts the emphasis to theory. He wants an interpretive model where, inquiring into the space between *an* author, i.e. the space of theory, and *the* author, the space of interpretation, the autonomy and creativity of the interpreter plays a greater role in constituting the text.

Rorty wants to preserve an anti-essentialist view of literary neopragmatism. He is critical that Knapp and Michaels' 'distrust of theory's epistemological project' and their refusal to offer concrete ways for identifying meaning 'suggests that we put the text in whatever context we find useful and then call the result a discovery of the author's intention'. Rorty is less worried here about the implications of their anti-method leading to interpretive relativism, than he is that it might lead in the opposite direction to a correspondence theory of truth for interpretation.

For Rorty, Knapp and Michaels view interpretation as simply placing a text in the context of its being written to discover what underlies it as intention, or, in other words its 'essence'. But this presumes that identifying the *Sitz im leben* provides some magical connection to the psychology of the author. Ironically, such a connection all but requires a metaphysical explanation in this view, since insistence that what counts as intention for the author exists at the exact moment of the writing could not be determined by those extremely general rules of narratology, prosody and so forth, which they do allow *qua* theory.

For Rorty, insurmountable differences exist *between* different epistemological projects and between *types* of theories that such a global rejection of theory misses. Knapp and Michaels's attempt to circumvent theory by denying its possibility at the beginning illustrates its inescapability when they fall into the same pattern as an original intention hermeneutics, with its outmoded metaphysical implications. Pragmatically speaking, for Rorty, they should see 'that the question "What is the meaning of the text?" is as useless as the question "What is the nature of the good?"', and simply move on.

Rorty holds a further concern over the collapse of the logical space between authorial intention and meaning. He upbraids Knapp and Michaels for thinking of 'theory' and 'epistemology' or, in general, of 'philosophy as entirely a matter of deductive argument'. Rorty's version of neopragmatism, which he aligns with Derridean deconstruction, understands 'Philosophy as a Kind of Writing', to quote the title of one of Rorty's essays. He eschews metaphysical and analytical theory, but he sees neopragmatism as a conversation and literature that requires the creative interaction of multiple interpretations, and thus requires theory:

> Derrida's point, I take it, is that crosstalk is all that we are going to get, and that no gimmick like 'the new science of grammatology' is going to end or *aufheben* it. Once one thinks of philosophy as a kind of writing, one should not be surprised at the result. For to think this is to stop trying to have a philosophy of language which is 'first philosophy,' a view of all possible worlds, an [episteme epistemes], a bootstrap self-elevation to a point from which all past and future writing can be seen as contained within a permanent framework.[26]

26 *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), pp. 108-9.

'Crosstalk' is a Romantic awareness of something inherent in philosophical dialogue that over-reaches its putative pre-determined linguistic structures, whether 'Kantian or non-Kantian'. The crossing of different philosophical languages illustrates the dissonance amongst theories, but it also creates possibilities for doing philosophy in a different way. Crosstalk is an intellectual cross-pollenisation that reveals to the interlocutors how philosophy is constituted by overlapping discourses. For Rorty, this includes crossing over from theory into interpretation.

With respect to Knapp and Michaels, the collapse of meaning and intention not only surreptitiously provides for the reinstatement of metaphysics because of their refusal to countenance any theory, but it inhibits language from crosstalking. This is the real problem for Rorty, even though his own anti-metaphysical thought parallels the rest of *Against Theory*. The refusal to theorise interpretation prevents their neopragmatism from being concretised and, in Rorty's terms 'humanised'. It prevents interpretation from participating in the carry-over from one sphere and system into another, and the theoretical problematising that liberates language from the abstract metaphysical or analytical view.

Literary Theory and Scientifico-Romantic Theological Realism

Although Knapp and Michaels criticise theory, theory is precisely what they take up by such a view. Theory is inescapable given the breadth of their definition of it as rules 'to govern interpretations of particular texts by appealing to an account of interpretation in general'. No account is more general than the identification of meaning with authorial intention. Further, theory is what they are doing even when they minimally equate meaning with intention. They prescind from explaining how intention is recovered and therefore how meaning is accessed. There is something anti-holistic, anti-pragmatic in their refusal to situate interpretation within the rest of thought.

In this sense, although Knapp and Michaels's aim is pragmatic by refusing the division between meaning and intention, they insist on a further absolute division between interpretation and theory. The line is unbridgeable for them, even in practice, and they maintain with Fish that whatever they say about interpretation could have no conceivable effect on theory as such. In this way, their view of the division is *a priori*, no less dualistic than the neoKantian theories they seek to avoid.

Knapp and Michaels shun theory in their literary neopragmatism, but, as this book argues, that approach is atypical for the pragmatic tradition. Rather, the tradition has engaged theory, rejecting dualistic, abstract and *unpragmatic* versions of theory. In spite of their apprehensions, a degree of theory is required to explain the difference between their literary neopragmatism and other modes of literary interpretation. The scientifico-Romantic neopragmatism of this book, for example, would draw upon an open-ended, corrigible theory of truth to arrive at increasingly proximate views of a text's meaning. It would adopt a commonsense realist view of the text, granting it and the intention of the author a substantiality absent in other postmodern accounts. Most importantly, it would concretise any view by appealing to the *praxis* of both writing and reading. In this area, it can draw, like Rorty, on its Romantic heritage, and rehabilitate some of those concepts that postmodernism sees as threatening meaning.

Knapp and Michaels only half-keep with pragmatism's fallibilistic revisionism in refusing any methodology, any 'account of interpretation in general' 'to govern interpretations of particular texts'. They are not interested in carving out a blueprint for how interpretation is done, but their identification of meaning with intention necessarily holds some methodological implications, even implicitly. As it stands they are neopragmatists, but only in a narrow and negative sense in the anti-dualism of meaning and intention. They are critics rather than constructive neopragmatists, resembling the very post-New Criticism and deconstructionist literary critics they wish to avoid.

A neopragmatism keeping with the tradition would move to the next constructive step, acknowledging the indispensability of authorial intention in interpretation, but understanding that such recognition inescapably requires a theory, and an epistemology, for it to be truly holistic and not merely anti-dualist. The scientifico-Romantic neopragmatism of this book thus follows Peirce and James in acknowledging the theoretical implications of anti-dualism. It understands the need for a theory of knowledge to support interpretive activity, whether of experience, as in the previous chapter, or literature. Scientifico-Romantic neopragmatism follows Knapp and Michaels, *contra* Rorty, connecting intention and meaning as way of insuring the substantiality of the text, and of the subject who writes it and the reader who reads it. But it counters Knapp and Michaels by advancing beyond criticism to theory, describing the connection in scientifico-Romantic neopragmatic epistemology.

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Chapter 9

Neopragmatism and the Return of Religion

The development of literary neopragmatism exerts an important, if not always acknowledged, effect on its philosophical counterparts. This is true of recent literary criticism in general, which, as Knapp and Michaels point out, had ventured so far from literary texts and questions of authorial intention that it had become its own distinct culture of criticism. That culture now extends beyond interpretation and aesthetics into the traditionally philosophical and theological domain of the study of knowledge

Recently, several notable philosophical neopragmatists, like Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam and Stanley Cavell, who trained and made their careers in analytic thought are showing this influence. Most notably, they are collectively adopting an un-analytic, literary-autobiographical voice. This new voice, perhaps even more than the return of interest in pragmatism that is supposedly bringing it about, is a clear indication that something has changed.

Adopting an autobiographical-literary, rather than Enlightenment scientifico-logical, style is more than a complaint against the excesses of logical analysis. It is an admission tinged with confession now that analytic thought has run its course. In its confessional, occasionally epigrammatic, sensibility this change in philosophical voice most resembles an earlier version of literary criticism:

> The arrogance of philosophy is not one of its best kept secrets. … A formative idea in planning these lectures was to pose the question whether, or how, philosophy's arrogance is linked to its ambivalence toward the [humanising tendency of the] autobiographical. … After some years of graduate study in which philosophy interested me but seemed unlikely to be moved by anything I had to say, or by the way in which I seemed fated to say it, I began finding my intellectual voice in the work of the so-called philosophers of ordinary language, J. L. Austin at Oxford and the later Wittgenstein; and, as it turns out, took me years to recognize usefully, importantly because their philosophical methods demand a systematic engagement with the autobiographical.[1]

Cavell's intimation that it was Austin and the later Wittgenstein, two philosophers in some sense still tied to analytic thought, though also eclipsing it, who delivered him *from* analytic thought to the autobiographical-literary is an instructive if perhaps not

1 Stanley Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy: Autobiographical Exercises* (London: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 3–6.

so eccentric an admission any more.[2] In fact, the level of its acceptance is a token of the sea-change in thinking about the recent history of Anglo-American philosophy.

Rorty's solution is to complete the so-called Wittgensteinian linguistic revolution by making philosophy 'literary' and 'autobiographical'. The recent development of Continental thought is his model and, whilst recovering the thought of Hegel, Nietzsche and Heidegger, figures associated with the Romantic trajectory of thought, the person he most has in mind is 'Derrida, that extraordinarily imaginative, poetic, inventive, ingenious, funny, flesh-and-blood writer', 'the most intriguing and ingenious of contemporary philosophers', a figure for whom even the name 'deconstruction[ist] is inadequate'.[3]

Indeed, Rorty clearly sees himself as an American equivalent of Derrida, and his version of neopragmatism an Anglo-American analogue to Derridean deconstruction. One of the least noted philosophical differences between the two, however, has been their approach to religion. Derrida, as a result of his criticisms of the 'logocentrism', 'essentialism' and 'presence' that Christianity has bequeathed to philosophy, has enjoyed a serious, career-long engagement with theological thought. This is one reason why many theologians, not just so-called 'postmodern' theologians, have found Derrida useful.[4] Rorty, on the other hand, is well-known for rebarbative attacks on religion, and theologians and philosophers of religion have found him less of a productive resource for their work. This is an understandable, albeit regrettable development, considering Rorty's enormous influence in other areas of the academy, especially literary theory. Thus, theologians and philosophers of religion have found themselves mainly left out of this conversation.

Rorty's Theological Turn

What happened to religion, so central to classical pragmatism, in the neopragmatic renascence? According to Giles Gunn, 'Religion, it must be said, has not played a very significant role, except perhaps negatively, in the recent renewal of pragmatism'. He pinpoints the source:

> There are no doubt many reasons for this, but none is more important than the responsibility that Richard Rorty deservedly bears for helping to promote this revival and the connection he has made between the development of pragmatism and liberalism's project of disenchanting the world religiously.[5]

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2 Following Quine, Austin was dubious of the analytic-synthetic distinction, and his speech-acts theory grew out of his eventual rejection of the constative-performative distinction. *Cf. How to do Things with Word*s (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962).

3 *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers, Volume 3* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 307 and 349f.

4 Interest in Derrida's treatment of late medieval apophatic theology is a prime example. *Cf. Margins of Philosophy*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

5 Giles Gunn, 'Religion and the Recent Revival of Pragmatism', in *The Revival of Pragmatism*, p. 404.

Now, however, Rorty has changed. His historical analysis, spelt out in *Consequences of Pragmatism* [1982] and *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* [1989] is stated succinctly in 'Religion as Conversation-stopper' [1994]. There he repeats Virginia Woolf's famous claim that:

> The big change in the outlook of intellectuals – as opposed to a change in human nature – that happened around 1910 was that they began to be confident that human beings only had bodies, and no souls.[6]

For Rorty, the 'central achievement' of Enlightenment thought is the shift in ontological outlook from the vertical to the horizontal, and the secularisation of public life that followed. The reasons for this shift are numerous, overlapping and cumulative: the predictive success of the natural and technical sciences, the influence of Marxist and critical theory and the rise of feminist consciousness, to name several. However, the most important is the rise of liberal inter-subjective awareness and its defining political characteristic in democratic linguistic practices. The further concrete effect, especially when combined with the post-Darwinian, post-Einsteinian worldview, is the redundancy of metaphysical philosophy.

For Rorty, neopragmatism inherits Enlightenment consciousness and must reconstruct itself, Dewey-like, according to the changing view. 'Democratic conversation' replaces metaphysically freighted concepts like 'truth' or 'God' underwriting Rorty's epistemology. Democracy even problematises the originally metaphysical understanding of epistemology itself. If notions like 'God' have a place in democratic discourse, and in 'Religion as Conversation-stopper' Rorty believes they do not, it is only if religious believers submit their 'absolutist' truth claims about them to the public domain of debate. In that *milieu*, their value will be determined by intelligibility and coerciveness, not *a priori* proof or protected rank in a religious group's language game.

Rorty invokes the 'Jeffersonian compromise' to make this point. According to Jefferson, the particular beliefs of any group are tolerated in the public arena if and only if its mode of discourse is itself functionally tolerant, i.e. if religious believers subordinate their truth claims to the rational justification procedures of the democratic community. They cannot 'stop the conversation' or circumvent public adjudication by calling on the epistemological insulation of doctrines like 'special revelation'. Beyond that, Rorty thinks people should keep their faith to themselves:

> Contemporary liberal philosophers [such as Rawls, Habermas and Rorty] think that we shall not be able to keep a democratic political community going unless the religious believers remain willing to trade privatization for a guarantee of religious liberty ….[7]

Rorty makes a highly *un*pragmatic move endorsing the Jeffersonian compromise. This notion proceeds from a sharp theoretical, rather than practical, division between

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6 Richard Rorty, 'Religion as Conversation-stopper', in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), p. 168.

7 Richard Rorty, 'The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy', in *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers, Volume 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 170.

the 'public' and 'private' sphere, where aspects such as religion, sexuality and family mores are typically assigned the rubric of private. Differing opinions and practices may be held personally as long as they don't impinge upon the individual's function in the larger social life. If they do, the public value trumps the private.

Rorty's reliance on binaries like public/private and social/individual sacrifices the constitutive insight of classical pragmatism of conceptual holism, or what Hilary Putnam identifies as James's notion of the 'interpenetration' of precisely such theoretical divisions.[8] Rejection of dualistic rationality is a hallmark of classical pragmatist thought. Further, this anti-dichotomising sensibility is what many neopragmatists extend in their work. Putnam, for example, writes of James's view of the interdependence of 'fact, value and theory', to which he adds 'interpretation'.[9] Jurgen Habermas, remarking on James's aphorism that 'The community stagnates without the impulse of the individual, the impulse dies away without the sympathy of the community' describes neopragmatic holism in the 'reciprocal dependence of socialization and individuation, the interrelation between personal autonomy and social solidarity, that is part of the implicit knowledge of *all* communicatively acting subjects …'.[10] Richard Bernstein even calls on pragmatism's anti-dualism to problematise the division between modernity and postmodernity, creating the compound 'modernity/postmodernity'.[11]

Rorty opens himself to the practical charge that large swaths of human life like religion, sexuality and family cannot be cordoned off neatly into the private sphere. It is a truism, in no small part due to the insight of pragmatism, that all have deep and inextricable connections to public life. Allying his version of neopragmatism with earlier Jeffersonian liberalism, Rorty buys into a dualistic thinking eschewed by the pragmatic tradition and other post-analytical philosophy as well.

The Jeffersonian compromise reinforces a common 'secularising' theme in liberal historiography, exemplified by Max Weber. In Gunn's view, Rorty is indebted first to Weber and Hans Blumenberg's revised Weberian, post-Christian interpretation of social progress.[12] Both point to the increasing religious disenchantment of the world resulting from the rise of democratic consciousness.

An additional source for Rorty's atypical embrace of the Jeffersonian compromise is found closer to home. It is John Dewey, the thinker to whom Rorty is most explicitly indebted. In *A Common Faith,* Dewey identifies the key modern event as the shift to democratic consciousness. As a result, faith becomes a matter of personal choice rather than a necessary obligation as it was in pre-modernity when community and *cultus* were coextensive. Traditional beliefs come under stress with this change, but for Dewey this does not necessitate the loss of religiosity.

8 *Cf.* William James, 'Lecture II: What Pragmatism Means', in *Pragmatism* and *The Meaning of Truth*, pp. 27–44.

9 *Pragmatism: An Open Question*, p. 64. *Cf.* also pp.12–18.

10 Jurgen Habermas, *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics*, trans. by Ciaran P. Cronin (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993), pp. 113–14.

11 Richard J. Bernstein, *The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), pp.11–12.

12 Gunn, 404. Rorty reviewed *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* for *The London Review of Books.*

Rather, democratic consciousness opens up the field for theological reconstruction, of which his radically immanentist theology, discussed above, is an example.

Increasing democratisation for Dewey does not entail increasing disenchantment, as it does for Weber and Blumenberg. Just the opposite. Increasing democratisation makes possible new theological reconstructions. Democracy creates a fluid, non-metaphysically imagined horizon against which conceptions of person, society, world and divinity, and how they fit together, may be creatively re-imagined. Increasing democratisation allows for a *re*-enchantment of the world. For Dewey and James it involves thinking of the divine and the human not in terms of opposition, i.e. creator/creation, sacred/mundane, but plurality and even ecstatic identity. As James states, following Emerson, 'We are indeed internal parts of God and not external creations' whose democratic activities are 'self-reparative', helping to complete the 'incompleteness' of the world.[13]

According to this understanding, Rorty's position even in 'Religion as Conversation-stopper' is not against religious belief *per se*, but against those faiths using impenetrable truths to trump conversation. If, as with Dewey, divinity coalesces with the immanent, then epistemology does not need to look to an absolute external reference for securing belief. Traditional metaphysical thinking about God, in this sense, is not disproved, but rendered irrelevant. It ceases to be a useful way of thinking about God in a democratised context. But this does not require atheism on Rorty's account, since, as James and Dewey show, it is possible to reconstruct an immanentist theology.

Neopragmatic Epistemology and Religious Pluralism

Rorty is careful of potential attacks on this view, especially a charge frequently levelled against the Jeffersonian compromise that immanentisation and privatisation of religious belief is tantamount to its reduction. This is the stance of his interlocutor in 'Religion as Conversation-stopper', Yale Law professor Stephen L. Carter. Rorty, however, thinks privatisation is a reasonable trade-off in the current pluralistic context:

> Carter's inference from privatization to trivialization is invalid unless supplemented with the premise that the nonpolitical is always trivial. But this premise seems false. Our family lives are private, nonpolitical and nontrivial. The poems we atheists write, like the prayers our religious friends raise, are private, nonpolitical and nontrivial. Writing poems is, for many people, no mere hobby, even though they never show those poems to any save their intimates. The same goes for reading poems, and for lots of other private pursuits that both give meaning to individual human lives and are such that mature, public-spirited adults are quite right in not attempting to use them as a basis for politics. The search for private perfection, pursued by theists and atheists alike, is neither trivial nor, in a pluralistic democracy, relevant to public policy.[14]

Rorty's argument for 'nontriviality' is a red herring. No one denies that family, personal poetry or religious belief can be personally meaningful. He relies upon

13 *The Pluralistic Universe*, pp. 138 and147.

14 Rorty, 'Religion as a Conversation-stopper', in *Achieving Our Country,* p. 170.

the specious assumption of a strict separation of the public/private and political/nonpolitical spheres when 'family lives' are not solely 'private' and 'nonpolitical'. Family is a social organisation, and the definition of what constitutes family is increasingly a subject of social debate and political dispute. Poetry, even if it is not written to be shared, is constructed from a public language, subject *qua* poetry to the poetical language game. Likewise, religious belief cannot be strictly delimited or simply traded off to one theoretical sphere of life. Rorty misses the fact that none of his examples are only private. At some level all are 'relevant to public policy' because all have public implications.

This criticism of Rorty's position does not deny the usefulness of the public/private distinction in practice. Rather, it rejects how for Rorty it operates ironically like an anti-neopragmatic, *a priori* absolute. Rorty treats it as a Cartesian clear and distinct division or a Sellarsian 'Given' when even in the separation-of-church-and-state context in which he raises it the line is constantly shifting. What is public and what is private is determined socially, for example through the legal interpretation of the U.S. Constitution, votes of Congress, the input of states and, finally, the activism of people who can vote to alter the Bill of Rights. The public/private distinction and where that division lies is, at least in the U.S., an increasingly malleable legal-political and, thus, *praxis*-informed division.

Rorty sacrifices the pragmatic observation of holism for the Enlightenment view of a rationally incorrigible public/private division. He backtracks from a Deweyan theological reconstruction to embrace an earlier, Enlightenment-inspired, Jeffersonian attitude. Religious belief for him can either be public, where its assertions are open to debate, criticism, modification or rejection according to publicly accepted criteria, or it can be private, where it may enjoy great personal suasion but where its claims are subordinated to the truth-processes of the democratic community.

Neopragmatist Stanley Fish also rejects Rorty's view. He denies the connection of neopragmatism and the project of Enlightenment liberalism, or the portrayal of the former as a postmodern extension of the latter. Although Fish's neopragmatism is indebted to Rorty in other ways, he rejects his dualistic epistemology and the Jeffersonian compromise upon which it operates. [15]

For Fish, the epistemology of the Enlightenment liberal, epitomised by J. S. Mill, and the religious believer, epitomised by St. Augustine of Hippo and John Milton, are at loggerheads. They proceed from irreconcilable suppositions and, even when in dialogue, they speak incommensurable vocabularies:

> For the modern liberal, beliefs are what the mind scrutinizes and judges by rational criteria that are themselves hostage to no belief in particular. For Milton, beliefs – in God or in oneself or in the absolute contingency of material circumstances – are the content of a rationality that cannot scrutinize them because it rests on them. Milton's motto is not 'Seeing is believing' but 'Believing is seeing'; and since what you see marks the boundaries of what you know – whether what you know is that there is a God or that there

15 Fish probably borrowed the title of his latest book from Rorty. *Cf.* Stanley Fish, *The Trouble with Principle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) and Richard Rorty 'Ethics without Principle [1994]', in *Philosophy and Social Hope*.

> isn't one – that you act, believing is acting. What you believe is what you see is what you do is what you are.[16]

Fish adopts the classical pragmatist view of holism. In his reading of Milton, he links a theory of religious knowledge to the believer's peculiar form of life where the content of belief is not a matter of personal choice, as it is for Rorty.

But Fish establishes an extreme fideist position. A common ordinary language, in this view, does not unite religious and secular discourses. It rather discloses them as epistemological competitors, fighting over the same linguistic space. For Fish, the liberal as well as the believer, even with the best of intentions, cannot help speaking past each other and are doomed to recurring conflict.

The disagreement between Fish and Rorty is clear in their separate confrontations with Stephen L. Carter. Both reject Carter's advocacy of a public theology, but for opposite reasons. With Carter, and against Rorty, Fish eschews the relegation of faith to the private as a reduction. But against Carter, and with Rorty, Fish holds that seeking a place in contemporary liberal discourse, the religious believer trades away what has traditionally been understood to make faith possible: its core of meta-rational truth claims. Rorty thinks this is acceptable; Fish counters that it removes precisely what is religious from religion.

Fish further rejects Carter's liberal public theology with a Barthian stridency:

> If you persuade liberalism that its dismissive marginalizing of religious discourse is a violation of its own chief principle [of tolerance], all you will gain is the right to sit down at liberalism's table where before you were denied an invitation; but it will still be *liberalism's* table that you are sitting at, and the etiquette of the conversation will still be hers. … To put the matter baldly, a person of religious conviction should not want to enter the marketplace of ideas but to shut it down, at least insofar as it presumes to determine matters that he believes have been determined by God and faith. The religious person should not seek accommodation with liberalism; he should seek to rout it from the field, to extirpate it, root and branch.[17]

Carter's theology is wrong-headed for Fish because it is *moderate* theology. Likewise, Rorty's conception of religion is faulty because it is liberal. Both thinkers are too accommodationist in their view of what believers can and should, respectively, trade away. On Fish's account, accommodation is not what religious faith is about.

Fish subjects Rorty's liberal neopragmatism to the same thing that Rorty subjects theistic metaphysics: a critique of its hidden absolutist claims to knowledge, such as disinterested proceduralism, the public/private split, intolerance of strong religious belief and so forth. Whilst liberalism claims otherwise, it too holds an indefensible absolutistic posture, according to Fish. It merely replaces the transcendental claims of theology with its own dogma of anti-religious foundationalism.

Fish's neopragmatism is neither liberal nor religious. Like Rorty's, at least in 'Religion as Conversation-stopper', it is not even philosophical. Rather, it is a

16 *Ibid*., 247.

17 Stanley Fish, 'Why We Can't All Just Get Along', in *First Things*, vol. 60, February 1996, p. 22. Interestingly, the revised version published in *The Trouble with Principle* measures the hostility of the above quote, ending with '… he should seek to rout it from the field'.

species of anti-foundationalist critique. It is neopragmatism as deconstructionism. It reveals all epistemological disputes to be at their root disputes about language:

> The strong poet, in short, is a rhetorician, and if pragmatism is anything … it is an up-to-date version of rhetoric, that account of thought and action anchored in two famous pronouncements of Protagoras: 'About the gods I cannot say either that they are or that they are not' and 'Man is the measure of all things.' It's all there – the bracketing of ontological questions and the location of knowledge, certainty, and objectivity (of a revisable kind) in the ways of knowing that emerge in history. That is the lesson pragmatism teaches us: that we live in a rhetorical world where arguments and evidence are always available, but always challengeable, and that the resources of that world are sufficient unto most days.[18]

For Fish, neopragmatism is agnostic about the claims of theology. That is because neopragmatism, like Enlightenment philosophy, is not theology. Its proper role is in critiquing the meta-claims of epistemology by means of rhetorical analysis. It can reveal the moderate theology of Carter as melioristic and deconstruct the connection between neopragmatism and democracy of Rorty.

It should be noted that in this view Fish and Rorty are much closer than Fish acknowledges. For Rorty, neopragmatism and democracy are not identical. Nor does his version of neopragmatism necessarily entail democracy, or *vice versa*. Rather, both hook up because 'democracy' describes the fund of rhetorical practices that work for most Western people at the present time.

That democratic practices are largely taken for granted illustrates the pragmatic point. Rather than concern itself with whether and how democratic practices hook up to a metaphysical structure of the universe, both Rorty and Fish think neopragmatism should measure their usefulness *in praxis*. In James's terms, it is in this way that the value of truth is 'cashed out'. Rorty maintains there is no requirement for philosophical to 'justify' democratic politics. Democracy is self-justifying to those communities that find it helpful to collectively imagine, decide amongst and work-to-realise what Dewey termed the 'ideal ends' of human existence. This is how Rorty conceives of truth, religious or otherwise.

In the same way that contemporary science seems more plausible than Aristotelian physics, Rortyan neopragmatism is guided by what 'seems' the best with respect to the right and the true, according to the view of a particular time and place. This view can and does change, affirming the pragmatist balance between epistemological corrigibility and historical-critical contextualism. But instead of fashioning his neopragmatism along the lines of a fallibilistic realism, such as Peirce, Putnam or the rational-procedural methodology of Habermas, Rorty opts for the weaker 'cautionary' use of the term 'true'. For him, a Dewey-style 'idealized rational acceptability' equates to 'acceptability to *us* at our best' when arguing for one view over another.[19]

There is only better or worse with respect to whatever counts at a particular time, in a particular community's practices of rational justification. For both Rorty and

18 *The Trouble with Principle*, p. 307.

19 Richard Rorty, 'Hilary Putnam and the Relativist Menace', *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers Volume 3*, p. 52.

Fish there is no external philosophical 'principle', the reference to which secures once-and-for-all our ethical and epistemological judgements. The hope for one and anxiety because it cannot be found is what remains after the demise of metaphysics. The proper arena in which 'truth' is adjudicated for Rorty is not philosophy or science, but *politics*. Fish's version of neopragmatism as rhetoric agrees with this stance.

Rorty characterises his view as 'ethnocentrism', believing our beliefs will never convince everyone, only those whose beliefs and justification practices significantly overlap our own. Here Rorty holds a more epistemologically generous position than Fish. Like James and Dewey, Rorty sees a significant overlap not only with respect to democracy, but also in the scientific view of the universe as well.

Rorty has even begun to explore this overlap in an explicitly theological reconstruction, calling his version of neopragmatism 'romantic polytheism'. He begins by asking Dewey's question, How are we to conceive of notions like 'human nature' and 'the good' in a democratic, post-Darwinian, post-Einsteinian age?

Rorty holds that current biology and psychology define humans as 'clever animals trying to increase our happiness by continually reinventing ourselves'.[20] We are Virginia Woolf's 'bodies', led by a non-metaphysical, relativisitic understanding of the good. For Rorty, the good is the good-which-we-choose as best at any given time. It is happiness that, in the present context, unpacks as adaptive, nonmetaphysical, utilitarian eudaimonism.

Rorty draws a twofold connection between modern science, on the one hand, and democratic utilitarianism, on the other. The former provides a viable socio-biological description of the good, identifying it with human happiness, whilst the latter provides concrete mechanisms to bring it about for the greatest number of people.

Rorty has begun to connect this reconstruction of 'the human' and 'the good' with humanistic, demythologising theology. He has done this over and against both the fundamentalistic image of religious discourse held by Fish and the metaphysical strain in James which allows him in the absence of publicly verifiable evidence to say 'the best things are the more eternal things'.[21]

Paul Tillich is a theologian whom Rorty sees as sharing common ground. He identifies in Tillich both an affirmation of the Jeffersonian compromise and a Deweyan concern that religious conceptions be reconstituted against an immanentist worldview:

> A pragmatist philosophy of religion must follow Tillich and others in distinguishing quite sharply between faith and belief. Liberal Protestants, to whom Tillich sounds plausible, are quite willing to talk about their faith in God, but demur at spelling out what beliefs that faith includes. Fundamentalist Catholics to whom Tillich sounds blasphemous are happy to enumerate their beliefs by reciting the Creed and identify their faith with those beliefs. The reason the Tillichians think they can get along either without creeds, or with a blessedly vague symbolic interpretation of credal statements, is that they think the point of religion is not to produce any specific habit of action but rather to make the sort of difference to a human life which is made by the presence or absence of love.[22]

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20 *Ibid*., p. 276.

21 Richard Rorty, 'Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility and Romance', *The Cambridge Companion to William James*, ed. by Ruth Anna Putnam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 94.

22 *Ibid*., pp. 93–4.

Tillich's conception of God as the only object proper to our 'ultimate concern' is, according to Rorty, a prime example of Dewey-style reconstruction. Of course, Tillich conceived of this notion as metaphysically transcendental, deriving it from the Christian belief in God as the source of the ontology that Rorty rejects. But Rorty's admiration has less to do with what Tillich retains of the orthodox Christian conceptual scheme than with how Tillich reconstructs those conceptions in light of existential metaphysics.

Rorty acknowledges that this tends to anthropocentrise theology, a criticism, by the way, also levelled by Barth even though Tillich's notion of 'ultimate concern' was intended to relativise any particular humanistic notion of the divine. But this is precisely what attracts Rorty to Tillich's 'demythologising'. The notion of God as the object proper to *our* ultimate concern is what makes the divine imaginable in pragmatic-utilitarian terms, for Rorty. It relocates God-talk from the realm of abstract concepts to the lived experience of those who choose to take that notion seriously.

On Rorty's tenuous reading, Tillichian demythologising accords with the Jeffersonian compromise. It keeps faith within the sphere of the private. This is possible because of the conceptual opaqueness of a demythologised deity: the interpretations of what constitutes the object of ultimate concern are so potentially divergent, they by *fiat* relegate to private belief. Situating God-talk in this way dispenses with the traditional recite-and-assent formula of creeds for Rorty. It provides for flexibility in individual conceptions of the deity, especially for him, towards those encouraging the social co-operation necessary for democratic politics.

Tillich is not the only theologian whom Rorty admires. He finds a similar neopragmatic-utilitarian strain in the social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch and in the 'most socialistic of the papal encyclicals'.[23] The connection of both to Marxist thought exposes another impulse behind Rorty's theological reconstruction. In so far as Marxism projects a future social utopia *in* the world, it redescribes a secular version of Christian eschatology. For Rorty, it manifests a spirit derived and in a sense inextricable from Christian hope:

> If one treats the term 'Christianity' as the name of one such appeal [to hope], rather than as a claim to knowledge, then that world still names a powerful force working for human decency and human equality. 'Socialism,' similarly considered, is the name of the same force – an updated, more precise name. 'Christian Socialism' is pleonastic: nowadays you cannot hope for the fraternity which the Gospels preach without hoping that democratic governments will redistribute money and opportunity in a way that the market never will. There is no way to take the New Testament seriously as a moral imperative, rather than as a prophecy, without taking the need for such redistribution equally seriously.[24]

Rorty, the once-confirmed atheist largely responsible, according to Gunn, for the atheistic bent of the pragmatist revival is now an apologist for existentialist and liberationist Christian theology. He recommends them as two approaches in contemporary theological reconstruction, along the lines of Dewey in *A Common Faith*.

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23 'Failed Prophecies, Glorious Hopes' [1998], in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, p. 206.

24 *Ibid*., p. 205.

Romantic Polytheism as Neopragmatist Reconstruction

The distance between the atheism of 'Religion as Conversation-stopper' [1994], the recommendation of Tillich in 'Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility, and Romance' [1997] and the defence of Marxist-influenced theology in 'Failed Prophecies, Glorious Hopes' [1998], is bridged by a paper he presented at a 1995 conference on neopragmatism: the very same conference where Gunn made his observation that neopragmatism's relative lack of interest in religion could be attributed to Rorty. That paper, 'Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism', not only marks Rorty's adoption of a religious vocabulary. It explicitly *identifies* his neopragmatism as theology.

To make that identification, Rorty expands his previous list of constituent influences on pragmatism, from democratic liberalism, contemporary science and utilitarian ethics, to include a 'romantic, Coleridgean strain' exemplified in J. S. Mill's utilitarianism.

The connection between Romanticism, especially its American Transcendentalist version, and pragmatism is drawn earlier in this book, specifically to the prehistory of pragmatism in Ralph Waldo Emerson. This connection is problematic for Rorty. Emerson was a rational idealist, too metaphysical to reasonably consider the grandfather of his own anti-metaphysical neopragmatism. Rorty instead traces the genealogy to thinkers at a remove from Emerson, even to candidates as unlikely as Friedrich Nietzsche.

Tracing an equally doubtful source to Mill frees Rorty to describe a less metaphysical Romanticism and therefore a different Romantic imprint on pragmatism. This, in turn, provides him the theoretical space necessary to reconstruct a different, non-metaphysical type of neopragmatic theology.

Mill's utilitarian Romanticism is anti-Benthamite, exchanging religious dogma and moral calculus for poetry as the proper source of human ideals. Mill's substitution is utilitarian-pragmatic for Rorty, shifting from the language of eternal metaphysics to that of the human imagination. It is also Romantic in shifting from the philosophical ideal of the unitary to the aesthetic ideal of the plural. The effect of both for Rorty is a further shift in outlook from the supernatural to the natural.

The upshot is still theistic, *poly*theistic, according to Rorty. It involves no loss or minimisation of the religious *per se*, only of monotheistic religion:

> Here is a definition of 'polytheism' that covers both Nietzsche and James. You are a polytheist if you think that there is no actual or possible object of knowledge that would permit you to commensurate and rank all human needs. Isaiah Berlin's well-known doctrine of incommensurable values is, in my sense, a polytheistic manifesto. To be a polytheist in this sense you do not have to believe that there are nonhuman persons with powers to intervene in human affairs. All you need is to abandon the idea that we should try to find a way of making everything hang together, which will tell all human beings what to do with their lives, and tell all of them the same thing. Polytheism, in the sense I have defined it, is pretty much coextensive with romantic utilitarianism.[25]

25 Richard Rorty, 'Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism', in *The Revival of Pragmatism*, p. 24.

Again, Rorty proceeds from strained interpretations of his chosen thinkers to connect one strand of Romanticism with an anti-transcendental definition of polytheism and his version of neopragmatism. It would be easy at this point to write off this move, yet there are strong reasons to consider it a genuine attempt at theological reconstruction. Rorty's use of 'polytheism' is an example of his favoured technique of linguistic 'irony', of 'playing the new off against the old', that he uses against traditional conceptions of philosophy and science. Rorty's desire is not to undermine philosophy or science, only their insistence on 'final vocabularies'. Theology, especially Tillich's notion of 'ultimate concern', contains a similar interest with its prohibition of idolatry.

Beyond an instrumentalist critique, Rorty adopts such theological language in a substantive reconstruction. In true pragmatist fashion he imagines, How might faith be sensibly adapted to fit the democratic, post-Darwinian, post-Einsteinian world? 'Romantic polytheism' is his understanding of the religious point of view that holds the Romantic ideal of the pursuit of personal perfection in this world as the *telos* towards which humans should aspire.

Rorty cites his predecessor Dewey, ascribing to him the belief of 'democracy as Christianity cleansed of the hieratic, exclusionist elements'.[26] Whilst this grossly oversimplifies Dewey's theological position, it allows Rorty to undertake a thought experiment asking, What if Christianity followed a Deweyan 'non-Platonic and non-exclusivist' course of development? and, What might Christianity look like today if it centred belief in a private love ethic rather than insisting that 'God and truth are one?' Could it have avoided, could it avoid today, the antinomy between scientific, political and religious authority?

Rorty's neopragmatism as romantic polytheism is a redescription of a possible Christianity for the modern/postmodern age. At the heart of his musings is the same concern perplexing theology: How can Christianity conceive of itself in the present pluralistic context? Rorty answers, By reconceiving itself as a polytheism of privately held faiths. Christianity can coexist with others, but only along the lines of the Jeffersonian compromise. For Rorty, it must needs trade off its exclusivist monotheist claims to the private sphere, sublating them in favour of social-pragmatic utility.

Earlier in his career, Rorty advocated the priority of democracy to philosophy.[27] Now he argues for the priority of democracy to a particular type of theology:

> Your devotion to democracy is unlikely to be wholehearted if you believe, as monotheists typically do, that we can have knowledge of an "objective" ranking of human needs that can overrule the results of democratic consensus. But if our devotion is wholehearted, then you will welcome the utilitarian and pragmatist claim that we have no will to truth distinct from the will to happiness.[28]

and

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26 *Ibid.*

27 Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers Volume I*, pp. 175–96.

28 *Op. cit.*, p. 27.

> In a democratic society, everybody gets to worship his or her personal symbol of ultimate concern, unless worship of that symbol interferes with the pursuit of happiness by his or her fellow-citizens.[29]

Neopragmatism as romantic polytheism is a private ethico-aesthetic Christianity set in the context of the present religiously pluralistic worldview. It is a version that draws a new trajectory for Christian thought. It makes possible the interpretation of the existentialist theology of Tillich, the social Gospel of Rauschenbusch and the liberationist influenced documents of the Vatican as the true inheritors of Christian orthodoxy.

Rorty's theistic turn grows out his exploration of the Romantic imprint on pragmatism and what he sees as the incipient anti-logocentrism of the Romantics in their turn to 'poetry' instead of a monotheistic 'God' or other 'transcendentals' as a 'source of ideals'. Rorty fashions a neopragmatist genealogy broad enough to account for such an immanentised view of human teleology. He side-steps the background figure this book posits, the metaphysical, explicitly theological Romantic Ralph Waldo Emerson for whom such an immanentised view would be problematic.

Rorty presents an occult genealogy. He wrongly attributes the view of a immanentised polytheism in part to a detheologised 'romantic, Coleridgean strain' in pragmatism, for example. He is correct in identifying Coleridge's influence running from Emerson to James and Dewey, but wrong in imputing non-theism to the initially Unitarian and later Trinitarian Coleridge.[30] Rorty also dubiously traces the Romanticism behind pragmatism to 'Mill's poetic, anti-Benthamite' thought and, of course, to Nietzsche. Rorty appears to be the only scholar making this connection.

Again, it is not so much that Rorty gets the Romantic inheritance wrong, as only half-right, drawing upon the wrong Romantics or attributing false notions to the right ones. Rorty's 'pragmatism as romantic polytheism' genealogy, however implausible, is important for two reasons. First, it is the apotheosis of the anti-representationalist turn made in 1982's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, one of the most widely read and influential philosophy books outside of philosophy in the past twenty years or so. Rorty at once completes the turn to language, moving beyond the scientific model to the autobiographical-literary idiom of 'poetry'. He places himself, along with Cavell and increasingly Putnam, at odds with a philosophy of which he was a prime mover. Their collective move follows a transition described earlier by Wittgenstein, Quine and Sellars, and *de facto* moves neopragmatism closer to the Romantic-literary style.

Second, this transition to the Romantic literary-autobiographical voice betrays sharp *a priori* logical distinctions, which are the trademark of analytic thought, but also those divisions within the rational subjectivity adopted by epistemologies mimicking the divisions within science, such as Kant's. The Romantic poetic imagination cuts across these divisions. They are not seen as absolute, but provisional. They are even, like

29 *Ibid*., p. 33.

30 *Cf*. Richard Holmes's *Coleridge: Early Visions* and *Coleridge: Dark Reflections* (London: Flamingo, 1999).

Emerson's transparent eyeball, opaque. This works against Rorty's separation of public and private, revealing echoes of Kantianism contrary to his appeals to Romanticism.

Unfortunately for Rorty, who made a reputation lampooning religion, his Romantic genealogy also means that theological reason also cannot be cordoned off or excluded from subjective rationality. The great irony, played on the liberal ironist himself, is that in reconstructing his neopragmatism as an updated, atheistic version of Romanticism, Rorty cannot exclude the religious without falling into the type of *a priori* distinctions that it eschews. He now goes so far as to identify himself with theism, describing 'pragmatism as Romantic polytheism'. His reconstruction of 'romantic polytheism' as 'think[ing] that there is no actual or possible object of knowledge that would permit you to commensurate and rank all human needs' and that there are no 'nonhuman persons with power to intervene in human affairs' indicates a privatised approach to faith:

> For human perfection becomes a private concern, and our responsibility to others becomes a matter of permitting them as much space to pursue these private concerns – to worship their own gods, so to speak – as is compatible with granting an equal amount of space to all. The tradition of religious toleration is extended to moral toleration. This privatisation of perfection permits James and Nietzsche to agree with Mill and Arnold that poetry should take over the role that [traditional] religion has played in the formation of individual human lives.[31]

Rorty's transition from bald atheism to 'pragmatism as Romantic polytheism' is a strange and unsuccessful attempt to write neopragmatism as a public theology. Nonetheless, it is instructive in showing how the principal thinker of the main school of U.S. philosophy is forced not only to take religion seriously, but to reconstruct his philosophy theistically as a result of linking it with Romanticism. In such a move, Rorty is not far different from his classical predecessors William James and John Dewey who, in *A Pluralistic Universe* and *A Common Faith* respectively, undertook similar theological reconstructions.

Religious Turns in Cavell and Putnam

Rorty is not the only neopragmatist confronting religion from the inside of neopragmatism. Stephen Mulhall argues that Stanley Cavell's notion of 'Emersonian perfectionism as redemptionism' contains significant 'structural analogies' to the 'Christian story of redemption'. For Mulhall, in spite of Cavell's renunciation of religious faith as a competitor to his neopragmatism's 'Emersonian perfectionism', 'it could well be argued that the question of Cavell's understanding of his relationship with religion is not merely one element amongst others in his work, but the most fundamental and so the most revealing of his preoccupations'.[32] Mulhall traces the 'dominance' of this 'relationship' to Emerson's Romanticism, which is again ironic, since the figure whom Rorty avoids for being too metaphysically religious is

31 *The Revival of Pragmatism*, pp. 23–4.

32 *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary*, p. 285.

precisely the one whose adoption compels Cavell further than Rorty into an atheistic version of neopragmatism.

The surprising thing is not that a philosopher like Cavell claims atheism, *de rigueur* for Anglo-American philosophy faculties. What is surprising is that in a supposedly post-religious age Cavell continuing to talk about the Christian story as a viable competitor to his secularised Emersonianism and to adopt a religiously founded 'Emersonian perfectionism' scheme of quasi-redemption. In spite of Cavell's protests, this move is less of a rejection of faith than a James- and Dewey-style, as well as now Rorty-style, reconstruction focusing on the imaginative, literary and mytho-poetic theological imagination.

Cavell eschews Rorty's earlier tactic of treating religion as irrelevant, ceasing to raise God and faith as philosophical questions and, thus, move beyond them. Rather, Cavell follows a well-worn pragmatist route reconstructing a type of faith and keeping religion in play. None of this is to mention his suggestive autobiographical struggles about being a Jew and a philosopher, specifically 'the ways my Jewishness and Americanness inflect each other' and his strong feelings on visiting Israel. He refuses to write these concerns off 'as a clinical issue' rather than 'a critical issue', which colour 'certain forms taken by my devotion to Thoreau and to Emerson as expressions of that issue'.[33]

To complete the triumvirate, Hilary Putnam, who, considering his earlier career in positivism seemed the most unlikely to end up as a leading neopragmatist, now also raises issues of faith. In a telling admission in his Gifford lectures, he says:

> As a practicing Jew, I am someone for whom the religious dimension of life has become increasingly important, although it is not a dimension I know how to philosophize about except by indirection; and the study of science has loomed large in my life. …Those who know my writings from that [earlier] period may wonder how I reconciled my religious streak, which existed to some extent even back then, and my general scientific materialist worldview at that time. The answer is I didn't reconcile them. I was a thorough-going atheist, and I was a believer. I simply kept these two parts of myself separate.[34]

Now that he has become a leading proponent of neopragmatism, Putnam has been in a process of uniting these 'two parts of myself' and philosophising about religion with a bit more direction. As early as 1978's *Meaning and the Moral Science*, originally delivered as the 1976 John Locke Lectures in Oxford, he explored the literary-religious relationship to realist ethics. Most recently he wrote an introduction to an edition of the Jewish theologian Franz Rosenzweig's *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy: A View of World, Man, and God* in which he ranks Rosenzweig alongside Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas as the most important Jewish thinkers of the past century, comparing his intellectual contribution to that of Ludwig Wittgenstein. [35]

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33 Stanley Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy: Autobiographical Exercises* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. xv.

34 Hilary Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy*, p. 1.

35 Franz Rosenzweig, *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy: A View of World, Man, and God*, trans. and with an introduction by Nahum Glatzer and with an introduction by Hilary Putnam (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 1–18.

Whilst Putnam emphasises that the task of the philosopher and the theologian are separate, in drawing parallels between such thinkers, he too is starting to venture into the epistemology of religion.

Chapter 10

Conclusion – Neopragmatism and Theology

The previous chapter discussed the rise of the religious question in three of the principal leaders of the pragmatic renascence, Richard Rorty, Stanley Cavell and Hilary Putnam. Their collective theological turn is having another remarkable effect: the return of God-talk to Anglo-American philosophy. Only a few years ago, Giles Gunn attributed the lack of interest in religion to Richard Rorty. Now Rorty himself is making religion a respectable philosophical topic again, linking it to his neopragmatist worldview:

> My differences with Vattimo come down to his ability to regard a past event as holy and my sense that holiness resides only in an ideal future. My sense of the holy, insofar as I have one, is bound up with the hope that someday, any millennium now, my remote descendents will live in a global civilization in which love is pretty much the only law. In such a society, communication would be domination-free, class and caste would be unknown, hierarchy would be a matter of temporary pragmatic convenience, and power would be entirely at the disposal of the free agreement of a literate and well-educated electorate. I have no idea how such a society could come about. It is, one might say, a mystery. That mystery, like that of the Incarnation, concerns the coming into existence of a love that is kind, patient, and endures all things; 1 Corintians 13 is an equally useful text both for religious people like Vattimo … and people like myself ….[1]

Although the revival of pragmatism is a generation old, as discussed at the beginning of this book, the religious turn in neopragmatist philosophy is still in its infancy. Therefore, the issue is less that these three thinkers betray their lack of theological depth, e.g. in Rorty's simplistic appeal to private faith, than the fact that they find it necessary to speak of God at all.

Rorty, Cavell and Putnam have yet to work out for themselves why, although Rorty comes closest in his atypical Romantic genealogy. This book traces the source back to the beginnings of pragmatism in Emerson's Transcendentalism and the relationship between mind and nature thematised in theological terms by Emerson and the classical pragmatists. Just as religion was at the heart of their philosophy (the source of their views on the 'ecstatic' pluralism of nature, the free 'abandonment' of rational subjectivity, the creative democracy of the aspiring 'community of inquirers' and so forth) neopragmatists are discovering that the rehabilitation of such notions requires a philosophical account of religion. This book posits its account in

1 'Anti-Clericalism and Atheism', in *Religion After Metaphysics*, ed. by Mark A. Wrathall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 44.

a scientifico-Romantic epistemology that understands neopragmatism as theological rationality.

Up to this point, this book has been mainly an exercise in epistemology and philosophy of religion. It has traced a scientifico-Romantic neopragmatic genealogy, reconstructing reason for the post-analytical, linguistified context. It has not approached neopragmatism from the side of theology, which, of course, has had a long-standing interest in pragmatic themes. But the fact that the turn to the religious in philosophical neopragmatism is occurring independently of theology illustrates the current disconnect between the two academic discourses. This concluding chapter seeks to reconcile this distance by critiquing three theologians according to scientifico-Romantic neopragmatic epistemology. It ends by offering a reconstructed metaphor-model for such a theological rationality.

A Scientifico-Romantic Critique of West's 'Prophetic Pragmatism'

One of the few contemporary thinkers bridging the world of theology and philosophy of religion is Cornel West. His book *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* is the standard text on pragmatism. He was amongst the first to posit Emerson as a background figure for classical pragmatism, although to a much less degree than argued in this book. Because it is a book on the history of philosophy or rather, in his words, its 'evasion' in pragmatism, its reconstructive theological dimension comprising the last section of the final chapter has been neglected. In it, West dubs his thought 'prophetic pragmatism':

> Prophetic pragmatism is a form of American left thought and action in our postmodern moment. It is deeply indebted to the continental traveling theories such as Marxism, structuralism, and poststructuralism, yet it remains in the American grain. It is rooted in the best of American radicalism but refuses to be simply another polemical position on the ideological spectrum. Prophetic pragmatism calls for reinvigoration of a sane, sober, and sophisticated intellectual life in America and for regeneration of social forces empowering the disadvantaged, degraded and dejected. … [It] is a rich and revisable tradition that serves as the occasion for cultural criticism and political engagement ….[2]

Several notable points arise in this quote. First, West allies prophetic pragmatism with leftist thought and the appropriation of 'continental traveling theories such as Marxism, structuralism, and poststructuralism', albeit with an American inflection. For him, the pragmatic tradition is an open circle, cross-pollinated by other theories and deconstructive techniques that expose and resist exclusionary power. Pragmatism bootstraps these theories and techniques, revising its self-definition in the practice of 'cultural criticism and political engagement'.

Prophetic pragmatism thus conceived is not only 'oppositional', 'but also a material force for individuality and democracy'.[3] West taps into the Emersonian and Deweyan emphasis on egalitarian politics as a productive source to move beyond

2 *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, p. 239.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 232.

criticism. But there are deeper oppositional and creative sources as well behind West that push prophetic pragmatism beyond mere political philosophy:

> My kind of prophetic pragmatism is located in the Christian tradition for two basic reasons. First, on the existential level, the self-understanding and self-identity that flow from this tradition's insights into the crises and traumas of life are indispensable *for me* to remain sane. It holds at bay the sheer absurdity so evident in life, without erasing or eliding the tragedy of life. …Second, on the political level, the culture of the wretched of the earth is deeply religious. To be in solidarity with them requires not only an acknowledgement of what they are up against but also an appreciation of how they cope with their situation. This appreciation does not require that one be religious; but if one is religious, one has wider access into their life-worlds.[4]

West affiliates prophetic pragmatism with the Christian prophetic tradition and the Christian tragic sense of life. For him, as both an academic and lay preacher in the African American church, the most trenchant 'traveling theory' is the Christian *mythos* of redemption concretely embodied in those communities of faith that live it out. 'It is the love ethic of the Christian faith – the most absurd and alluring mode of being in the world – that enables me to live a life of hope against hope without succumbing to a warranted yet paralyzing pessimism or to an understandable yet miserable misanthropy.'[5]

It is important to remember that West's first appointment was at Union Theological Seminary in New York, and that his initial academic reputation came as a liberation theologian with his book *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* [1982].[6] West has since moved away from theology to philosophy and cultural criticism becoming, like Dewey, one of the most recognisable public intellectuals of his day. But West's background is theological, influencing both his view of social practice and his philosophy. He is able to adopt his particular liberation-influenced ethic, reconstructing neopragmatism with a prophetic Christian emphasis, because of the pragmatic tradition's methodological pluralism and its theological roots in Emersonian religious faith.

The identification of prophetic pragmatism with African-American liberation theology and other self-described forms of 'American left thought' point to considerable epistemological tensions in West's programme. The first tension relates to the connection of his Christian-theological neopragmatism with materialist Marxism. The difficulties here are well-rehearsed, from Frankfurt school political theology to the explosion of different theologies of liberation. Suffice it to say that the central issue of competing theistic and atheistic worldviews opens up to a plethora of related conflicts.[7] West is not the only neopragmatist who sees a pragmatic value in

4 *Ibid.*, p. 233.

5 Cornel West, *Keeping Faith* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. xi.

6 In this early book, West does not identify his liberation theology with pragmatism. *Cf. Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982).

7 *Cf.* Denys Turner, *Marxism and Christianity* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1982) and Denys Turner, 'Marxism, Liberation Theology, and the Way of Negation', in *The*

combining the preferential option for the poor with socialistic redistributive economics. As shown in the previous chapter, Rorty admires the same impulse in the social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch and what he sees as liberation-influenced Roman Catholic thought.

From the neopragmatist viewpoint, West's prophetic pragmatism follows from the pragmatist stress on contexuality and *praxis*, themes that are also central to the Marxist understanding. The danger is in tipping the balance to over-contextualising at the expense of continuity with broader epistemological interests, which is a tendency of neopragmatist theology. West understands prophetic pragmatism to be an open movement that can include 'feminist, Chicano, black, socialist, left-liberal' positions. But such specificity can lead to Rortyan ethnocentrism or parochialism, since each can and has developed distinctive and mutually exclusive liberation theologies attached to them. The increasing emphasis on particularism can threaten the ability of any neopragmatic method to apply in different epistemological and social contexts.

Further, there is something unpragmatic about West's conception of a neopragmatism that, from the outset, splits into dualistic, either-or options. He generally associates prophetic pragmatism with leftist politics and he specifically aligns it with predetermined affinities for specific social groups. Both this general and particular predisposition work against the anti-dualistic, holistic meliorism developed in classical pragmatism and the scientifico-Romantic neopragmatism argued for in this book.

West's active promotion of the dualism between left and right, for example, hardens the divisions already so inflamed in American politics. Neopragmatism as scientifico-Romantic theological epistemology views this situation as an opportunity to break down ideological divisions in order to work towards pragmatic cooperation and concrete social goods.

Such a view also frees neopragmatism from over-specificity when he connects it to particular racial and ethnic groups and a specific political economy. Amongst other problems, such specificity dates the relevance of such an approach when the social situation changes. Since the fall of the Soviet bloc, for example, Marxism-socialism has proven not a viable option for most of the Western world, certainly not the U.S. Identifying prophetic pragmatism with liberation theology dates West's project, especially now in the early twenty-first century when the pressing concerns revolve around navigating faith in a religiously plural world.

There is a sense, however, where West's Christianity-informed prophetic pragmatism does improve upon classical pragmatism. The optimism that Peirce, James and Dewey inherit both from Emerson and post-Newtonian science did not fare well in the twentieth century. West's recovery of the Christian tragic sense of life counter-balances a naivety that earlier pragmatism holds with its corrigible view of truth and progressive view of the future. West keeps neopragmatism morally responsive to the 'crises and traumas of life' and attuned to the suffering of 'the wretched of the earth'. He does so not on the grounds of practical principle, but because of our identity as humans called by God to solidarity with each other and held responsible for creating a just world 'on earth as in heaven'.

Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology, ed. by Christopher Rowland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Sallie McFague and the NeoKantian Approach to God-Talk

Sallie McFague is another prominent neopragmatist theologian. She, like West, has taken up theological reconstruction, aligning her work with feminist and ecological consciousness and adapting different models for God and religious belief. It is important to recall that, although a theologian, she develops her methodology from a linguistic philosophy she calls 'metaphorical theology'. She begins with an observation within Christianity of the provisionality of all God-talk that she traces to two ideas. First, is the Jerusalem-based monotheistic notion of idolatry, that all language about God is contingent and non-exhaustive and that any absolutistic or 'literal' view of God-talk is a violation of Mosaic sensibility, if not Mosaic law. God-talk is not prohibited, but contains within its operation awareness of the peculiar limiting character of the theological language-game:

> [E]ither to equate human words with the divine reality or to see no relationship between them is inappropriate. Rather, the proper way is 'like a finger pointing to the moon.' Is *this* the way 'to participate in transcendent truth and to embrace reality'? I would agree … that it is. I would call it the 'metaphorical' way and will be elaborating on it as the form of religious language.[8]

For McFague, theological language, not only God-talk but language about subjective reason and the world, is non-literal, or metaphorical language. It is because as beings 'created in the image of God' we 'participate in transcendent truth' and inhabit a sacred world, but we do not have any direct purchase on a Sellarsian 'Given' because we are not God. To think we do is not only an epistemological mistake, it is a theological mistake and, further, a sin. It makes an 'idol' out of concepts, mistaking language for that which, by its definition, outstrips language. Hence, McFague's metaphor of the pointing finger, recalling the tetragrammaton in the sky or a veil of clouds in a Chagall painting.

Second, literal theological language about God and the world is faulty because such language is increasingly irrelevant in the postmodern world, according to McFague. Language masks power relations that favour some groups and exclude others. This is a patent violation of what Christian language is supposed to be about and leads to a crisis of self-contradiction for faith. Critical social analysis discloses this problem and calls theology to task:

> In a number of ways, then, feminist theologians (and a similar case could be made by black and third world theologians) have shown why religious language is not meaningful in our time. Language which is not our language, models which have become idols, images which exclude our experience are three common failings of religious language, but they are especially evident to groups of people who feel excluded by the classical tradition of religious faith.[9]

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8 Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), p. 7.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

McFague's point is that 'the classical tradition' excludes the voices of marginal groups from its expression of Christian faith, thus making its symbols, metaphors and stories increasingly irrelevant for those believers. It does so by making hierocratic and individualistic metaphors normative and, in a more subtle but no less injurious way, systematically aligning theology with abstract philosophical conceptions over concrete human needs. The principal metaphor she critiques is God as Father, which she replaces with a 'nonfamilial, non-gender-related' conception of 'God as "friend"'[10] and elsewhere with 'God as Mother' and 'God as Lover'.[11] McFague also criticises Tillich's notion of 'Being-Itself' on grounds of philosophical abstraction, although she sees it and similar conceptions as 'metaphors' that can effectively critique hierarchical and exclusionary models of the divine.

McFague's search for new language for God implies a view of subjective reason that makes such reconstructions possible. For her, humans are linguistic beings, with metaphor residing at the heart of language. She emphasises metaphor as a tool of imaginative redescription, rather than for identification of what is being described.[12] She privileges an epistemology that promotes the freedom of the human image-making capacity:

> The most outstanding feature of the human mind is its *mobility,* its constant, instantaneous power of association, its ability to be forever connecting with this and that …. In logic of this sort, "truth" is never reached; rather, approximations are achieved to which persons commit themselves, but the process continues. A metaphorical pattern for rational human understanding is essentially a dramatic pattern for human knowing and becoming, a pattern which focuses on mobility, open-endedness, and tentativeness in its commitments.[13]

McFague's understanding contains several parallels to the scientifico-Romantic neopragmatic view of this book. It accentuates the open-ended, procedural character of inquiry, of 'mobility' over *stasis*. It privileges creative imagination, especially the ability to make connections amongst different notions across the web of language. It is literary-'dramatic' as opposed to positivistic. It requires 'persons' to 'commit themselves' existentially and pragmatically to language, rather than see redescription as an exercise in theological abstraction.

Also similarly, McFague reimagines the relationship of mind to world along scientifico-Romantic naturalistic terms. A preferred metaphor is that of 'body', 'We are bodies …. Whatever we say about that part of ourselves we call brain, mind, or spirit, it evolved from and is continuous with our bodies'.[14] Rational subjectivity in this view is not separate from nature or world, it is part of the same thing,

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10 *Ibid.*, p. 178.

11 Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

12 *Cf.* Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarenden Press, 1987, p. 89. Soskice rejects McFague's understanding of metaphor because it emphasises what 'is not', rather than 'what is'.

13 *Op. cit.*, p.33.

14 Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 16.

which accords with the Emersonian transparent eyeball metaphor and the view of evolutionary science and contemporary ecology.

Yet, there is a tendency of McFague's methodology, in spite of such claims, that cuts against this very view. The problem relates directly to her notion of humans as metaphor-producing agents and our reliance on the 'indirection of language'. It is a difficulty she is aware of and is not sure how to reconcile, outside of simply acknowledging it:

> If language always stands between us and reality, if it is the medium through which we are aware of both our relationship to 'what is' and our distance from it, then metaphor is both our burden and glory, from the first words of children to the most complex forays on reality by philosophers.[15]

McFague is caught between the tension to see human consciousness and its imaginative linguistic capabilities along a continuum where, on the one hand, they are all part of nature, and, on the other, a view where language mediates between consciousness and the world. Language, as it were, is not natural in the latter sense. It distances us from the natural world (or, rather, it both distances and reconciles us to it, which is 'our burden and glory').

The problem is that McFague's metaphorical theology still operates with a neoKantian view of mind. It posits an opposition between perception of the world and the freedom to create new metaphors for understanding, the difficulties of which were discussed in Chapter 7. For McFague, language does not touch reality and 'truth is never reached', allowing subjective rationality the flexibility to redescribe the world according to changes in context and relevance. The world is not a 'Given', following Sellars. 'What is', as it were, lies behind language like a Kantian noumenal realm, in this view.

McFague is clear to assert that language is a 'medium through which we are aware of … our relationship' to the world, so her metaphorical epistemology is not a full-blown coherentism. It follows more of an internal or 'cookie-cutter' realism in which reality is treated as a matrix that can be pressed into different conceptual shapes by language, e.g. in imagining different metaphors for God. The cost of this view, however, is continuity with the world that the scientifico-Romantic understanding retains by balancing the open-endedness language with commonsense, non-dualistic realism.

This book argues for a view of language, as well as language-users, as part of nature, not notionally separate. It thematises nature and subjective consciousness according to the open-ended Darwinian, 'ecological' understanding that McFague holds, and it recognises a convergence in the Transcendental-Romantic understanding that describes such development in literary-poetical terms as 'ecstasy', 'tychism' and 'abandonment'. Mind and nature, because of their connection, share a developmental character that gives shape to language. Therefore language about the world can be open-ended, not because it is protected in a sphere of conscious freedom, but because nature exhibits the selfsame freedom. The 'mobility of mind' and 'indirection of

15 *Op. cit.*, p. 34.

language' McFague draws on for theological metaphor exist, in the scientifico-Romantic view, in the same sphere as nature.

Rejecting the neoKantian approach encourages precisely the type of ecological consciousness and attendant theological metaphors McFague desires, but is ultimately prevented from fulfilling because of this underlying dualism. In a recent book, for example, she proposes an 'Ecological Reformation' for Christianity, in which the 'picture of reality emerging from cosmology, evolutionary biology, and ecology focuses on relations and community, not on individuals and objects'.[16] This entails conceiving of humans not primarily 'as individuals with the power to use nature in whatever ways they wish. Rather we are *dependent* on nature and *responsible* for it. … [W]e do not control nature, but rely utterly on it'.[17]

A couple of points should be noted. First, a subtle instrumental dualism obtains in this view, where nature and humanity are set apart in a relationship of dependency and responsibility. Contrary to McFague, exercising true ecological responsibility requires that we do have considerable 'control' of 'nature'. It is, of course, precisely because of unwise control and agency that we have delivered the world into the current ecological situation. So the point is not just that 'we are *dependent* on nature' and hold responsibility for its care, as with McFague, but that we *are* nature, or at least part of it, and so nature is dependent upon us and our ecologically responsible thinking and action.

The holism of scientifico-Romantic neopragmatism gives an immediacy to environmental concerns that McFague's neoKantian epistemology misses. The difference in sensibility is this: we are not just destroying 'nature', something separate from us upon which we depend; we are killing ourselves. Or, alternately: it is not that we are 'responsible' for something set apart from us that we need to live; rather, we need to live responsibly. Ironically, McFague's earlier view of rational subjectivity as 'body' posits more of an identity with the natural world than her later work.

Second, McFague's impetus for metaphorical thinking was to provide for a range of descriptions of God, mind and world that opens up theology for marginalised groups, such as women and racial and ethnic minorities. Her model of 'God as friend' is a case in point. It provides flexibility and personalisation of conception of both God and the person or group conceiving of the divine in that way. However, the ecological concern, which she describes as a 'peril' and 'crisis', works against such particularisation.

That is, if the pragmatic context is so drastic and global, theological language should reflect it in the type of robust, universalistic metaphors that encourage concrete, collective action on the widest possible scale. Again, there is another irony. At the very time when opinions about global warming are converging not only in mainline science, but also in the experience of indigenous communities, and a consensus on global emissions limitation is emerging, McFague advocates a methodology of disparate views on God, humanity and the world. Such a methodology can work against precisely that solidarity required by faith communities for strong moral

16 Sallie McFague, *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), p. 207.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 208.

environmental action.[18] In such a situation, the traditional monarchical view of the God-humanity relationship, where God holds humankind responsible for the care of creation and punishes moral failure, might actually be more conducive to better ecology.

Kaufman and Scientifico-Romantic Neopragmatic Epistemology

This leads to the final theological neopragmatist, Gordon D. Kaufman, one of the most influential reconstructive theologians of the late twentieth, early twenty-first centuries.[19] Throughout his career he has been identified both as a liberal and a neoKantian thinker (although somewhat unfairly with respect to the latter, as he is as much indebted to Hegel and Wittgenstein). Recently, Kaufman has also come to retrospectively identify the pragmatic imprint on his method:

> 'There is no way to establish the "truth" of the notion of God by ordinary rational or philosophical argument: that is in principle impossible. The only relevant question of truth … here concerns that ordering of life and the world which faith imposes: is such an ordering of the world appropriate to the world as we experience it and to the nature of our human experience, or does it involve misapprehensions of our situation and result in a stunting of human life and its ultimate breakdown …?' Note that in this passage a major criterion for assessing theological truth-claims – a *pragmatic* criterion – *is the way the symbol 'God' enables us to live in the world*.[20]

Kaufman expanded upon his pragmatic criterion in other writings, but he identifies his clearest statement in *An Essay on Theological Method* [1975]. There he makes three observations about theology. First, that 'ideas of God and the world are constructed by the human imagination for essentially practical purposes'.[21] Kaufman highlights 'the importance of Kant' and 'his discovery that the concepts or images of God and the world are imaginative constructs'.[22] This observation reveals a Romantic understanding of imagination, read through the filter of Kantian linguistification. Kaufman tends, as with McFague, to lead to a 'cookie-cutter' view of realism, where different imaginative constructs are applied to an underlying and ultimately inaccessible reality.

This leads to the second point, that the 'purpose of theological construction is to produce concepts (and world-pictures) which make possible adequate orientation in life and the world'.[23] For Kaufman, concepts are cashed-out, James-like, according

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18 *Cf.* Charles Wohlforth, *The Whale and the Supercomputer: On the Northern Front of Climate Change* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2004).

19 McFague traces her 'conversion' to metaphorical theology to Gordon Kaufman's 1975 *An Essay on Theological Method. Cf. Life Abundant*, p. 6–7.

20 Gordon D. Kaufman, *In the Beginning ... Creativity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), p. 119. Kaufman quotes his *God the Problem* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 99.

21 *An Essay on Theological Method* (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1975), p. 32.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 24–5.

23 *Op. cit.*

to the difference they make practically. The point of reconstruction is that traditional theological models and metaphors, to use McFague's terminology, have lost their relevance for many contemporary Christians. For others, they have no imaginative purchase at all. Kaufman is thinking here of the same hierarchical, exclusionary political language as McFague, as well as the understanding of God as a transcendent metaphysical construct. Like Dewey, Kaufman understands the change in modern worldview to move from the vertical to the horizontal, as a result of scientific theory and democratic language *praxes*.

For Kaufman, it is not that theology inherits a static fund of concepts that it now seeks to dynamically adapt for the present context. It is that theology has always reconstructed its understanding to the worldview in which it finds itself. The early church did this by melding the Hellenistic worldview with that of the Jewish faith, the medieval church reinterpreted its symbols with respect to the rediscovery of Aristotle, the Reformation and Catholic Reformation church did so according to the new understanding of science and democratic politics and the present church needs to do so for today. Furthermore, following Kant and Wittgenstein, it is not only from within the church that such possible reconstructions can come, e.g. authoritative leaders or councils. They can potentially come from any competent language-user, because ostensibly the concept 'God' operates as part of ordinary common language. In this respect, the church can learn as much about adapting its symbols and concepts from a Nietzsche and Feuerbach, as from an Aquinas and Luther.

Third, the understanding of theology as imaginative construction leads Kaufman to redescribe the job of the theologian:

> The theologian's task is to reconstruct a conception or picture of the world – the whole that contains all that is and all that can be conceived – as pervaded by and purveying a particular kind of (humane) meaning and significance because of its grounding in an ultimately humane reality.[24]

In the post-positivist context, this does not mean to reconstruct a one-to-one correspondence of new theory to established or new symbol. Precisely which symbols are to be retained and redescribed and which are to be reconstructed or replaced are, as Dewey illustrated earlier, not something that can be known beforehand. The point of having symbols and concepts, for Kaufman, is that they hold relevance for the lived context. They help us orient ourselves and lead to humane action in the world and, in that sense, they simply 'work'.

But just as not every symbol retains its relevance through time and not every symbol can be redescribed, likewise, not every new symbol or reconstruction is helpful. Therefore, it takes the highest imaginative capabilities and creative experimentation to engage this type of theology. For Kaufman 'the theologian is essentially an artist' even though the theological project 'does not confine itself to this or that segment or fragment of experience … but addresses itself to the *whole* within which all experience falls'.[25]

24 *Ibid.*

25 *Ibid.*

Kaufman's view of the theological project is medieval, not modern/postmodern, in the sense that it aims for an architechtonic understanding of theological rationality. Theological reason is not cordoned off in a division of rational subjectivity, as it is for Kant. Neither is it delimited to a particular language game, although it is part of its own. In fact, the theological language game is responsible in a way that no other intellectual enterprise is to the integrity of its symbols and concepts. For Kaufman, these symbols and concepts must needs remain faithful not only to the wide range of human practical experience, but to the distinctive claims of God-talk that relativises absolutely all finite knowledge and language.

Kaufman's view is also Romantic in the sense that, even if it is systematic, it looks to the plastic character of language to mould its symbols and concepts in an 'aesthetic', 'artistic' fashion. Kaufman, consciously or not, borrows from the Transcendentalist-Romantic tradition for his evolving conceptions of God over the years. From God as 'Problem'[26] to God as 'ultimate point of reference'[27] to God as 'humanizing' and 'relativizing' principle[28] to God as 'Mystery'[29] to God as 'serendipitous creativity',[30] Kaufman has increasingly and creatively troped his own reconstructions in a poetical direction. But he balances these and other conceptual reconstructions with a scientific and anthropological understanding of the human condition that has, since the Enlightenment, been the dominant understanding for most of the world. Thus, he also reconstructs an understanding of the human as 'bio-historical', possessing self-reflective 'agency', and yet susceptible to a sin-like material and institutional corruption. He conceives of the world in terms of an ecological, cosmic process through which our participation can lead to greater 'humanization and humaneness'.[31]

Of the three theologians, Kaufman comes closest to embodying scientifico-Romantic neopragmatic epistemology in his theology. As with McFague, however, there has been a tendency towards particularisation that threatens the continuity of those reconstructions. He has, in the past, focused reconstructions on *krises* or, at least, perceived crises in the world-historical situation that threaten to over-specify some of his work. As a result, this has required him and others to frequently reconstruct his reconstructions in light of each new crisis. For example, Kaufman's publication of *Theology for a Nuclear Age*, where he reconstructed a theology for a period when humanity gained a power formerly proper to God, i.e. apocalyptic power in the form of nuclear technology, spurred McFague to write *Models of God: Theology for a Nuclear, Ecological Age* and Kaufman to respond with his own ecology-informed *In Face of Mystery*.

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26 Gordon D. Kaufman, *God the Problem* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

27 Gordon D. Kaufman, *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981).

28 Gordon D. Kaufman, *Theology for a Nuclear Age* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985).

29 Gordon D. Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

30 *Cf. In the Beginning ... Creativity.*

31 *Cf.* esp. *op. cit.*

The problem with such crisis-oriented reconstruction is that it tends to focus on the presenting issue at the expense of the long view. This has contributed to an over-contextualisation that itself weakens the theological project as a whole, making it excessively *ad hoc*. It betrays a lack of Peircean faith in the community of inquirers to arrive at a point of, if not truth, then some consensus about God and the world leading to the very type of humane activity Kaufman desires.

Perhaps the history of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has not encouraged faith in the long view. Yet, if Kaufman's tendency is to continually redescribe and reconstruct, then the danger is, as with McFague, to disallow the very imaginative power of concepts and symbols that allows the best of them, the most time-proven of them, to transcend each immanent 'crisis', and thus provide the stability for moral action. Are we, for example, now committed to reconstruct a nuclear-*cum*-ecological-*cum*-global terrorism theology? Are we committed, following Kaufman's *Theology for a Nuclear Age*, to specify the next potential worldview-altering crisis in terms of a 'theology for a dirty bomb age' or 'theology for a biological agent age' or a 'theology for a potential bird flu pandemic age'? And, if so, how are to conceive of these as notional advances over earlier understandings? How are we to navigate through a life of faith when such theologies have a practical shelf-life, generously five-to-ten years, before requiring reconstructing again? Does not such provisionality lead away from the type of stability for religious faith that such strong moral claims demand?

Neopragmatism and the Voyage of Theological Rationality

The neopragmatic theological reconstructions of West, McFague and Kaufman suffer from an underlying concern for relevance that has itself proven false. They follow Weber in thinking that increasing scientisation and bureaucratisation lead necessarily to increasing disenchantment and concomitant loss of orthodox religious metaphors. The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, however, show religion resurgent, to the point that leading sociologists of religion are refuting the once-prevalent view of religious disenchantment.[32] These theologians have focused on the viability of religious belief, when the real issue is durability. The reconstruction of Christianity's central concepts also requires pragmatic attention to their ability to sustain belief through time and across crises, real or perceived, not just adaptation to a particular context or 'problem'. That is, theology needs flexibility and imagination in its reconstructions to make them robust enough for belief to adapt to the rapidly changing environment that defines modernity/postmodernity. The theological emphasis needs to be on conceptual continuity rather than *ad hoc* revisioning.

Although this book is not primarily concerned with specific theological reconstructions, it is interested insofar as they derive from epistemologies in the neopragmatic trajectory. The language and imagery of theological reconstructions will be shaped according to the underlying theories that describe the larger view of mind and world, subjective agency and social-linguistic relations. The scientifico-Romantic

32 *Cf.* Peter Berger, 'The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview', in *Religion in Modern Times*, ed. by Linda Woodhead and Paul Heelas (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), pp. 434–36.

neopragmatism of this book expresses a shape for epistemology, guided by a long tradition in Anglo-American theological thought. Its insights of a natural holism and pluralism, contextualism and practicalism trace behind neopragmatism to sources in American Transcendentalism and British and Continental Romanticism that connect to a non-positivistic, post-Newtonian understanding of scientific experimentalism.

This epistemology holds in creative tension the expressive individualism of the Emersonian perfectionist with the collective reasoning of the Peircean community of inquirers. It reconciles the opposition between individual and society, humanity and the universe, by positing an earlier 'synechic' connection and 'transparent' identity between rational subjectivity and nature. It conceives of the very power animating the autonomy of understanding and freedom of language in the same natural processes of 'ecstasy' and 'tychism' that arise in nature. Furthermore, it thematises this neopragmatic understanding as theological. It rejects the modernist inclination to cordon off the theological into a separate sphere of reason, or deny it rational space altogether, and it erases the ultimate epistemological dualism between the sacred and the mundane.

Scientifico-Romantic neopragmatist epistemology suggests a range of metaphors for reason. It is especially attuned to the type of nature-oriented imagery preferred by McFague and Kaufman, and the inter-subjective social description promoted by West. This book proposes a long-established metaphor, the trope of navigation. From Plato's pragmatic description of the provisionality and risk involved in embarking on the journey for truth,[33] to Horace's understanding of life as a voyage for understanding and community as a 'ship of state',[34] it has been famously revived in post-analytical epistemology by Otto Neurath:

> There is no way to establish fully secured, neat protocol statements as starting points of the sciences. There is no *tabula rasa*. We are like sailors who have to rebuild their ship on the open sea, without ever being able to dismantle it dry-dock and reconstruct it from the best components. Only metaphysics can disappear without a trace. Imprecise verbal clusters are somehow always part of the ship.[35]

The image of thought as a collective process of rebuilding what we already occupy coincides with neopragmatism's view of the embeddeness of thought in linguistic practice. Just as there is no *tabula rasa*, there is no Given to which epistemology can appeal for foundations.

Rather than looking for foundations, the nautical metaphor emphasises process, especially cooperative, humane process, amongst individuals whose efforts lead to the preservation of the whole. The image of reparative activity is also instructive, conceiving of thought along continuities instead of radical ruptures that upset the boat.

Undergirding the nautical metaphor is a deeper level of process, of the connection of human consciousness to the natural world. Navigation happens on the open sea, with

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33 Plato, 'Phaedo', in *The Works of Plato*, ed. by Irwin Edman (New York: The Modern Library, 1956), pp. 147–8.

34 Horace, *Odes and Epodes*, ed. by Paul Shorey and Gordon J. Laing (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, pp. 14–15, 44–5.

35 Otto Neurath, *Philosophical Papers, 1913–1946* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1983), p. 92.

all the danger and contingency that that implies. Navigation demands the expertise of the pilot and skipper and the best resources of technological understanding, yet it is subject to the vicissitudes of wind, current and tide, of irregular shoreline and uncharted obstacles. It is goal-directed, and yet serendipitous like nature, requiring the replotting of course and sometimes revision of destination.

It requires careful planning and forethought, but it also draws on a flexible and improvisational state of mind, adapting to changing conditions. The journey may be smooth or tossed by tempests, and the voyage must be adjusted in accordance. The journey can lead to a desired arrival or an unknown destination. It requires collective wisdom, drawing upon the experience of those who pass down a fund of theory and practical learning. That fund is then inflected by the individual personalities and groups who inherit it, for their own time and situation, likewise passing it along.

It remains, despite all preparations, an inherently risky endeavour. It requires ultimate personal commitment and the hopeful vision of a self-transcendent future arrival. No two voyages are the same, because of the infinite variables and the changing environment. It also contains within its understanding that sense of the tragic of which West speaks, as a counterbalance to a self-deluding optimism. This characteristic of moral realism grows from the common sense realist epistemology that connects understanding to the world. Nature can be beautifully serendipitous, as Kaufman observes, yet that same serendipity can be chaotic and cruel. Humans, as part of nature, are also seen through this lens of moral fallibility and moral humility. Yet, the model remains hopeful, open to productive possibilities and looking towards an open future. The voyage is courageously undertaken amidst and in spite of the inherent uncertainty of any such journey. It promotes striving and innovation, but it conserves with humble admiration the best of the past.

The nautical metaphor applies to a ship or a fleet, but it also adapts for the single mariner. It parallels the individual inquirer who, although part of a larger philosophical and theological language game, draws upon personal experience and creativity to inform insight. It values the individual's autonomy, requiring freedom for the larger process of inquiry, where it has its context and may be judged according to merits in practice. In this sense, the individual's participation already involves self-transcendence, in that it is part of a social process and a linguistified web of belief. It provides a further transcendence by positing this process and web in continuity with nature, rather that in contrast to it. In fact, the nautical metaphor holds in tension the autonomy of the person with respect, even reverence, for the natural world, of which the voyage itself is a part. The journey, like James's stream of consciousness, is in reciprocal, organic relationship with the environment in which it flows.

Finally, the nautical metaphor provides neopragmatism with allied mythologies that conceive of such endeavour in terms of the religious. From scriptural stories like Noah and Jonah and Jesus's travels across the Sea of Galilee to saint stories like that of St. Brendan, the connection of God, humanity and nature is rich with stories that invoke navigation. These narratives inspire the imagination, and they anchor subjective consciousness in a living relationship with the natural world. The human journey and the natural process overlay in their telling. Like Emerson's transparent eyeball, their very activity reveals a deeper unity that the scientifico-Romantic neopragmatic realist understanding sees as holy.

Conclusion

This book has traced its epistemology back to a common source in classical pragmatism, influenced by Emerson, amongst others, and developments within modern science. It has also traced that understanding forward, submitting it to developments within the current epistemological situation, addressing the threat to epistemology itself. The climate of postmodern deconstruction made possible the revival, but that revival has now become problematised from the inside.

The dilemma presently confronting neopragmatism is the superabundance of competing, irreconcilable versions. Lack of agreement on even the most basic characterisation, over whether or not neopragmatism is epistemology or even philosophy, for example, threatens the usefulness of the term itself. Such a divergence in understanding is *prima facie* evidence that the revival has not adequately theorised the historical resources from which it grows, nor sufficiently criticised itself as a developing rational scheme.

This book has critiqued versions of neopragmatism, including those that choose a false dichotomy between poles of the 'scientific' and 'literary', 'epistemology' and 'criticism' and 'realism' and 'anti-realism/irrealism'. It has argued in favour of an understanding of neopragmatism that reconciles such opposition in a different understanding of pragmatic realism. This pragmatic realism makes room for such aspects that make neopragmatism an attractive epistemological option in the modern/postmodern context: practicalism, contextualism, commonsenseism, non-materialist naturalism, holism, fallibilism, corrigibility, pluralism, the literary-aesthetic sensibility and so forth. It involves a version of direct, commonsense realism that is non-metaphysical, on the one hand, and, on the other, opposes the dualism of current neoKantian conceptual approaches. It appeals to a post-Wittgensteinian, post-Quinean view of language and, in classical pragmatist fashion, shifts the burden of proof to sceptics of rationality. It requires anti-realists/irrealists and deconstructionists to produce adequate reasons for their doubt, rather than manufacturing Cartesian-style epistemological scepticism that falls away when one leaves the classroom. In demanding good reasons, such a neopragmatism delivers philosophy to its original Socratic calling to be relevant to life as it is lived.

Scientifico-Romantic neopragmatism also returns philosophy to its engagement with the theological. This parallel development of the pragmatic revival reveals the centrality of the religious to the classical pragmatists and the necessary connection of their epistemology to such themes. Their view of mind and world and the intrinsic connection, even identity, between the two was conceived of along theological lines and expressed in theological-naturalistic language. As this book has argued, the religious is not simply another dimension amongst many that the classical pragmatists addressed. It is the key to their entire philosophy.

It is understandable, therefore, that the recovery of pragmatic epistemological themes would also carry with it a revival of theological concerns, even to thinkers like Rorty, Putnam and Cavell for whom such engagement has only come since their turn to neopragmatism. This book offers a genealogy of pragmatism that accounts for this return of religion and provides a reconstructed scientifico-Romantic neopragmatism as a plausible alternative to the numerous versions that draw the tradition in other

directions. It maintains that the rise of neopragmatism, properly understood, not only makes room for theological reason, but is theological reason. With this understanding, and the openness to naturalistic models of rationality like Neurath's, scientifico-Romantic theological neopragmatism possesses the imaginative resources and rational stability to combat the threat to epistemology and to guide philosophical thought into the re-enchanted world of the twenty-first century.

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