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FOLLOWING PUTNAM'S TRAIL

ON REALISM AND OTHER ISSUES

Edited by

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PART I

HILARY PUTNAM'S PRAGMATISM

Hilary Putnam

WHAT MAKES PRAGMATISM SO DIFFERENT?

ABSTRACT. As the title of this essay indicates, my concern will be with the ways in which pragmatism is a *unique* metaphysical tradition. This is something I have written about before,¹ but in many quarters the idea still persists that pragmatism must be *either* the denial (à la Rorty)² that there is such a thing as an objectively warranted idea; *or*, on the other hand, just an outdated early twentieth century American movement with no real importance today. To show that it is neither of these, I propose to compare pragmatism with, on the one hand, the materialism or “naturalism” which dominates the thinking of most analytic philosophers who do metaphysics and epistemology today, and, on the other hand, the traditional understanding (which goes back to Aristotle) of what “metaphysics” is supposed to be. At the conclusion of this essay I shall also say a few words about the respects in which pragmatism also differs from European existentialism, a movement which shares pragmatism’s aspiration to break loose from the traditional project of metaphysics, without (pace Rorty and Brandom)³ falling into relativism or nihilism.

¹ This paper has a precursor in a lecture titled “The Uniqueness of Pragmatism” (unpublished) that I delivered on Dec. 13, 2004 at a conference on Pragmatism and the Philosophy of Technology at the Tokyo Center for Philosophy of the University of Tokyo (Komaba campus). See also my (1995).

² In his (1993) Rorty writes, “I view warrant as a sociological matter, to be ascertained by observing the reception of *S*’s statement by her peers.” Strangely, he objects – in the same essay! – to being called a relativist.

³ Robert Brandom shares Rorty’s view that the pragmatists simply identified truth with belief that satisfies the desires of the believer. In my reply to Brandom in (Conant and Zeglen 2002), I show that this interpretation is “text free” – that is, it simply ignores what the pragmatists actually *said*.

1. Materialism

Today a large majority of analytic philosophers call themselves “naturalists.” Although the term ‘naturalism’ was frequently used by John Dewey, Dewey did not mean by it either materialism or reductionism, as he made clear when he wrote: “The *obnoxious quality of materialism* is due to its depression of thought which is treated as an illusion or at most an accidental by-product” (Dewey [1929] 1981, p. 87, emphasis added). But what today’s “naturalists” mean by the word is a sophisticated (or “Post-Quinian”) materialism, and not merely the rejection of appeals to supernatural entities in philosophy. (For that reason, I shall usually refer to them in what follows as “materialists.”)

The most sophisticated naturalist-cum-materialist of the last fifty years was not Quine, however, but the late Bernard Williams⁴ (who was, to be sure, deeply influenced by Quine).

Williams’ most famous claim was that ideally a completed physics – and *only* a completed physics – can give us a complete and maximally non-perspectival view of the world as in is in itself (or as he preferred to say, “as it is anyway”). He called this hypothetical completed physics “the absolute conception of the world.” “The reason I write “a completed physics” and not simply “a completed science” here is that has elsewhere said explicitly that the notion of an “absolute conception” does not “look too pale” because we have a conception of “what an adequate *physics* might look like”” (Williams 1978, p. 247).

One central difficulty with such a blatant materialism is the problem of accounting for semantical properties. Williams says that such properties are “perspectival” (1978), but what exactly is that supposed to mean? Well, one thing it means is that they aren’t “absolute” properties of the world; Williams says explicitly that that “the world itself has only primary qualities” (1978, p. 247). Given what Williams says about the absolute conception (e.g., that it contains only primary qualities – and, presumably, what is definable in terms of primary qualities using the apparatus of mathematical physics), and what he says about semantic relations, it follows from Williams’ premises that an account of them cannot figure in the absolute conception. And given his characterization of the absolute conception, it is not hard to see that he is right. What

⁴ Williams views were set out at most length in (1978) and (1985). I criticized Williams’ views in (1990a), (1992a, “Bernard Williams and the Absolute Conception of the World”), and (1994a). Williams replied to these criticisms in (2000), and I replied to this response in (2001).

would an account of a semantical relation in the language of mathematical physics (or in terms of “primary qualities”) *be*?

Thus, Williams, on my reading of him, found himself in the position of needing *either* to reduce semantical facts to purely physical facts *or* to become an outright denier of the reality of the semantical (an “eliminationist,” in the jargon of contemporary analytic philosophy).⁵ And in the book I just mentioned he did end up⁶ by suggesting that eliminationism with respect to the semantical is probably the right line to take. For he wrote:

[I]f the various sorts of considerations [Quinian and Davidsonian considerations] which have been summarily sketched here are correct, then we have to give up not just dualism but the belief in the determinacy of the mental. *These considerations converge on the conclusion that there are no fully determinate contents of the world which are its psychological contents.* (Williams 1978, p. 300, emphasis added)

Indeterminacy of “psychological contents” (in the sense of Quine and Davidson) is precisely indeterminacy of the semantical. And that indeterminacy, if their arguments are accepted, is far reaching indeed. (Quine says, astonishingly, for example, that there is no fact of the matter as to whether the name ‘Tabitha’ refers to his cat Tabitha or to the whole cosmos minus the cat [Quine 1990]!)

It is true that Donald Davidson, while giving full credit to Quine for the arguments that allegedly establish “indeterminacy,” claimed that the extent of indeterminacy is much reduced in his theory, by his willingness to make “a more far reaching application of the principle of charity” than Quine (Davidson 1984, p. 228). (Perhaps this is the reason that Williams wrote “no *fully* determinate contents” and not simply “no determinate contents.”) But charity is a maxim of translation into the interpreter’s home language and it cannot bestow *any* additional determinacy on the

⁵ In current parlance, an “eliminationist” (Paul Churchland is the paradigm case) holds that propositional attitudes (e.g., belief) and semantic relations (e.g., reference) don’t exist, and that the idea that they do is a superstition (Churchland has compared it to belief in witches, or in phlogiston). Cf. “Activation Vectors vs. Propositional Attitudes: How the Brain Represents Reality,” in Churchland (1998). (In my view, Quine’s claim that reference is indeterminate to the extent that there is no fact of the matter as to which object ‘Tabitha’ refers to is just eliminationism under another name.) I criticize the cited essay of Churchland’s in my (1992b). Note that eliminationism is very different from reductionism.

⁶ I say “end up” because earlier in that work he favors the project of accounting for all the “perspectives” and the properties they project onto the world in absolute terms. By the closing pages of the book (Williams 1978, pp. 300ff), however, this enterprise has been ruefully renounced as too ambitious.

home language itself. It isn't as if one could really argue that reference is *partially*, even if not "fully," determinate, except in the sense (which even Rorty could agree with) of "determinate relative to a translation scheme." Dewey's remark that *thought* "is treated as an illusion or at most an accidental by-product" by materialists was right on the mark! For semantical properties are precisely the properties that we need to describe thoughts *as* thoughts.

Indeed, the view that only the primary qualities of a completed future physics are genuine properties of the world ("the world itself has only primary qualities") would banish much more than the semantical properties to the hazy realm of "indeterminacy." (In *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* Williams says that 'grass' and 'green' are terms that would not occur in finished science!) As a consequence, this view would seem to banish such "special sciences" as *economics*.

A similar criticism was made by the economist-philosopher Vivian Walsh, who wrote:

Economists cannot afford to neglect the failure of an advertising campaign that tried to sell a shade of green which consumers rejected, or the devastating results of a record drought upon grasslands. The things consumers [and clients!] want, or buy, or have produced for them, are chosen or rejected in terms of features that arguably would not appear in "completed science" if it should ever arrive. They live, move, and have their being, just like those who make moral statements, on the "wrong" side of the dichotomy between "finished science" and *everything else that anyone ever says*. (Walsh 2000, p. 9)

2. Supervenience

American materialists are usually more coy about the real content of their view than Bernard Williams was. Rather than say that the only terms that would appear in a complete and non-perspectival account of reality are terms for primary properties, they usually say that what Williams called the "perspectival" terms (including terms for psychological states) are "supervenient" on the primary qualities.⁷ But what is "supervenience"?

The question is a difficult one, and the difficulty reminds me of an episode in the history of late logical positivist philosophy of science. As late as 1936, Rudolf Carnap still sought a way to "reduce" all the terms of physics to "observation terms" such as 'blue' and 'touches' (for

⁷ See my discussion of Jaegwon Kim's highly influential views in my (1999).

Carnap, as later for Bernard Williams, physics was *the* paradigm of serious scientific knowledge). But in 1939⁸ Carnap gave up this project, and settled for taking the "theoretical terms" of physics as primitives, while claiming that there was still a profound difference between these terms, which, he said, were only "incompletely interpreted" and the "completely interpreted" observation terms. In a lecture titled "What Theories are Not" that I gave to an international congress in Philosophy of Science in 1960, I pointed out that

The notion of partial interpretation has a rather strange history - the term certainly has a technical ring to it, and someone encountering it in Carnap's writings, or Hempel's, or mine certainly would be justified in supposing that it was a term from mathematical logic whose exact definition was supposed to be too well known to need repetition. The sad fact is that this is not so! The term was introduced by Carnap in a section of his monograph [Carnap 1939, pp. 61ff], without definition (Carnap *asserted* that to interpret the observation terms of a calculus is automatically to "partially interpret" the theoretical primitives, without explanation), and has subsequently been used by Carnap and other authors (including myself)⁹ with copious cross references, but with no further explanation. (1962, pp. 244-245)

I believe that the situation is very similar with respect to the term 'supervenience', except that in the case of this term *many* definitions have been proposed. The problem, however, is that the term is used as if the definitions in question entailed that the relation they define had certain properties, and this is simply not the case!

Of the many definitions which have been proposed, the following pair are by far the most common:

(S global) Phenomena describable by means of predicates in a certain set *B* are **globally supervenient** upon the phenomena describable by means of predicates in a certain set *A* if and only if *there do not exist two physically possible worlds, W_1 and W_2 , such that the objects are the same in both worlds, and their A-predicates are the same in both worlds, but their B-predicates are not the same.* In short, global supervenience means that *global sameness of the distribution of A-predicates necessitates global sameness of the distribution of B-predicates.*

⁸ Carnap (1939). See especially §24, "Elementary and Abstract Terms," pp. 61-67.

⁹ I used the term myself without defining it, I am sorry to confess, in an early paper: (1957).

(S local) Phenomena describable by means of predicates in a certain set *B* are **locally supervenient** upon the phenomena describable by means of predicates in a certain set *A* if and only if *there do not exist two physically possible objects* O_1 and O_2 , such that the *A*-predicates of those objects are the same but their *B*-predicates are not the same. In short, global supervenience means that *local sameness of the distribution of A-predicates necessitates local sameness of the distribution of B-predicates*.

Although every philosopher who employs the term 'supervenience' would agree that there is a difference between saying that a type *B* of phenomena is supervenient upon another type *A* (usually described in the language of physics) and saying that *B*-phenomena are *nothing but C*-phenomena, or that *B*-phenomena are *identical* with certain *C*-phenomena, or that the language we ordinarily use to speak of *B*-phenomena can be *replaced by* (or "eliminated" in favor of) the language scientists use to speak of *A*-phenomena, in practice analytic metaphysicians take supervenience to have virtually the same metaphysical significance as identity or elimination or reducibility. In other words, once materialists have said that *B*-phenomena are "supervenient upon" *A*-phenomena, they often feel that they have, in effect, disposed of the question of the metaphysical status of *B*-phenomena, especially if they have argued to their own satisfaction that the supervenience of *B*-phenomena upon *A*-phenomena is "local" rather than global.

As indicated above, the problem is that the term (or rather the pair of terms 'globally supervenient' and 'locally supervenient') are used by these analytic metaphysicians as if the definitions in question entailed that the relations they define had certain properties, but the relations defined by (S global) and (S local) are easily shown not to have those properties.

The most important property ascribed to supervenience is this: if *B*-phenomena supervene on *A*-phenomena, then it is supposed to be the case that *B*-phenomena are *determined* by *A*-phenomena where 'determined' is obviously supposed to mean "explained." Some years ago, the Dutch chemist-philosopher Jaap van Brakel protested against the unclarity of this notion of "determination" in a pair of important papers (van Brakel 1997 and 1999). In fact, it is not hard to see that the accepted definitions of supervenience, (S global) and (S local), do not even guarantee *asymmetry!*

To see why they do not, consider the following completely imaginable possibility: suppose that it turns out to follow from General Relativity (or from quantum mechanics, or from a successor theory to both) that the global electromagnetic field couldn't be different without there being *some* difference in the gravitational field, and suppose at the same time that the gravitational field couldn't be different without there being *some* difference in the electromagnetic field. Does it follow without further argument *either* that the gravitational field "determines" (or is the reality at the "basis" of) the electromagnetic field or that the electromagnetic field "determines" (or is the reality at the "basis" of) the gravitational field? I see no reason why either should follow. Indeed, the possibility that we would immediately suspect is that both fields are physically determined by something more fundamental, some more basic field or some feature of the laws of Quantum General Relativity (a theory we have not yet succeeded in constructing).

What this thought experiment reveals is that supervenience as conventionally defined simply means that there is a certain sort of *functional relation* between *A*-phenomena and *B*-phenomena. Since it is perfectly imaginable that there are functional relations in *both* directions (in the case of the example I just used, from gravitational properties to electromagnetic properties and *vice versa*), it is not surprising that "supervenience" does not always run in one direction. And more important, that a functional relation amounts to *determination* – and to "determination" *in which sense* – is something that has to be made out in each case, not something that the mere fact (or assumption) of "supervenience" does for us.

Consider, now, the case of psychological phenomena. To say that psychological phenomena supervene *globally* on the "primary qualities" of physics is just to say that there could not be two physically possible worlds, which are identical in their physical descriptions – in classical physics, that would be to say that the distribution of "primary qualities" over fundamental physical objects is the same (or, these days of quantum mechanics, that the two physical universes have identical "state vectors" in Hilbert Space) – but in which different psychological phenomena take place. That psychological phenomena are indeed *globally* supervenient in this way on fundamental physical properties (or "states") few would today doubt. But that the psychological states of *individual organisms* are *locally* supervenient on the fundamental physical properties of those organisms is false, if we accept "externalism with respect to the mental," as I have argued we must in (1988) and elsewhere. By 'externalism with respect to the mental', I mean the thesis the content of psychological

states is individuated by a history of interactions with one's conspecifics and with the entire natural environment, and not just by what goes on inside one's skull. (William James, by the way, was a fellow "externalist," at least about perceptual states, as his [[1912] 1976] make clear [see my 1990b]). Today, the most common response of the materialist philosophers I am speaking of is to grant the truth of externalism with respect to such intentional states as thinking and believing, but to try to argue that our psychological states have a, so to speak, local core. In (1999), I argued that this claim is confused, and that, in fact, there are *no* isolated neural states that have the properties that the "narrow contents" of our content-bearing psychological states are supposed to have. To suppose, for example, that there is any one neural state that *every* human being who thinks the thought that there are many restaurants in Tokyo (that is, whose thought a good interpreter would interpret as the thought that there are many restaurants in Tokyo) must be in *one and the same* neural state, or one and the same "computational state," independently of why she thinks that thought or what her knowledge state, interests, purposes, etc., are, is science fiction, not science. As I wrote there, "The futile search for scientific objects called "narrow contents" in the case of meanings and for "internal psychological states" in the case of beliefs are alike instances of the rationalist error of assuming that whenever it is natural to project the same words into two different circumstances there must be an "entity" that is present in both circumstances" (Putnam 1999, p. 125).

As for "global supervenience," as I and others have pointed out for many years, global supervenience of psychological phenomena of the *global* environment does not imply that psychological explanations are redundant. If someone lets the water run in the bathtub to take a bath, for example, the *type* phenomenon "deciding to turn on the water in a bathtub in order to take a bath" is not definable in physical terms.¹⁰ And explanations, as Davidson rightly saw, connect events under *types*. A physical explanation of the trajectory of certain particles does not generalize to the same class of cases as the psychological explanation, that the subject decided to turn on the water in order to take a bath. Global supervenience does not mean that individual psychological states are correlated with individual physical states, or indeed, with definable set of physical states. Psychological explanations are still necessary, are

¹⁰ The question, famously raised by Donald Davidson, of the identity of the "token event" of, say, deciding to take a bath with a "token" physical event is beyond the scope of this lecture. My position (which I set out in [1999], p. XXX), is that "events" are much too vague for the notion of "token identity" to make any real sense.

still valid, and have ranges of applications which are not the *same* as those of any physical explanations.

3. Pragmatist "Aristotelianism"

Some years ago, Martha Nussbaum and I argued that, according to Aristotle, "the psychological activities of living beings, such as perceiving, desiring and imagining, are realized or constituted in matter, are in fact the activities of some suitable matter, and that the relation between form and matter is in fact one of constitution or realization not of identity of mere correlation" (Nussbaum and Putnam 1994, p. 28; see also Putnam 1994b). And we concluded by saying that "we can have nonreductionism and the explanatory priority of the intentional without losing sight of the natural and organic unity of the intentional with its constitutive matter that is one of the great contributions of Aristotelian realism" (Putnam and Nussbaum 1994, p. 5). Obviously, the positions we ascribed to Aristotle there are positions that John Dewey also argued for, and *Human Nature and Conduct* (Dewey [1922] 1988) has sometimes been characterized as a sort of "naturalized" (in Dewey's sense, not the contemporary materialist sense!) Aristotelianism. The criticisms of the materialist school of "analytic metaphysics" I have been making might be restated in Aristotelian language thus: the materialists speak as if the only explanatory principles were the fields and particles of fundamental physics; what they entirely fail to see is that the world has *many, many different levels of form*, and that types of form are also explanatory principles. If you want to explain why, for example, why Kant wrote a certain passage in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, a knowledge of quantum mechanics and relativity theory won't help you; as I put it in a paper I wrote many years ago, *most of the structure at the level of physics is irrelevant from the point of view of [a] higher-level discipline* (Putnam [1973] 1994, p. 432).

But pragmatism also has serious differences with the Aristotelian tradition, differences that, as has often been pointed out, are connected with the fact the Pragmatists came after and were deeply influenced by the discoveries of Charles Darwin. For Aristotle, a given individual belongs to one and only one (lowest) species (*which* lowest species a given individual belonged to is supposedly determined by the *essence* of that individual), and the essence of a given individual or species is supposed to be perfectly clear cut (and, of course, *unique*). But for Darwin and those biologist who built on his work, what is important is

variation. Species do not have sharp boundaries; indeed the criteria for specieshood are actually criteria for species *difference* (e.g., “populations” which are not cross-fertile belong to different species; populations which are geographically isolated and have sufficiently different phenotypes are normally classed as belonging to different species); and these criteria, as Ernst Mayr, the grand old man of today’s evolutionary biology, always emphasized, do not yield a “clean” division of organisms into disjoint species (Mayr 1976). Nor is this a *defect* in population biology: the basic teaching of Darwinism is that the line between species *can’t be sharp* – otherwise one species could not evolve from another! *Variation* is fundamental, and “essentialist” thinking is taboo.

The anti-essentialism of which I speak is beautifully expressed in a letter that James wrote late in his life, in 1907, to a philosophical critic, Dickinson S. Miller:

I got your letter about “Pragmatism,” etc., some time ago [. . .]. I sent you a week ago a “Journal of Philosophy” with a word more about Truth in it, written at *you* mainly; but I hardly dare hope that I have cleared up my position. A letter from Strong, two days ago, written after receiving a proof of that paper, still thinks that I deny the existence of realities outside the thinker; and Perry [. . .] accused Pragmatists (though he doesn’t name *me*) of ignoring or denying that the real objects play any part in deciding what ideas are true. I confess that such misunderstandings seem to me hardly credible [. . .]. Apparently it all comes from the *word* Pragmatism – and a most unlucky word it may prove to have been. I am a natural realist. The world *per se* may be likened to a cast of beans on a table. By themselves they spell nothing. An onlooker may group them as he likes. He may simply count them all and map them. He may select groups and name these capriciously, or name them to suit certain extrinsic purposes of his. Whatever he does, so long as he *takes account of them*, his account is neither false nor irrelevant. If neither, why not call it true? *it fits* the beans-*minus*-him, and expresses the *total* fact, of beans-*plus*-him. Truth in this total sense is partially ambiguous, then. If he simply counts or maps, he obeys a subjective interest as much as if he traces figures. Let that stand for pure “intellectual” treatment of the beans, while grouping them variously stands for non-intellectual interests. All that [. . .] I contend for is that there is *no* “truth” without *some* interest, and that non-intellectual interests play a part as well as the intellectual ones. Whereupon we are accused of denying the beans, or denying being in any way. (James [1907] 1920, pp. 295-296)

4. Philosophy without Essences

From Aristotle to the great 17th century revolutions in philosophy, philosophy almost always posited a realm of “intelligible” entities, entities uniquely available to “Reason” (that is, to the reason of *philosophers*), with fixed and immutable essences. Those entities were, in one way or another, held to provide the reasons for being (the *raison d’être* in a very literal sense) of all the “sublunar,” or mundane, and contingent entities that we encounter.¹¹

In introductory courses in philosophy, the 17th century revolutions I spoke of are often presented as if they completely overthrew this structure (or as if empiricism, at least, did so), but it is not hard to see that this is an exaggeration. As Dewey explains in *The Quest for Certainty*, classical empiricism took it for granted that the mind is confronted with “ideas” or “sensations” or *Empfindungen*, that these are mental objects, and that the general form of these objects and of their “qualities” was a pretty self-evident matter (Dewey 1960). Although, by the time he wrote *The Analysis of Mind*, Russell came to see that the possibility of dividing up every experience into a part that is simply given and a part that is contributed by conceptualization (a “mnemonic” element, in his jargon) was contestable, he felt that he had to defend it, on *virtually a priori* grounds. By way of contrast, in Dewey’s view, if rationalism made the mistake of supposing that the most fundamental laws of nature, and hence the form of scientific explanations at least in physics, could be known *a priori*, still the empiricist belief that the most fundamental experiential objects and their properties (and hence the nature of all empirical “data”) could be known once and for all was a perfectly comparable mistake. Against this aspect of the empiricist tradition, Dewey, continuing a line of thought that James had begun, insisted that by creating new observation-concepts we “institute” new data.¹² Modern physics (and of course not only physics) have richly born

¹¹ Abe Stone has remarked that the twentieth century metaphysics of Husserl’s *Ideas* actually retains this traditional structure; the novelty in Husserl lies in a new account of the relation of “psychology,” as the empirical science of sublunar minds, to philosophy (“phenomenology”) as the account of the intelligible beings and their essences.

¹² “The new data thus instituted do much more than provide facts for confirming and refining old conceptions. They institute a new order of problems whose solution requires a new frame of conceptual reference. In particular, it was by the use of new instruments and techniques that changes and relations of change were disclosed in what had previously been taken as fixed; a process that has gone on at an accelerated rate since the 17th century. This change in the nature of data was both the source and the product of the

him out. A scientist may observe a proton colliding with a nucleus, observe a virus with the aid of an electron microscope, or observe genes or black holes, etc. *Neither the form of possible explanations nor the form of possible data can be fixed in advance, once and for all.*

Like traditional metaphysics, contemporary materialism postulates a distinct realm of things which are the ultimate explanatory principles of all beings, although it *is* fallibilist to the extent of allowing physicists rather than philosophers to determine the contents of that realm. Following Quine, it often says that what we call “change” is a sort of illusion, and that the ideal description of this reality would be in what it calls a “tenseless” language. It does not think that realm can be known *a priori*, to be sure, but it does freely speculate about the form of an “absolute conception” of that realm, a finished science. And it often takes that speculation to be the only remaining function of philosophy. It is not hard to see that materialist metaphysics is a decidedly conservative affair. In rejecting the entire picture of a philosophical subject of metaphysics with a subject matter which consists of fundamental objects which are the explanatory principles of all “beings,” pragmatism is quite different.

5. Pragmatism and Existentialism

Existentialists, from Nietzsche on, used scornful language to describe the traditional metaphysical enterprise that I have so sweepingly (but, I think, not inaccurately) described. Heidegger famously described that enterprise as “ontotheology.” *Their* alternative to what they saw as a fatally flawed conception of the task of philosophy was typically to diagnose of what they saw as the falsity at the root of (most of) our lives, and to recommend an alternative to that falsity. For Nietzsche, fear of life is at the heart of our sickness, and the will to live (which Heidegger unsympathetically described as “the will to will”) is what has to be revived and strengthened. For Kierkegaard, addressing people who thought they were Christians, the problem was just that – that they *thought* they were Christians, that they knew what it means to be a “Christian,” and what they had to learn – not intellectually, because intellectualization is a principal symptom of their illness, but existentially – is what it really means to have a Christian relation to God.

universal adoption of the experimental method and the new order of conceptions demanded by its successful execution” (Dewey [1938] 1986, pp. 388-389).

For Heidegger (even if he attempts to deny that “authenticity” is a normative concept), the sickness is inauthenticity, and the valorized life combines authentic acceptance of absurdity (the “Nothing”) with submissiveness towards Being in ways that Heidegger interpreters endlessly argue about. What I want to emphasize is that along with the abandonment of metaphysics, this search for God, in Kierkegaard’s case, or for a secular substitute for an existential connection to God, in the case of the atheist existentialists, led to either an abandonment of or an irresponsible relation to the political, as well as to a disinterest or a failure to see the *philosophical* significance of science, and, in Heidegger’s case, not just to disastrous politics, but to a disastrous philosophy of history.¹³ In contrast, Dewey famously declared that “Philosophy will recover itself when it ceases to deal with the problems of philosophers and addresses the problems of men” (Dewey [1917] 1976, p. 42).

It is important to note that Dewey wrote “problems” in the *plural*. Pragmatists refuse to believe that there is just *one* problem of men, that is of persons, and just one solution. Dewey also wrote that philosophy “has no Mosaic or Pauline authority of revelation entrusted to it.” The pragmatist philosopher does not pretend to be a prophet or an oracle. But pragmatist philosophy does aspire to “the authority of intelligence, of criticism of [...] common and natural goods” (Dewey 1926, pp. 407-408). The pragmatist is willing to address existential concerns; but he does not think that one can responsibly address them, address them without falsifying them, without addressing quotidian concerns. If philosophy no longer has either a unique subject matter, nor a unique prophetic vision, then how can it continue at all? I sometimes heard students ask. Dewey’s answer was that philosophy has no need to be unique (an answer which is, however, itself unique!). James already argued in “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life” “the ethical philosopher must wait on facts,” and furthermore

he only knows if he makes a bad mistake, the cries of the wounded will soon inform him of the fact. In all this the philosopher is just like the rest of us non-philosophers, so far as we are just and sympathetic instinctively, and so far as we are open to the voice of complaint. His function is in fact indistinguishable from that of the best kind of statesman at the present day. His books on ethics, therefore, so far as they truly touch the moral life, must more and more ally themselves with a literature which is confessedly tentative and suggestive rather than

¹³ For a penetrating description and criticism of Heidegger’s philosophy of history, see Boyle (1998).

dogmatic – I mean with novels and dramas of the deeper sort, with sermons, with books on statecraft and philanthropy and social and economical reform. Treated in this way ethical treatises may be voluminous and luminous as well; but they can never be *final*, except in their abstractest and vaguest features, and they must more and more abandon old-fashioned, clearcut, and would-be “scientific” form. (James [1897] 1956, pp. 158-159)

Here James exaggerates when he writes “indistinguishable.” Philosophy *is* distinguishable from statesmanship, spiritual exhortation, and literature. But the difference, Dewey would say is one of degree: philosophy at its best is simply more reflective, more critical, more wide ranging. ‘Criticism’ is a word Dewey loved, and, in fact, he once defined philosophy as “criticisms of criticisms” (Dewey [1925] 1981, p. 298). Although Stanley Cavell has been at times critical (unfairly critical, I believe) of Dewey (see Cavell 1998), I believe that Cavell’s characterization of philosophy as “education for grownups” is one that Dewey would have approved. A philosophy that renounces both the dreams of metaphysics and the self-importance of existentialism is a grownup philosophy; and only a grownup philosophy is fit to educate grownups.

One last but essential remark. To call upon us, as I just have, to renounce both the dreams of metaphysics and the self-importance of existentialism, is NOT to join the logical positivists of yesteryear in calling both metaphysics and existentialism “nonsense.” There is MUCH of permanent value in the writing of both traditional metaphysicians and the great existentialists. It would be false to Dewey’s own spirit to deny that there is. But my self-imposed task today has been to bring out the uniqueness of pragmatism., and to do that I have had to emphasize what pragmatists see as the failures of those traditions.

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PRAGMATISM, PLURALISM, AND THE PEIRCE PRINCIPLE

ABSTRACT. This chapter examines Putnam's views on Pragmatism and points out that, according to this philosopher, metaphysical pluralism, i.e. antiessentialism, is not only the distinguishing feature of this philosophical trend, but also a feature that makes impossible to reconcile Pragmatism with what Putnam calls the Absolute Conception of Reality, a view he attributes to Bernard Williams. After calling the reader's attention towards how far is Putnam from adopting the Peirce Principle, which Dewey thought it to resume Pragmatism's main substance, it is argued that this principle naturally fits in with two ingredients of the Absolute Conception, namely the transcendence requirement and the convergence requirement. Finally, the chapter claims that there are two different interpretations of the Peirce Principle, i.e. a verificationist reading and a non-verificationist one, and holds that the transcendence and convergence requirements were already present in Dewey's work on education.

In his rich paper "What Makes Pragmatism So Different?", Professor Putnam aims at bringing out the uniqueness of pragmatism within Western metaphysics. In order to do so, he compares pragmatism with three metaphysical traditions, namely contemporary naturalism, Aristotelian essentialism and existentialism. Besides tracing out analogies and differences, Putnam defends pragmatism against these three traditions. Thus, he reproaches existentialism – a label under which he mentions Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger – for having led contemporary philosophy along paths that withdraw her from the sorts of problems that demand common people's attention. William James and John Dewey chose instead a view of philosophy that only gradually differed from literature, religion, politics and science. For them, philosophy brings with itself the means to equip not only the thinker but the grownup in general with a more reflexive and critical awareness of

nature and society. It is in this sense that we are to understand Dewey's happy characterization of philosophy as criticisms of criticisms.

The main body of Putnam's paper is not devoted to comparing pragmatism with existentialism, but to laying down and criticizing a metaphysical view of reality, the Absolute View of Reality, which results from combining both materialist and Aristotelian doctrines and which has had a heavy influence on current philosophy. Since Putnam's attempt to systematically picture this view and to expose its weakness deserves careful reflection, it is this the part of his paper that will be focused on in what follows. It will be argued that in Putnam's view metaphysical pluralism is pragmatism's distinguishing feature, and pluralism entails the rejection of the Absolute View. In the first place, it will be pointed out that this view is a complex one, so that several ingredients could, and should, be set apart in shading light on it. In the second place, it will be argued that two of these components fit in with the spirit of pragmatism, namely the need for transcending any subject-centered view of reality and the need for converging with further world perspectives. In the third place, Putnam's critical attitude towards the main insight of Pragmatism, i.e. the Pragmatic Maxim or the Peirce Principle, could be attributed to his not having distinguished what in the Absolute View is acceptable for a pragmatist and what such a kind of philosopher cannot stomach. In accordance with such a diagnosis, two interpretations of the Peirce Principle will be put forward: the verificationist reading Putnam endorses and a phenomenism-free reading of it. This second interpretation is compatible with the partial vindication of the Absolute View that will be carried out below. Finally, I will adduce that the transcendence and the convergence requirements have a neat pragmatist pedigree, their presence being detectable in John Dewey's influential *Democracy and Education* (1966).

1. Putnam's Metaphysical Pluralism

The kind of naturalism Putnam deals with is not the supernaturalism that was the target of Dewey's attacks, but materialism, a doctrine that Putnam finds paradigmatically put forward in Bernard Williams' works. According to it, there is a conception, a belief system that pictures the world "with the highest degree of independence of our own perspective and its characteristic features" (Williams 1985, p. 178). It is the view from nowhere, as Thomas Nagel (1986) called it, a view from which

every singular perspective would have been disposed of. I will refer to this doctrine as the Absolute View thesis or conception of reality.

Not only for Williams but for Putnam as well the idea that "all fundamental properties and relations that actually occur are physical" (Lewis 1999, p. 292) – the thesis of materialism – is part and parcel of the Absolute View thesis. The view that the concepts recruited to make up the representation of the world from the zero point of view are concepts of material properties and relationships, coined within basic natural science, so that any other concept, whether intentional, psychological, moral or whatever, one might resort to in taking inventory of the world, will be a concept of either a property or a relationship that supervenes on the basic or primary ones. To be in a better position to discuss these views, I will distinguish the Absolute View thesis from the one that holds that any non-basic property (and relation) supervenes of one or more fundamental properties (and relations), which I will refer to as the Supervenience thesis. Reductive Physicalism, i.e. the result of applying the Supervenience thesis to the elucidation of mental properties, is the doctrine that holds that mental properties supervene on physical properties, and it is included in the Absolute View pack.

Aristotelian essentialism supplies the third basis on which the view that Putnam rejects rests. It is the thesis that each and every individual belongs to one and lowest species and that the essence of either an individual or a species is unique and has perfectly clear sufficient and necessary conditions. The result of putting together all these ingredients is a metaphysical view according to which reality is made up of individuals that, given the fundamental properties they possess and the fundamental, i.e. supervenient, relationships they maintain, constitute categories with perfectly delineated borders. Therefore, any non-basic property supervenes on the fundamental ones. It follows from all this that any belief we are entitled to have about such a reality would be a piece of a representational system from which any singular perspective has been filtered out.

Against such a view Putnam adduces a battery of arguments with which he tries to demolish the three pillars that have been briefly described. Among these arguments, the most explicitly developed ones have the Supervenience thesis as their target, and can be divided up into three groups. The arguments in the first group point out that the concept of supervenience does not satisfy the conditions that the program of reducing non-basic properties and relations to the fundamental ones should warrant. Those conditions are asymmetry and determination. Asymmetry demands that non-basic properties supervene on the

fundamental ones, but not the other way around, thus subjecting the program to a hierarchy requirement. As for determination, it is the demand that the metaphysical hierarchy rests on a level in which only primary properties and relationships are to be found. Now, Putnam briefly puts forward an ideal experiment that casts serious doubts about whether the usual definitions of the concept of supervenience are successful. I feel myself inclined to side with him.

The second group of arguments is specifically addressed at undermining the basis of Reductive Physicalism. On the one hand, the well-known Twin Earth poisoned-pawn gambit (in Putnam 1975), one of the most outstanding findings in Putnam's professional career, shows that people's mental states have properties that do not locally supervene on the biological properties of their brains. And, on the other hand, Putnam argues that global supervenience does not substantially help the physicalist in advancing the reduction program: that global supervenience "does not mean that individual psychological states are correlated with individual physical states, or indeed, with definable set of physical states" (pp. 9f).¹

A third group of arguments, in which the influence of Aristotle is clearly felt, is spot again on the Supervenience thesis. The main substance of those arguments lies in his proposal of abandoning the idea of supervenience in favour of that of constitution (or realization) and defending that mental life is nothing but activity of the matter and in the matter. To my mind, what Putnam seems to be advancing is a sort of Non-Reductive Materialism. It is Physicalism in so far as there is no mental life without matter; it is non-reductive because he holds that psychology is explanatory even if its concepts cannot be replaced by concepts provide by basic natural science.² In other words, "*most of the structure at the level of physics is irrelevant from the point of view of [a] higher-level discipline*" (this volume, p. 27).

¹ This is not new. The point had been made in Kim (1989). Among others, L. Rudder Baker and Tyler Burge have insisted on this point. See Baker (1993) and Burge (1986). As far as I know, Putnam had not employed this argument until now.

² Putnam's seems to be close to, if not identical with, what Lynn Rudder Baker has called Minimal Materialism, a doctrine she states with the following slogan: "Take away all the atoms and nothing is left." See Baker (1995). The key idea is that, fundamental properties and relations aside, there are many levels of explanation. Putnam does not speak of levels of explanation, but of levels of form. However, he immediately adds, "types of form are also explanatory principles." It follows from this remark that the ontology and the conceptual system of basic physical science, i.e. elementary particle physics, are irrelevant for psychology, semantics, economy and other high-level scientific disciplines. See Putnam (1994).

Putnam's criticisms not only aim at the Supervenience thesis. His pragmatism begins taking shape when he confronts Aristotelian essentialism and the Aristotelian tradition in metaphysics. The deep influence that Darwin's evolutionary teachings had on James and Dewey (see Putnam 1990b, pp. 234ff) runs parallel to Ernst Mayr's – and, in general, Population Genetics – lessons that species are historic entities (Mayr 1982, Chs. 2 and 12) and that, as Putnam acknowledges, "[v]ariation is fundamental and "essentialist" thinking is taboo" (this volume, p. 28). (Thus, in the same way as intentional properties do not supervene on brain's chemical properties, biological population properties do not supervene on DNA's chemical properties.) This result provides Putnam with a basis on which to set up his own variety of pragmatist metaphysics, a variety which is defined by the following two theses: first, there is no fixed set of basic objects, properties and relations; and second, neither individuals nor species have sharp boundaries, i.e. essences. These two claims constitute Putnam's metaphysical pluralism and anti-essentialism, Putnam's own alternative to the Absolute View thesis.

2. A Partial Defence of the Absolute View of Reality

The extent to which I accord to Putnam's views is significant – it goes without saying that some of the ideas I share with him I have learned from his work. Among them I am glad to emphasize three of them: his externalism concerning the intentionality of mental properties, his conviction that those properties that basic natural science might include in the stocktaking of the world are of no help to higher-level disciplines, i.e. psychology among others, and his Darwinian rejection of essentialist thinking. However, I want to explore now the question that gives Putnam's contribution its title, namely to what extent is pragmatism compatible with the Absolute View, which is the target of Putnam's criticisms. More briefly put, where does the difference between a pragmatist and a pluralist lie in? In his manifesto *Pragmatism*, James thought that opting for pluralism would allow us to get rid of the kind of dogmatic strictness that friends of monism like to abide by (James 1907, pp. 554ff). Since Reductive Physicalism is a kind of monism, i.e. of materialist monism, one way of interpreting Putnam is that of taking him as carrying out the sort of enlightened work that James recommended, a task much needed given the course adopted by contemporary analytic

philosophy. From this point of view, pluralism is enough to make of Putnam a pragmatist.

Another way on interpreting Putnam in a pragmatist key consists in underlying those contents we find at the beginning of his paper. It is the key that has allowed Rorty to take a distinguished role in the current discussion of pragmatism and moved him to give Dewey's thought a lot of coverage.³ On those pages, Putnam addresses Bernard Williams, the philosopher who personifies the Absolute View for him. If we decided to follow Rorty's lead on this point, we might ask whether Putnam's metaphysical pluralism is either the pragmatist alternative to a sort of monism implicit in natural science or a result of having become emancipated from a secular god, namely the way things are in themselves. Although Putnam does not echo this Rortyan theme in his paper, he comes close to doing it. Thus, whereas he denies that there is a view of the world from nowhere, he also insists, as his analysis of existentialism leads him to conclude, that philosophy has to be concerned with the common men and women's problems and interests.

I suggest these two ways of recognizing in Putnam's paper a commitment to pragmatism because it is not clear to me that his is an entirely orthodox pragmatism. Specifically, I miss in his defense of pluralism any reference to the Pragmatic Maxim or, as I will call it, the Peirce Principle.⁴ In his argumentation no room is left for the principle that "there is no distinction of meaning so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference of practice" (Peirce 1998, p. 44). I understand that if Putnam had resorted to it, he had not taken his attack on the Absolute View thesis so far as it in fact goes. One thing is his arguments against Aristotelian essentialism and the consequences that many different beliefs systems may be exploited to represent reality because the world "has *many, many different levels of form*" (p. 10). As it was pointed out above, this part of Putnam criticisms sounds plausible enough, and the same can be said about the claim that there exist a number of diverse conceptual repertoires with whose the help to describe how things are . . . even *different* ways of representing the very *same* things. However, once the Absolute View is purged of everything that makes it incompatible with pluralism, there still remain two ideas that, first, I judge necessary to retain; second, and more important, that the Peirce Principle validates.

³ See Rorty (1999, pp. 7-20; and 2000, Lesson One). Putnam (2000b) discusses Rorty's metaphysical and epistemological ideas.

⁴ Rorty's second characterization of pragmatism is committed to this principle. See Rorty (1982, pp. 163ff).

The first ingredient is the need for shaping our beliefs about the world by means of conceptual systems devoid of any particular perspective that might taint them, the need for articulating our concepts in such a way that they make possible to represent the world from without our own parochial interests and limitations. Far from considering futile the wish to transcend our own point of view, it is difficult to question the convenience, both theoretical and practical, of progressively freeing our conceptual system of such blind points. A view that transcends our own perspective reduces both the casual and contingent atmosphere that biases our understanding and gives us access to things in so far as they come into our span of vision. The struggle for transcendence is the struggle for widening our egocentric window while strolling through the world. When our understanding of it is the outcome of combining images exclusively obtained from our particular point of view, without coordinating them to others' understanding, it is unavoidable to feel that things happen by accident and that a sense of chance pervades our inquires and explanations. Besides, our actions essentially become reactions to those circumstances that somewhat affect us, because our abilities to foresee them are severely limited. As our skills to intervene in the world develop, we manage to place our own vision of the world, or of parts of it, into a more objective, intersubjective, pattern, a task that gradually goes on and that requires continuous and piecemeal changes to better keep to the world's scripts. As the feeling of reality unfolds, both our explanatory and predictive powers and our opportunities to change the world increase. The Peirce Principle, not only does not stand in the way of our recommending the need to transcend our point of view, but it helps making sense of it. From a pragmatist point of view, far from being after better copies of the world, we look forward to getting involved in more successful dealings with it, more skilful resources to get involved with things and to have them at our disposal. The Peirce Principle gives an enlighten expression to what the feeling of reality comes to.

The Absolute View thesis' second valuable insight gives a bonus to convergence, that is, to articulating shared conceptual systems that transcend singular perspectives, once again a task that asks for a program of piecemeal intervention. Our concept and belief systems would converge were they liable to be subject to others' understanding and judgments and, as a consequence, it would gain acceptability for those who do not occupy our place among things. We make convergence possible in choosing to abide by general procedures for locating an event in space-time, replacing 'It rains in Granada on April 04.28.04' for 'It rains here', or an exchange economic system based on either currency or

a precious metal to an economic system based on barter. As before, the Peirce Principle makes it natural to infer that differences of practical involvement go hand in hand with different degrees of convergence.

Of course, transcendence and convergence are not independent goals. The only way of looking at our own concept and belief systems from without and transcending them is through some else's perspective, even though it is we who momentarily bracket our views and practices and catch them as it were from behind. The inseparability of transcendence and convergence, though it is not the whole story to tell about it, helps making Peirce's proposal of identifying truth with the theory reached at the end of an indefinitely continued investigation intelligible. And it also gives its point to Williams' idea of a belief system "with the highest independence of our own perspective and its peculiarities." The core of such a proposal, as Putnam has rightly pointed out, is making truth the result of a procedure, and the point argued above is that the Peirce Principle requires that transcendence and convergence are built into the conditions that prevent investigation from coming off rails. This fact – if it is one – speaks in favour of the existence of something essentially human in the idea of an absolute truth, namely the need to go beyond our own perspective and accepting that truth and community are correlative (Putnam 1990, p. 31). On this basis, I gather that what might lead Putnam to flatly oppose to the Absolute View thesis is not the requirements of transcendence and convergence, but a conception of representing as copying. If all these components are factored out, no reason is left that blocks the way towards sharing Putnam's criticism of that thesis while preserving those requirements.

On the other hand, some writings of Putnam's on pragmatism suggest an ambivalent attitude towards my diagnosis concerning what is right and what is wrong about the Absolute View idea. His papers on James and the pragmatist philosophy provide serious evidence that Putnam does not wholeheartedly subscribe to the Peirce Principle. He shares James' view that Peirce's theory of truth gives expression to a regulative ideal, and adds that if we cashed out such a theory, all we would get is the requirement of warranted assertability (Putnam and Putnam 1990, p. 223). This suggestion does not seem to me as convincing as many others of Putnam's. Lacking an argument, I do not see that the concept of warranted assertability respects the requirements of transcendence and convergence that I deem worth retaining.

3. Non-Conceptual Content and the Peirce Principle

There is another topic, which Putnam does not deal with in his paper, though it has been extensively developed in other papers of his, about which some doubts, if not total disagreement, can be expressed. It is the problem of the nature of non-conceptual content and, more specifically, the doctrine, set out by James, according to which every perceptual experience has conceptual and non-conceptual aspects that can be sorted out. In *The Threefold Cord* Putnam has argued that there are forms of our experience that depend on our conceptual resources. Thus, he adduces that it is impossible to see x as being P unless we have got the concept of (being) P (Putnam 1999, Second Epilogue). Nothing will be said in what follows on this argument. More recently, in a long comment on John McDowell's *Mind and World* (Putnam 2002), Putnam has suggested that, without returning to the thought that some experiences involve no conceptual capacity at all, some experiences are *preconceptual*. He prefers the term 'preconceptual' to 'non-conceptual' in order to underlie that the assumption that there is a sharp boundary between conceptual and non-conceptual experiences makes no sense (Putnam 2002, p. 183). In this case, however, the argument Putnam rests on an unstable basis. According to McDowell, if the contents of our experiences were non-conceptual, they could not play any role at all in justifying our beliefs and judgments. Since McDowell thinks that experiences support as well as refute beliefs, he concludes that experiences must have conceptual content as well. Putnam puts some distance between McDowell and himself in setting perceptions apart from experiences. As Putnam understands them, while perceptions have conceptual constituents – his term is 'aspects' – experiences do not have any.⁵ To be coherent, Putnam has to admit that the boundary between perceptions and experiences is fuzzy and that, because of it, it makes no sense to hold that there is a neat dividing line between perceptions-or-experiences that justify beliefs and perceptions-or-experiences that do not. No content without any justificatory role is his conviction.

Some might find a bit uncomfortable living with this way of approaching the conceptual and non-conceptual dichotomy, because it mixes up the theory of content and the theory of justification. The first one is, if you want, a metaphysical theory about the *constitution* of mental states, e.g. the belief of such-and-such; the second one is an

⁵ It is interesting to note that Putnam says that successful perceptions have conceptual aspects "in some sense of 'conceptual'" – a sense that the paper does not make it explicit. See Putnam (2002, p. 182).

epistemic theory about the goodness of *reasons* to belief that such-and-such. Putnam's distinction between perceptions and experiences leaves one wondering what experiences are for and in what do their contents consist in, if they are not involved in the providing-reasons business. Pragmatism should provide pragmatists with the means to answer these questions. To finish these critical comments an attempt to do it will be sketched.

Well, in the same way as the Peirce Principle allows us to single out what there is in the Absolute View thesis that is worth saving, it is worth arguing now that the same principle can be used to vindicate a substantial notion of non-conceptual content. The insight that has guided the partisans of this kind of content is that perceptual states of many species of animals, very young children and deeply mentally handicapped aged people, e.g., Alzheimer syndrome patients, have content (see, e.g., Cussins 1990, p. 381). Any pragmatist should take the challenge to explain what the nature of non-conceptual content is, given his or her closeness to Darwin and evolutionary biology – a relationship Putnam reminds us of in his paper. Instead of construing the notion of non-conceptual content as hardly squaring with the pragmatist creed, since it contributes to strengthen a gap between experience and perception or, alternatively, between two kinds of content, it fits in with such a creed. This affinity has been clearly underlined by Evans:

Such status [perceptual informational status endowed with non-conceptual content] – that is, states of a conscious subject. However addicted we may be to thinking of the links between auditory input and behavioral output in information-processing terms – in terms of computing the solution to simultaneous equations [...] – it seems abundantly clear that evolution could throw up an organism in which such advantageous links were established, long before it had provided us with a conscious subject of experience. (Evans 1982, pp. 157f)

This seems to me to be a deep remark. According to it, non-conceptual content is a matter of a direct correlation between an organism's gathering information laying out there in the world, through the workings of its sensory organs, and the information gathered, without the mediation of any conscious judgment. A subject that hears a sound coming from a certain direction, Evans points out, need neither to say to herself "Its coming from over there" nor wondering what is going on, to lend her attention to the sound, to turn her head to it, or whatever. Those abilities are exercised regardless of whether that organism is a concept user, because what matters when it comes to non-conceptual content is *activity*. It is action what has to be taken into account in order to say

what non-conceptual content amounts to. From this point of view, differences in non-conceptual content translate into differences in dispositions to do various things, because non-conceptual content captures what the psychologist James J. Gibson (1986) called *affordances* the environment provides to guide subjects' actions, i.e. trails that afford them guidance. Imagine you get up in the middle of the night because someone had the ominous idea of phone you then. Not being entirely conscious of what you are doing, you feel for your slippers with your bare feet until you get the familiar feeling that you have put them on. Are concepts involved in your actions? Maybe there are. However, maybe this is not the right question to raise. By bringing it up, we loose sight of that fact it is not thought but action what world affordances should be mapped to. It is not the question "Where are my slippers?" what mediates my answering the call, but your slippers' guiding your feet.⁶

If there is something to this way of distinguishing non-conceptual from conceptual content, then the fact that experiences have non-conceptual content means an important difference, namely a difference in exploiting the environment's affordances for those subjects whose biological endowment and learned abilities enable them to act upon those affordances. Being this difference one that makes a difference, the Peirce Principle cannot be blind to it. Therefore, this would leave Putnam in a position in which he should argue that the distinction between thinking and acting is another dichotomy to be abolished.

4. Putnam's Rejection of the Peirce Principle

The main goals aimed at in this chapter have been reached in previous sections. In what follows two objections to the partial defense of the Absolute Conception carried out above will be taken up and answered. To begin with, two interpretations of the Peirce Principle have to be distinguished. One of those interpretations makes it easy to understand why Putnam thinks there is nothing in the principle worth retaining and why the idea of a non-conceptual content makes no sense at all for him. The other reading makes it possible not only to avoid the difficulties with which Putnam saddles the principle but also to give support to the thesis that Putnam's pragmatism is essentially Metaphysical Pluralism.

⁶ These last remarks closely follow not only Evans' insights but Cussins' elaborations on them. See Cussins (1992, 2002).

Putnam has made his reasons for rejecting the Peirce Principle explicit. Summed up, his objection amounts to the following: once you abide by it you are committed to a verificationist conception of meaning and truth. The formulation of the Peirce Principle Putnam considers is the well-known following one:

Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object. (Peirce 1998, p. 45)

In his opinion, the key idea in this statement lies in how one understands those effects our concepts or ideas have. Peirce states the maxim in a context that makes it natural to conclude that the term 'effects which might conceivably have practical bearings' means *sensible effects, sensible qualities*. Therefore, the principle identifies a concept's (or a thought's) content, as well as the meaning of an expression, with its sensible effects; and any difference between concepts (or thoughts) with a difference between the sensible effects that their use would bring out. Seen to this light, the Peirce Principle would come close to, if not coincide with, the Verification Principle, and Putnam has an interesting objection to raise against either the Peirce Principle or the Verification Principle.⁷ This objection opens up the following alternative for us. One option, the one Putnam chooses, takes on the verificationist interpretation of the Peirce Principle and distinguishes a liberal and a strict reading of Verificationism. The pragmatist philosopher would then be a liberal verificationist. Pragmatism denies that knowledge claims' ultimate touchstone consists of sense data presenting themselves in the theatre of the knower's consciousness. Pragmatism is neither phenomenism nor committed to the requirement that a thought or proposition can be completely verified by appealing to incorrigible sensuous items. On the other hand, Pragmatism coincides with Verificationism in at least one point, which Putnam strives to state. He concedes the verificationist philosopher that "our grasp of empirical concepts depends on our perceptual verification abilities" (Putnam 1995, p. 305), but immediately adds that those abilities are deeply rooted in our life forms – a

⁷ For reasons of space, I won't put forward Putnam's objection to Verificationism here. I will only point out that the objection relies on a distinction between *sense* and *significance* he does not articulate in his paper. See Putnam (1995, pp. 301f). According to such a distinction, 'system of stars arranged at the vertices of a 100-gon (in a region of space otherwise free of stars) *outside of our light cone*' would have significance or meaning but lack any sense.

Wittgensteinian touch. Putnam cares to underline that Peirce and James anticipated the sort of Verificationism that Carnap and Reichenbach made popular in contemporary philosophy and makes the best to remind the reader that the defenders of the Verification Principle gave the pragmatists the credit of having hit on it. As far as James is concerned, this historical note may be not disputed. Dewey (1988) pointed out it that rather than a pragmatist James was an empiricist – and James' insistence on particular sensible experiences and possible differences in perceptual flux hardly leaves any room to dispute this claim.

The second way of interpreting the Peirce Principle is adopted by those who think that the principle does not run the risk of being assimilated to Verificationism. From this point of view, which Dewey not only found in Peirce's writings but shared himself as well, the crux of the matter lies in the link between concepts' (and thoughts') contents and linguistic expressions' meaning, on the one hand, and the consequences of their use, on the other hand. 'Consequence' means here the subsequent actions, both real and possible, that the deployment of concepts and the use of terms and sentences give rise to. In Dewey (1988) it is openly acknowledged that ideas and concepts, in addition to being devices that allows us to register past experiences, are also means to anticipate future experiences and to guide possible human action. Human reason, said Dewey, is constructive. Thus, from this point of view the sensible quality of experience makes little showing. Peirce himself challenged the right to connect Pragmatism with Phenomenism, a link that James turned into a central doctrine of his philosophy. Peirce's strategy for purging Pragmatism from empiricist principles is a straight one, namely the need for distinguishing in the sensible effects that concepts' (and thoughts') content consist of – in other words, their value – their purely qualitative features, their sensuous aspect, from their *rational* purport (see Dewey 1916, p. 711). This second aspect really is the relevant one. It is not differences in the qualitative features of experience, but differences in rational purport, what differences in content and meaning amount to.

In "How to Make Our Ideas Clear" a variant of this strategy is explicitly brought up (Peirce 1998). Peirce begins by identifying the sensible effects of our concepts and thoughts with *beliefs*. In more exact terms, the sensible effects that concepts, thoughts and linguistic expressions have emerge into consciousness as beliefs:

Here, then, let us apply our rules. According to them, reality, like every other quality, consists in the peculiar sensible effects which things partaking of it produce. The only effect which real things have is to cause

belief, for all the sensations which they excite emerge into consciousness in the form of beliefs. (Peirce 1998, pp. 43f)

No matter which maneuver we resort to, the final result is the same: what fixes the content identity of concepts and thoughts and the meaning of words and sentences is the consequences they have for the subsequent action. There is no distinction of either content or meaning that cannot consist in “anything but a possible difference of practice” (Peirce 1998, p. 44). All this lead us to conclude that, though Putnam holds that Peirce provided the Pragmatic Maxim with a verificationist reading, the only support that can be given to Putnam’s claim comes from Peirce’s application of his principle to the doctrine of transubstantiation of wine and bread into Christ’s blood and flesh, in order to argue that the dispute between Protestants and Catholics lacks any base (cf. Peirce 1998, pp. 44f). Nevertheless, the example should not turn the anecdote into a category. It is perfectly reasonable to literally interpret Peirce’s mention of sensible effects as referring to the taste and smell effects that drinking wine produces in the wine drinker, but it would be to go too far to assimilate any other dispute to this one. Putnam himself acknowledges that pragmatists applied the Peirce Principle, i.e. the pragmatic method, to the analysis and comparison of different metaphysical systems and rightly claims that this use of the principle proves to what extent Pragmatism gave up the sort of Phenomenism that goes hand to hand with Verificationism.

5. Transcendence and Convergence in Dewey’s Views of Education

It has been argued above that a pluralistic view of reality is compatible with two requirements that are built into the Absolute View: a requirement of transcending subjective or particular perspectives on the world – the Transcendence Requirement – and a requirement of convergence of those perspectives with further human and institutional viewpoints – the Convergence Requirement. It has been held that a pragmatist philosopher is not obliged to abandon either of those two demands. However, it is possible to go beyond this conciliatory remark and defend that they can be found in the classical pragmatist curriculum. More specifically, Dewey’s views on the philosophy of education, as put forward in his book *Democracy and Education*, give those two desiderata of the Absolute View a central place in explaining the emergence of thought.

As far as convergence is concerned a brief comment will be enough. The question, What is education, says Dewey, is the question of how to achieve that the child’s beliefs and further psychological attitudes converge on their elders’ beliefs and attitudes and come to share them. In other words, “our problem is to discover the method by which the young assimilate the point of view of the old, or the older bring the young into like-mindedness with themselves” (Dewey [1916] 1966, p. 11). Dewey thinks that education is a matter of creating a new environment, of changing the young’s environment into the elder’s environment, thus bringing about the convergence of the former on the latter. A living being’s environment consists of every condition that stimulates or inhibits its characteristic activities. When we come to a human being’s education, the environment she has to share is a social environment, one in which those characteristic activities cannot develop without taking the activities of other human beings into account. To educate a human being requires, first of all, giving rise to those habits that control the ways in which natural responses to stimuli occur. This amounts to the passage from a more natural environment to a less natural one. Any success is a step forward in *training*, i.e. in replacing those stimuli that, in virtue of their natural tendencies, have influence on human beings’ activities by new stimuli. However, it is not the ability to be successfully trained what separates human beings from the rest of living beings. To train a living being is one thing, to educate a human being is another one. To educate a young is to create a social environment by arousing in her an interest for what Dewey describes as “the social use to which his action is put” (Dewey [1916] 1966, p. 13). The idea is to modify the subject’s intellectual and emotional attitudes in order for her to share both the thoughts and emotions that prevail in the community the subject belongs to. In educating a person “[sh]e not merely acts in a way agreeing with the actions of others, but, in so acting, the same ideas and emotions are aroused in h[er] that animate the others” (Dewey [1916] 1966, pp. 13f). Convergence on a group’s beliefs and emotions is the main *desideratum* of education. It is not only convergence of environments, that is, convergence of beliefs, desires and, in general, goals and values, but convergence of emotions and motivations as well. For an individual to be in line with the members of her group, it is necessary to behave the way the others behave, and this requires sharing the same environment with them. To converge, therefore, brings with itself truly significant advantages for the one who achieves it, since not doing it implies not being part of the group. One of those prizes, not to be overlooked just now, is that of “free intercourse and communication of ‘experience’”

(Dewey [1916] 1966, p. 99), the present experience and the one that accumulated over the generations.

The need for transcending our more-or-less parochial perspectives on reality also plays an important role in *Democracy and Education*. In fact, the significance of this requirement goes beyond Dewey's strictly educational worries and deeply touches the fundamental questions of pragmatist philosophy. There is no exaggeration in the idea that the Transcendence Requirement is the key to the analysis of the origin of thought and the nature of our experience that this work of Dewey's counts on. In our experiences Dewey finds two elements, one passive and one active. In virtue of its passive ingredient, any experience is an undergoing. The active ingredient is the one that gives any experience the character of a trying or an essay. Thus, there is in any experience a representational ingredient, and this means a cognitive factor. Now, experiences are not what they are if its active element is ignored, because both elements are not disconnected. We manage to learn from our experiences, because they are linked in the appropriate way. "We do something to the thing and then it does something to us in return: such is the peculiar combination" (Dewey [1916] 1966, p. 139). We try out things and, as a result of our attempts, we suffer or feel their effects on us. Our actions are experiments we perform on the world (or on the right part of it), and our joys and sufferings become patterns of action that relate them to further joys and sufferings. Learning from experience is relational in nature. In learning there are backwards-looking relationships, thanks to which we are often able to correct the missed shot and to validate the right try; and there are forward-looking relationships that help us to anticipate future experiences by connecting our actions with the effects on us that result from our having intervened in the world. From this analysis Dewey distills two philosophically interesting remarks. First, experience is only secondarily a cognitive affair. Second, that an experience's value "lies in the perception of relationships or continuities to which it leads up" (Dewey [1916] 1966, p. 140). It follows that the fundamental form of thought "is the discernment of the relation between what we try to do and what happens in consequence" (Dewey [1916] 1966, pp. 144f). The step from the fundamental way of thinking to the derived forms of thought is the step between thought based on the trial-and-error method and thought due to what Dewey calls *reflection*. In the kind of thought that follows the trial-and-error method, the minute details of the link that connects action and its effects are opaque for us. We simply ignore why our action brings about the affects. On the contrary, reflection is in the origin of action

because reflection makes us aware of those minute details, i.e. of why actions' effects occur.

Reflective thought turns its possessor into a kind of agent whose abilities amount to much more than "a piece of registering apparatus" (Dewey [1916] 1966, p. 147) of our experiences' effects. The ability to reflect allows transcending, first, the human agent's insertion among things to see them from a wider perspective, a viewpoint progressively less dependent on his or her particular contingencies. Thus, we typically reflect, that is, we plainly think, when we calculate what it *might* happen, though it has not happened (cf. Dewey [1916] 1966, p. 147). Such a capacity speaks of us, human agents, as having got a view of our insertion in reality as an active part of the world causal traffic. Campbell (1994) has argued that the emergence of human subjectivity, i.e. the creation of a gap between a living being that sees him or herself as acting on the world, on the one hand, and the world itself, on the other, correlates with the awareness of such a insertion. In the second place, and as the culminating moment of the process, reflective thoughts result from the need that agents have for transcending their immediate involvements with those situations they live in the middle of. Dewey describes this interesting point by saying that the reflective agent has to get a "certain detached impartiality," a separation that demands "keeping one's self out of the data" (Dewey [1916] 1966, p. 147). This is not the only basis on which it can be attributed to Dewey a deep commitment to the need for transcending our own perspective on the world. It was claimed above that the requirements of transcendence and convergence are not independent from each other. Dewey was perfectly aware of such a nexus when he held that human beings' becoming part of a social environment decisively pushes them to keep on transcending their particular stances:

There is, however, no incompatibility between the fact that the occasion of reflection lies in a personal sharing in what is going on and the fact that the value of the reflection lies upon keeping one's self out of the data. The almost insurmountable difficulty of achieving this detachment is evidence that thinking originates in situations where the course of thinking is an actual part of the course of events and is designed to influence the result. Only gradually and with a widening of the area of vision through a growth of social sympathies does thinking develop to include what lies in beyond our *direct* interests: a fact of great significance for education (Dewey [1916] 1966, pp. 147f).

No doubt can be cast on Dewey's recognition of the transcendence requirement. This desideratum is built into the very possibility of human thought.

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