

## PRAGMATISM, THEN AND NOW:<sup>1</sup>

Sun Yong<sup>2</sup> Interviews Susan Haack<sup>3</sup>

**SY:** Professor Haack, thank you for accepting my interview request. You are well known in philosophy circles in China, not only for your books *Philosophy of Logics*<sup>4</sup> and *Evidence and Inquiry*<sup>5</sup> but also for your research on pragmatism and your anthology *Meaning and Action: Selected Writings on Pragmatism Old and New*.<sup>6</sup> It is six years since Professor Chen Bo interviewed you in *World Philosophy*;<sup>7</sup> and I'm hoping that in this interview I can learn more about your views both on the classical pragmatist tradition and on pragmatism today.

**SH:** I'm happy to talk with you, and grateful for the opportunity to clarify some issues for Chinese readers. May I suggest that we begin with the classical pragmatist tradition, and then move on, through developments in pragmatism and neo-pragmatism during the twentieth century, to the present and even prospects for the future?

**SY:** Yes, let me begin, as you suggest, by asking you to clarify some issues about the history of pragmatism. In his *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge*<sup>8</sup> (a book which has had considerable influence in China), Thomas English Hill tell us that Peirce declined the

---

<sup>1</sup> © 2010 Sun Yong/Susan Haack. All rights reserved. This interview has been presented (by Prof. Haack) at the Peirce Edition Project, Indianapolis University/Purdue University; the LOGOS Group, Universitat de Barcelona, Spain; and the meeting of the Central European Pragmatist Forum held at Comenius University, Bratislava, Slovak Republic.

<sup>2</sup> Professor of Philosophy, Shanghai Financial University, P.R. China, [sunyong321102@yahoo.cn](mailto:sunyong321102@yahoo.cn).

<sup>3</sup> Distinguished Professor in the Humanities, Cooper Senior Scholar in Arts and Sciences, Professor of Philosophy, Professor of Law, University of Miami, U.S.A., [shaack@law.miami.edu](mailto:shaack@law.miami.edu).

<sup>4</sup> Susan Haack, *Philosophy of Logics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978). (Chinese translation by Lo Yi (Beijing, P. R. China: Commercial Press, 2003).)

<sup>5</sup> Susan Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry: Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993). 2<sup>nd</sup>, expanded edition, under the title *Evidence and Inquiry: A Pragmatist Reconstruction of Epistemology* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2009). (Chinese translation by Chen Bo, Zhang Li Feng, and Yiu Ye Tao (Beijing, P. R. China: Renmin University Press, 2005).)

<sup>6</sup> Susan Haack, Chen Bo, and Shang Xin Jian, eds., *Meaning and Action: Selected Writings on Pragmatism, Old and New* (Beijing, P. R. China: Renmin University Press, 2007). An English version (with associate editor Robert Lane) appeared under the title *Pragmatism, Old and New: Selected Writings* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Chen Bo, "Intellectual Journey of an Eminent Logician-Philosopher—An Interview with Susan Haack," *World Philosophy*, October 2003. An abridged version of this interview appears in English in Cornelis de Waal, ed., *Susan Haack: A Lady of Distinctions* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007), pp.17-37.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas English Hill, *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge* (New York: Ronald Press, 1961), 295. (I note that this book has not had, in the U.S., the influence it seems to have had in China.)

**honor of being regarded as the originator of pragmatism; that Peirce did not, like James, apply the pragmatic maxim to the concept of truth; and that many of Peirce's major contributions are irrelevant to, and some actually incompatible with, pragmatism. But you write in *Pragmatism, Old and New* that it was Peirce who first introduced the word "pragmatism," and that the spirit of pragmatism pervades even his early anti-Cartesian papers. How *should* we assess Peirce's position and role in American pragmatism?**

**SH:** What I will call "the classical pragmatist tradition" was a late-nineteenth-century movement in American philosophy that grew out of discussions between C. S. Peirce and William James at the Metaphysical Club in Cambridge, Mass., in the early 1870s. Both Peirce and James stressed that pragmatism should be thought of, not as a body of doctrine, but as a method, the method embodied in the pragmatic maxim of meaning.

And this, the core *idea* of classical pragmatism, was first articulated in Peirce's "How to Make Our Ideas Clear,"<sup>9</sup> published in 1878; an article he would later describe as "a little paper expressing some of the opinions I had been urging [at the Metaphysical Club] under the name of pragmatism."<sup>10</sup> But the *word* "pragmatism," in its new philosophical meaning, did not appear in print until 1898, when James used it—fully acknowledging Peirce's role—in "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results."<sup>11</sup> Peirce did not take his bows as founder of pragmatism until a 1903 lecture at Harvard, in which he wrote that, though the dove he had sent forth in 1878 had never returned to him, "of late quite a brood of young ones have been fluttering about, from the feathers of which I might fancy that mine had found a brood."<sup>12</sup>

Peirce later explained that the reason he hadn't used the word "pragmatism" in 1878 was that he didn't dare use it in print in its new, philosophical sense, for fear of confusion with its everyday meaning.<sup>13</sup> In ordinary English today, "pragmatism" means "practical, concerned with

---

<sup>9</sup> C. S. Peirce, *Collected Papers*, eds. Charles Hartshorne, Paul Weiss, and (volumes 7 and 8) Arthur Burks (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938-51), 5.388-410 (1878). [References to the *Collected Papers* are by volume and page number.] The section headings in this article (which *do* use the words "pragmatism," "pragmatic maxim," etc.), were supplied by the editors of the *Collected Papers*; they were not in the original.

<sup>10</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers* (note 9 above), 5.13 (c.1906).

<sup>11</sup> William James, "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results," *University Chronicle* (University of California, Berkeley), September 1898: 287-310; reprinted in James, *Pragmatism* (1907; ed. Frederick Burkhardt and Fredson Bowers, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 355-70.

<sup>12</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers* (note 9 above), 5.17 (1903).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.13 (c.1906).

expediency rather than principle”; at the time Peirce was writing, the primary meaning of “pragmatism” in ordinary English was even more off-putting: “officious meddlesomeness.”

As this brief history reveals, much of what Hill says requires correction. For example, Peirce did *not* “decline[] the honor of being regarded as the originator of pragmatism.”<sup>14</sup> The idea that he did is, perhaps, the result of a misreading of the well-known passage from 1905 where—famously hoping that *this* word will be “ugly enough to be safe from kidnappers”—Peirce introduced a new term, “pragmaticism,” to refer to his specific variant of pragmatism. But Peirce’s purpose in this passage, as he quite clearly indicates, is not to disassociate himself from James or Dewey, or even from the radical British pragmatist F. C. S. Schiller, but to distance himself from the abuses of the word “pragmatism” then rife in the literary journals.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, Hill is mistaken in thinking that, while James applied the pragmatic maxim to the concept of truth, Peirce did not. Both Peirce and James saw the maxim as the heart of the pragmatist method in philosophy: to be used not only negatively, as a way of dissolving meaningless metaphysical disputes, but also positively, as a way of explaining the meaning of hard philosophical concepts. And both applied it to the concept of truth: James in *Pragmatism*<sup>16</sup> and *The Meaning of Truth*;<sup>17</sup> and Peirce, much earlier, in “How to Make Our Ideas Clear,” where he writes that “[t]he opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed by all who investigate, is what we mean by the truth.”<sup>18</sup>

And then, apparently, Hill compounds these mistakes by first identifying pragmatism with views associated with James, John Dewey, and C. I. Lewis, and then claiming that Peirce’s views were “anti-pragmatist” where they diverged from these. This is seriously misleading. The fact that Peirce’s philosophical ideas views differed from James’s doesn’t make them “anti-pragmatist” except on the assumption—which, as I have already explained, is false—that James was a real, acknowledged pragmatist, but Peirce was not. It would be far better, recognizing the commonalities as well as the differences, to say, rather, that Peirce gradually developed a more

---

<sup>14</sup> Hill, *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge* (note 8 above), p.295.

<sup>15</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers* (note 9 above), 5.414 (1905).

<sup>16</sup> James, *Pragmatism* (note 11 above), 95-113.

<sup>17</sup> James, *The Meaning of Truth* (1909; eds Frederick Burkhardt and Fredson Bowers, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).

realist, and James a more nominalist, style of pragmatism.

But Hill's biggest problem, it seems to me, is that he thinks of pragmatism as exactly what Peirce and James insisted it was not: a body of philosophical doctrine. What the classical pragmatists—among whom I would include Peirce, James, Dewey, and George Herbert Mead—had in common was, rather, a congeries of philosophical *attitudes*: a distaste for dogmatism and for false dichotomies, a naturalistic disinclination to philosophize in a purely *a priori* way, a tendency to look to the future rather than the past, an interest in social aspects of language and of inquiry, and a willingness to take evolution seriously. Giovanni Papini's well-known analogy makes the point vivid: pragmatism was “like a corridor in a hotel. Innumerable chambers open out of it. In one you may find a man writing an atheistic volume; in the next someone on his knees praying for faith; in a third a chemist investigating a body's properties ... . They all own the corridor, and all must pass through it.”<sup>19</sup> We should expect that pragmatists will share a broad approach to philosophical questions and certain broad philosophical attitudes; but we should also expect them to diverge both in the kinds of philosophical questions that most interest them, and in the substantive philosophical claims they make.

**SY: Pragmatism says that truth is essentially verification, and describes it as “the expedient in our way of thinking.” But surely the fact that a belief is expedient or has good consequences is not sufficient for its being true; and doesn't James's account of truth (as Hill suggests) lead to subjectivism and even solipsism?**

**SH:** The first thing to say is that, while there are clear continuities, there are also significant differences between Peirce's ideal-realist account of truth as the Final Opinion that would be agreed were inquiry to continue indefinitely, James's more nominalist account of truth as verifiability, and—to anticipate a little—Dewey's instrumentalist conception of the “tried and true.” The second thing to say, perhaps, is that Peirce, James, and Dewey all agree that while it is not false, exactly, to say that truth is correspondence to the facts, it is unhelpful; it gives us no real insight into the concept of truth; that is to say, no *pragmatic* insight, no understanding of what difference it makes if a proposition is true. Each of them tries, in his own distinctive way,

---

<sup>18</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers* (note 9 above), 5.407 (1878).

<sup>19</sup> As reported by James in *Pragmatism* (note 11 above), p.32.

to supply what is lacking.

Peirce distinguishes three grades of clarity: the first requires only the ability to use a term; the second requires only the ability to give a verbal definition; but the third, pragmatic grade is reached only when one grasps what the experiential consequences of the concept's applying would be. Truth-as-correspondence, Peirce says, is only a "nominal" definition, reaching only the second grade of clarity. And his accounts of the concepts of truth and reality at the third, pragmatic grade of clarity quite explicitly rely on the idea of the community of inquirers: the opinion that will be agreed at the end of inquiry is the truth, and the real is the object of that final opinion.<sup>20</sup>

Of course, this account is not without difficulties; in particular, it faces what Peirce calls the problem of Buried Secrets: that there might be particular propositions about the past (e.g., that Cleopatra sneezed seven times on her eighth birthday) which seem on their face to be clearly either true or else false, but the truth-value of which could never be settled however long inquiry continued. Peirce replies that we underestimate what it might be possible to find out; and suggests that, if the truth-value of such a proposition really couldn't be settled, then the proposition lacks pragmatic meaning.<sup>21</sup> But this reply seems to many less than fully satisfying (for one thing, the last clause suggests that "pragmatic meaning" will turn out, like the "cognitive meaning" of logical positivism, to diverge significantly from "meaningful" in the ordinary sense of the word).

Now, to return to your question: Truth and reality, in Peirce's account, are characterized in terms of a hypothetical, indefinitely long-run consensus of a hypothetical community of inquirers.<sup>22</sup> (This stress on the community is of a piece with Peirce's early Cartesian papers, where Descartes is roundly criticized in part for what Peirce calls the "pernicious"

---

<sup>20</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers* (note 9 above), 5.407 (1878). Notice that here Peirce writes in the indicative ("the opinion that *will* be agreed...") rather than in the subjunctive ("the opinion that *would* be agreed..."). See note 21 below.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.409 (1878). In the following paragraph Peirce suggests that whether we say that a diamond that was never rubbed is hard is a matter purely of the arrangement of language, of linguistic convention. Later, he changes his mind: the diamond really is hard, even if it is never tested, if it *would not* be scratched if it *were* rubbed. 5.457 (1905) (the state of things that constitutes the hardness of the diamond consists in "the truth of a general conditional proposition. ... . [I]f a substance of a certain kind should be exposed to an agency of a certain kind, a certain kind of sensible result *would* ensue ...).

individualism of his criterion of truth.)<sup>23</sup> But Peirce can, and does, acknowledge without reservation that the truth “is SO, whether you or I or anyone believes it is so or not,”<sup>24</sup> and that the real is what is independent of how you, or I, or anybody, believes it to be.<sup>25</sup> So there is nothing subjectivist or solipsistic about *Peirce’s* conception of truth.

Your question, however, seems to rest on a misinterpretation—albeit a very common misinterpretation<sup>26</sup>—specifically of *James’s* account of truth. James distinguished concrete truths (i.e., propositions, beliefs, etc. that are true) from abstract truth (i.e., the property of being true). He identified abstract truth with *verifiability* but, as one might expect from someone of his nominalist leanings, he paid more attention to concrete truths, which he described as *becoming* true, as being *made* true, when they are verified.<sup>27</sup> Of course, this account is not without its difficulties either. For one thing, one is bound to ask: what does “verifiable” mean but “can be shown to be *true*”?—when truth is the very concept supposedly being explained. But this is not the place to explore these and other problems.

The passage responsible for the interpretation of James that you have picked up is, I assume, his observation that “[t]he true ... is only the expedient in the way of our thinking”; but that it is a *misinterpretation* becomes apparent as soon as you finish the paragraph, which continues: “[e]xpeditious ... the long run and on the whole of course; for what meets expediently all the experience in sight won’t necessarily meet all farther experiences equally satisfactorily. Experience ... has ways of *boiling over*, and making us correct our present formulas.”<sup>28</sup> James is clearly *not* suggesting that whatever it is expedient for someone to believe to believe is true; he is stressing that what is good about having true beliefs is that they will hold up even over the

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 5.407 (1878).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 5.265 (1868).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 2.135 (1902).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 5.405 (1878).

<sup>26</sup> G. E. Moore, “William James’s Pragmatism,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, n.s., 8, 1907-8: 33-77; and in Moore, *Philosophical Studies* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922), 97-146. Bertrand Russell, “William James’s Conception of Truth” (1908), in Russell, *Philosophical Essays* (New York: Longman’s, Green & Co., 1910), 112-130. See also Alexei Trusov, *An Introduction to the Theory of Evidence* (Russian edition, 1960; English-language edition Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, n.d.), p.18: “according to James, the ‘true’ is only the expedient in the way of our thinking. An idea is ‘true’ so long as to believe it is profitable to our lives.”

<sup>27</sup> James, *Pragmatism* (note 11 above), p.97.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* p.106.

long run of experience. If James *had* simply identified truth and expediency then, indeed, the question would arise, “expedient for whom?”; but the idea that James’s account of truth is subjectivist or solipsistic falls away once we repudiate this misinterpretation.

In *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938) Dewey describes Peirce’s definition of truth as “[t]he opinion that is fated to be agreed by all who investigate” as “the best definition.”<sup>29</sup> But, much like James, he tends to stress particular truths over truth-as-such, and actual verification over potential verifiability. In a series of lectures given in 1911 he had presented himself as charting an intermediate course between “realist” (i.e., roughly, correspondence) and “idealist” (roughly, coherence) conceptions of truth. Like James, he speaks of our making propositions true by verifying them; unlike James, he explains that to make a proposition true is “to modify and transform it” until it is able to withstand testing. In this context he writes of truth as “correspondence,” a kind of mutual adjustment between truth and reality.<sup>30</sup> This still conveys nothing of subjectivism or solipsism; it does, however, suggest that Dewey’s conception might involve some element of idealism or constructivism—which leads us to your next question.

**SY: Dewey was the pragmatist who had the greatest influence in the outside world. Basic to everything Dewey writes about knowledge is we should think of knowing in the setting of inquiry—a kind of contextualism. But his ontological position seems questionable, apparently denying the full objectivity and independence of the material world. How should we think of Dewey’s epistemology as relating to his ontological views?**

**SH:** In *The Quest for Certainty* (1929)<sup>31</sup> Dewey offers a historical diagnosis: the philosophical theory of knowledge came to us from ancient Greece, from Plato and Aristotle. In this culture, purely intellectual reflection was the prerogative of the few, and physical work, with all its uncertainties and dangers, was relegated to slaves. The resulting denigration of the physical, the practical, the uncertain, he continues, has endured through the epistemological tradition from Plato to Descartes to his own times. The theory of knowledge, he continues, still, in his day,

---

<sup>29</sup> John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: Henry Holt, 1938), p.345 n. The quotation from Peirce is from *Collected Papers* (note 9 above), 5.407 (1878).

<sup>30</sup> John Dewey, “The Problem of Truth” (1911), in Larry M. Hickman and Thomas M. Alexander, eds., *The Essential Dewey* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), vol. 2, pp.101-130.

<sup>31</sup> John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1929).

bears the marks of its origin: in its insistence that the only real knowledge is *certain* knowledge; and in its disdain for the merely probable, relegated to the realm of opinion. The result, Dewey believes, is a theory of knowledge at odds with the true character of modern, scientific inquiry. There is an urgent need, therefore, for an epistemology that acknowledges that uncertain, fallible knowledge is a good deal better than no knowledge at all, and that gives a proper role to experiment, to interacting with the world to see what happens, changing *this* to see the effect on *that*. By contrast with the “spectator theories” of the past, Dewey proposes what one might describe as an *activist* conception of knowledge.

In this context Dewey writes that “special theories of knowledge differ enormously from each other. Their quarrels fill the air. The din thus created makes us deaf to the way they all say one thing in common. They all hold that the operation of inquiry excludes any element of practical activity.”<sup>32</sup> What he means by this is in part, I believe, that we learn about the world not simply by means of passively received input, but more importantly by active observation and experimentation (i.e., seeking out, and in the case of experiments, creating, the circumstances in which we expect to be able to make the observations we need to resolve some question); and that we must then actively devise appropriate classificatory concepts in the light of our experience, in a kind of virtuous spiral in which experience and reasoning (or as Dewey prefers to say, “intelligence”) work intimately together.

But what he meant seems to have also been, in part, that by knowing the world we somehow change it; and this, apparently, in a strong sense: it is not just that it becomes true of the world that we now know this about it, but that somehow the act of knowing an object changes it substantively. I conjecture that part of what is going on here is that Dewey is trying to persuade us out of the idea that only the physical characteristics of physical objects (or their primary qualities, as an older empiricist would have said) are really real, and into the idea that moral and aesthetic qualities are no less real.<sup>33</sup> So I am not certain whether he is really committed to a kind of idealism. But if he *did* intend to defend the idea that physical objects are somehow constructed by us, my reaction would be much like Peirce’s: “There are certain

---

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p.22.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (1925: New York: Dover, 1958), p.18.

mummified pedants who have never waked to the truth that the act of knowing a real object changes it. They are curious specimens of humanity, and ... I am one of them.”<sup>34</sup>

I would not, however, put this, as you do, in terms of the objectivity of the “material world.” For, like Peirce, I acknowledge that, besides physical (or as he would say “external”) things, events, and phenomena there are also mental (“internal”) things, events, and phenomena. The ideas before my mind as I write this, and before our readers’ minds as they read it, for example, are real; and so too is the dream I had last night—even though the events of that dream never really happened. Similarly, a work of fiction is real, and there really are fictional characters portrayed in it—even though the people whose doings it narrates never existed, and the events never really happened. The real, in other words, cannot be identified with the mind-independent,<sup>35</sup> nor can reality be limited to the material.

**SY: How do you see Quine as fitting into the evolving history of American pragmatism? Could you comment specifically on Quine’s work in logic, and his ideas about truth, ontological commitment, and analyticity?**

**SH:** C. I. Lewis is sometimes classified as the last of the classical pragmatists; and Quine, who was Lewis’s successor as Edgar Pierce Professor at Harvard, is sometimes thought of as the key link between the classical pragmatist tradition and contemporary pragmatism. But this picture of Quine’s place in pragmatism is misleading; as I see it, Lewis’s place in the pragmatist tradition is distinctly ambiguous, and Quine’s best described as tenuous.

The theory of knowledge Lewis offers in his *Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation*<sup>36</sup> is a variant of strong, infallibilist foundationalism, and so quite far from anything in the classical pragmatist tradition. But it seems possible that Lewis (who was originally to be editor of Peirce’s *Collected Papers*, but dropped out after two years) drew some ideas for his work in modal logic from Peirce’s “gamma graphs” of 1903.<sup>37</sup> Mostly, though, Lewis’s claim to be a

---

<sup>34</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers* (note 9 above), 5.555 (1903).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.406 (1878). See also Susan Haack, “Realisms and Their Rivals: Recovering Our Innocence,” *Facta Philosophica*, 4.1, March 2002: 67-88, and *Defending Science—Within Reason: Between Scientism and Cynicism* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003), pp.161-163.

<sup>36</sup> C. I. Lewis, *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation* (La Salle, IL: Open Court), 1946.

<sup>37</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers* (note 9 above), 4.510-529 (1903).

pragmatist rests on his account of the “pragmatic *a priori*”: the thesis that the choice of concepts, and hence what propositions are knowable independently of experience, is a pragmatic matter—a matter, that is, of finding the most convenient and smoothly workable conceptual framework. This understanding of “pragmatic” is, however, closer to the ordinary-language meaning of the word than to its sense in the classical pragmatist tradition.

To clarify Quine’s relation to pragmatism, let me take the topics you raise—logic, truth, ontology, and analyticity—in turn. As you are aware, Quine’s earlier contributions were largely in formal logic. And I assume you know that Peirce (who developed a unified propositional and predicate calculus a few years year after, and quite independently of, Frege),<sup>38</sup> was one of the founders of modern logic. Quine reviewed volumes 2, 3, and 4 of the *Collected Papers*,<sup>39</sup> which include some of Peirce’s most important logical innovations; but unfortunately he seems to have been so put off by the untidiness of Peirce’s logical work, the gradual, ragged steps by which he improved on George Boole’s work to arrive at a wholly new and much more powerful calculus, that he didn’t really appreciate its significance. Many years later, Putnam observed that Quine’s understanding of the history of logic would have been greatly enriched had he grasped, for example. that, while Russell had learned quantification theory from Frege, Whitehead had learned it (indirectly) from Peirce.<sup>40</sup> Shortly after that, we find Quine recognizing Peirce’s contribution: writing in 1985 that “[g]eneral quantification theory ... is what distinguishes logic’s modern estate. Charles Sanders Peirce arrived at it independently four years after Frege.”<sup>41</sup> Later, in 1989, Quine writes that “Peirce and not Frege was ... the ‘founding father’ of

---

<sup>38</sup> See Peirce, “On the Algebra of Logic” (1880), and “The Logic of Relatives” (1883), in *Collected Papers* (note 9 above) 3.154-251 and 3.328-58; and Peirce’s student, O. H. Mitchell, “On a New Algebra of Logic,” in *Studies in Logic by Members of the Johns Hopkins University* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1883), 72-106 (a book edited by Peirce, though his name does not appear). Gottlob Frege, *Begriffsschrift* (1879), reprinted and translated in *Conceptual Notation and Related Articles*, ed. Terrell Ward Bynum (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 101-203.

<sup>39</sup> W. V. Quine, Review of Peirce, *Collected Papers*, vol. 2, *Isis*, 19, 1933: 220-229; review of Peirce, *Collected Papers*, vols. 3 and 4, *Isis*, 22, 1935: 285-97 and 551-553.

<sup>40</sup> Hilary Putnam, “Peirce the Logician,” *Historia Mathematica*, 9, 1982: 290-201. In fact, it appears, Russell knew more about Peirce’s work on quantification than Putnam realized; see Irving Anellis, “Peirce Rustled, Russell Peirced: How Charles Peirce and Bertrand Russell Veiwed Each Other’s Work in Logic,” *Modern Logic*, 5.3, 1995: 270-378.

<sup>41</sup> W. V. Quine, “In the Logical Vestibule,” *Times Literary Supplement*, July 12, 1985, p.767; reprinted in W. V. Quine, *Selected Logic Papers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, enlarged edition, 1995), 251-57.

quantification.”<sup>42</sup> There is really nothing distinctive about Quine’s logical work, however, to justify classifying him as a pragmatist.

On truth, one thing is clear: Quine quite explicitly rejects Peirce’s conception. In fact—if you will allow me to interject a personal note—to the best of my recollection it was Quine’s dismissive remarks about Peirce’s definition of truth in the first chapter of *Word and Object*<sup>43</sup> that first prompted me to get Peirce’s *Collected Papers* and begin seriously studying the philosophers of the classical pragmatist tradition.

Beyond this, Quine’s understanding of truth seems to me far from clear. He expresses sympathy with Tarski’s semantic theory; but, very confusingly, seems to run Tarski’s account together with the “disquotationalist” theory.<sup>44</sup> But this can’t be right; there is unambiguous evidence that Tarski would have emphatically rejected the disquotationalist idea. Tarski treats “true” as a semantic predicate of sentences, and defines truth as satisfaction by all sequences of objects. Disquotationalism, by contrast, treats “true,” not as a predicate of sentences, but as a device of disquotation: meaning, for example, that what “‘Snow is white’ is true,” amounts to is, simply, “Snow is white.”

The confusion arises, I suppose, because there is a superficial resemblance between Tarski’s Material Adequacy Condition on definitions of truth, that any adequate definition should entail all instances of the “T-schema”: “S is true iff p” (where “S” on the left-hand side names the sentence that appears on the right-hand side of the equivalence). But Tarski insisted that a quotation-mark name of a sentence, such as “‘snow is white,’” is a new, unitary expression, of which the sentence itself is not semantically a part; and quite explicitly denies that it is possible to generalize the T-schema to obtain a definition of truth along the lines of

In this paper Quine notes that Guisepe Peano built on Peirce’s work, but that Frege’s work was conducted independently.

<sup>42</sup> Quine, “Peirce’s Logic” (1989) in *Selected Logic Papers*, enlarged ed., 1995 (note 41 above), 258-65, p.259.

<sup>43</sup> W. V. Quine, *Word and Object* (New York: Wiley, 1960), pp.23-24.

<sup>44</sup> The muddle is epitomized in *Pursuit of Truth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1992), p.80, where Quine writes:

[T]here is some underlying validity to the correspondence theory of truth, as Tarski has taught us. Instead of saying that “Snow is white” is true if and only if it is a fact that snow is white we can simply delete “it is a fact that” as vacuous, and therewith facts themselves. ... Ascription of truth just cancels the quotation marks.

“(p) (‘p’ is true iff p).” For this, according to Tarski, is just nonsense; p is a sentential variable, but “p” is the name of the 16<sup>th</sup> letter of the English alphabet.<sup>45</sup> In any case, whether or not, in the end, it is possible to make any coherent sense of Quine’s observations about truth, I think it is abundantly clear that there is nothing particularly pragmatist about them.

We can understand Quine’s views on ontology by reference to two of his best-known philosophical slogans: “to be is to be the value of a variable” (his criterion of ontological commitment) and “no entity without identity” (his extensionalist stance).<sup>46</sup> The first of these makes no substantive ontological claims; it just indicates how to determine the kind of entities to the existence of which a theory is committed. Spelled out more fully, what it says is that a theory is committed to the existence of whatever entities are required as values of variables bound by an existential quantifier in statements which are logical consequences of the theory. The second principle rules out as unacceptable certain kinds of theory, those with ontological commitment to such things as meanings, propositions, or properties, which cannot be identified and individuated by extensional criteria. Spelled out more fully, what it says is that no theory should be accepted that is committed to the existence of a type of entity for which no satisfactory criteria of identity can be given; and what Quine means by “satisfactory” here is “extensional.”

Both principles are quite at odds with key ideas of Peirce’s ontology. Quine insists that “is, exists” has only one meaning;<sup>47</sup> Peirce distinguished existence (the mode of being of particulars) from reality (the mode of being of generals).<sup>48</sup> One consequence of Quine’s criterion of ontological commitment is that, if he acknowledged them, he would have to

---

<sup>45</sup> Alfred Tarski, “The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages” (1931), in Tarski, *Logic, Semantics, and Metamathematics*, ed. J. H. Woodger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 152-278, p.159. It is worthy of note that at once time Quine agreed with Tarski – the enclosed expression is not semantically a part of a quotation-mark name; see W. V. Quine, *Mathematical Logic* (1940; New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962), p.26. See also Susan Haack, “Mentioning Expressions,” *Logique et Analyse*, 17, 1974: 277-294.

<sup>46</sup> W. V. Quine, “On What There Is” (1948), in Quine, *From a Logical Point of View* (1953; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Harper Torchbooks, 1961) 1-19; see also Susan Haack, *Philosophy of Logics* (note 4 above), pp.43-49.

<sup>47</sup> W. V. Quine, “Logic and the Reification of Universals” (1947), in *From a Logical Point of View* (note 46 above), 102-129, p.105. See also Haack, *Philosophy of Logics* (note 4 above), p.48.

<sup>48</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers* (note 9 above), 6.549 (c.1901) (“existence ... is a special mode of reality”); and 6.495 (c.1906) (“I myself always use *exist* in its strict sense of ‘react with the other like things in the environment.’ ... I define the *real* as that which holds its characters on such a tenure that it makes not the slightest difference what any man or men may have *thought* them to be .... but the real thing’s characters will remain untouched.”)

construe properties, propositions, possibilities, etc, as abstract particulars, and not, as Peirce would have said, as real generals.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, as Peirce's realism matured, he acknowledged that there are not only real kinds and laws, but also real possibilities, including real unactualized possibilities.<sup>50</sup>

As I noted earlier, James's approach could fairly be described as nominalist in tendency; that's why he seems more interested in specific, particular truths than in truth-as-such, the property of being true. But, after an early paper written jointly with Nelson Goodman<sup>51</sup>—a kind of nominalist manifesto—Quine seems to have backed away from a nominalist repudiation of abstract objects generally to an extensionalist tolerance for those abstract objects, such as numbers, that can be satisfactorily individuated. So there is nothing particularly pragmatist about Quine's ontological ideas, either.

Still, one might think of Quine's repudiation of the analytic/synthetic distinction as an expression of pragmatism: after all, his campaign against "untenable dualisms" is one of Dewey's most famous pragmatist themes (and Peirce had written that Kant's understanding of "explicatory," that is, analytic, propositions is very narrow, "owing to his knowing nothing of the logic of relatives").<sup>52</sup> But when I compare Quine's critique of the analytic/synthetic distinction with the critique his colleague Morton G. White had published shortly before in "The Analytic and the Synthetic: An Untenable Dualism,"<sup>53</sup> White's seems much closer to the spirit of classical pragmatism than Quine's; in fact, while the title of White's paper evokes a theme from Dewey, the title of Quine's reveals his preoccupation with a different tradition altogether, the logical empiricist.

---

<sup>49</sup> See Susan Haack, "Extreme Scholastic Realism: Its Relevance to Philosophy of Science Today," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, XXVIII.1, 1992: 19-50.

<sup>50</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers* (note 9 above), 6.486 (1908) ("there are ... Real habits (which really *would* produce effects, under circumstances that may not happen to get actualized, and are thus Real generals"); and 8.216 (1910) ("the *will be's*, the actually is's, and the *have beens* are not the sum of the reals. There are besides *would be's* and *can be's* that are real").

<sup>51</sup> W. V. Quine and Nelson Goodman, "Steps Towards a Constructive Nominalism," *Journal of Symbolic Logic*, 12, 1947: 105-122.

<sup>52</sup> Peirce, C. S., *The New Elements of Mathematics*, ed. Carolyn Eisele (the Hague: Mouton, and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1976), vol. IV, p.84.

<sup>53</sup> Morton G. White, "The Analytic and the Synthetic: An Untenable Dualism," in Sidney Hook, ed., *John Dewey: Philosopher of Science and Freedom* (New York: Dial Press, 1930), 316-30.

In the concluding paragraph of “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” Quine writes:

Carnap, Lewis, and others take a pragmatic stand on the question of choosing between language forms ...; but their pragmatism leaves off at the imagined boundary between the analytic and the synthetic. In repudiating such a boundary, I espouse a more thorough pragmatism.<sup>54</sup>

The first thing to notice about this passage is that, while Lewis has some (fairly weak) claim to having inherited something from the pragmatist tradition, Carnap has none.<sup>55</sup> And all Quine is saying here is, in effect, that he sees an element of choice, of convention, in all our theory-choice; and there is really nothing genuinely pragmatist, in the sense that concerns us, about this.

Straying a little from your question, I will add that the first half of Quine’s “Natural Kinds”<sup>56</sup> is in some ways reminiscent of Peirce’s conception of real “generals,” and that his “Epistemology Naturalized”<sup>57</sup> might also be thought of as having some affinity with pragmatism. But in the second half of “Natural Kinds” Quine seems to take back most of what he had said in the first; and on the subject of naturalism, Sidney Hook’s earlier “Naturalism and First Principles”<sup>58</sup> seems to me sounder, less ambiguous, and much more clearly pragmatist in spirit. Indeed, as I see it Hook has a stronger claim than Quine to be thought of as a key transitional figure in the pragmatist line of descent.

**SY: In your 2003 interview with Chen Bo, you criticized Richard Rorty’s new pragmatism, which you see as far removed from the old pragmatist tradition. Rorty**

---

<sup>54</sup> W. V. Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” (1952), in *From a Logical Point of View* (note 46 above), 20-46, p.46.

<sup>55</sup> There is a further complication with Quine’s allusion to Carnap. Quine identifies Carnap’s distinction of internal vs. external questions with the analytic/synthetic distinction; but this is clearly a mistake. See Rudolf Carnap, “Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology,” *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 4, 1950: 20-40; reprinted in Carnap, *Meaning and Necessity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1956), 205-221. W. V. Quine, “On Carnap’s views on Ontology,” *Philosophical Studies*, 2, 1951: 65-72; reprinted in Quine, *Ways of Paradox* (New York: Random House, 1966), 126-134. Susan Haack, “Some Preliminaries to Ontology,” *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, 5, 1976: 457-474.

<sup>56</sup> W. V. Quine, “Natural Kinds,” in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 114-138.

<sup>57</sup> W. V. Quine, “Epistemology Naturalized,” in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (note 56 above), 69-90.

<sup>58</sup> Sidney Hook, “Naturalism and First Principles,” in Hook, ed., *American Philosophers at Work* (New York: Criterion Books, 1936), 236-68.

**presents himself as following Dewey and, like Dewey, connecting pragmatism and democracy; but he also repudiates the projects of metaphysics and epistemology, traditionally seen as at the very heart of philosophy. Do you think that Rorty’s “vulgar pragmatism” (as you call it) is a consequence of inner difficulties within pragmatism itself, that there is some lack in pragmatism that was bound, eventually, to lead to such radical, quasi-postmodernist conclusions? Or do you think that Rorty’s radical conclusions stem, not from pragmatism itself, but from the ways in which James’s and Dewey’s variants diverged from Peirce’s pragmatism?**

**SH:** The short answer to your question here is: neither of the above. Vulgar pragmatism is *neither* the inevitable result of some inner flaw in pragmatism as such, *nor* the inevitable result of the ways James’s and Dewey’s versions of pragmatism diverge from Peirce’s. It was, rather, Rorty’s own (disastrous) invention—dressed up with tendentious efforts to tie it to the classical pragmatist tradition. Because pragmatism is the only philosophical tradition, thus far, native to the United States, the word “pragmatism” has real resonance for many Americans: resonance which Rorty exploited, very shrewdly, in the “marketing” of his ideas. But now it is time to get down to details.

I will start with Rorty’s critique of the legitimacy of the traditional projects of epistemology,<sup>59</sup> since it was here that my engagement with Rorty’s (anti-)philosophy really began in earnest. As I argued in *Evidence and Inquiry*,<sup>60</sup> this critique is a mass of confusions. It relies on systematic equivocations on the several meanings of “foundationalism”—which may refer (i) to a family of theories of epistemic justification; (ii) to the idea that epistemology is an *a priori* enterprise underpinning the legitimacy of scientific inquiry; or (iii) to the idea that standards of stronger and weaker evidence are objective, rooted in the relation of justification and truth—to create the illusion that arguments against foundationalism in the first or second of these senses are also arguments against foundationalism in the third sense, the only sense relevant to the legitimacy of epistemology.<sup>61</sup> And in the end Rorty’s only argument against foundationalism in the third, relevant sense turns out to rest on a grossly false dichotomy: *either*

---

<sup>59</sup> Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 1989.

<sup>60</sup> See Susan Haack, “Vulgar Pragmatism: An Unedifying Prospect,” chapter 9 of *Evidence and Inquiry* (note 5 above).

<sup>61</sup> In *Evidence and Inquiry* (note 5 above), chapter 9, I labeled these, respectively, foundationalism, *foundationalism*, and FOUNDATIONALISM.

truth is correspondence to Things in Themselves, *or else* it is nothing more than “what you can defend against all conversational objections.”

Rorty hopes that the unattractiveness of the first option will be sufficient to persuade readers to adopt the second. But, to repeat, the dichotomy on which this relies is stunningly false—especially stunning coming from someone like Rorty, who likes to present himself as a follower of Dewey; these are not the only options. It should not escape notice that Rorty’s “conversational” account of truth in effect strips Peirce’s definition—which appeals to the hypothetical consensus of the community of inquirers at the end of inquiry, the Final Opinion that could withstand all experiential evidence and the fullest logical scrutiny—of everything that connects it to the world; so that all that remains in Rorty’s *ersatz* conception of truth is here-and-now agreement. It should not escape notice, either, that Dewey’s response to what he saw as the deficiencies of the “spectator theory of knowledge” was not to abandon epistemology, but to develop a new, thoroughly fallibilist, activist approach. Rorty’s “pragmatism” is indeed very far from Peirce’s; but it is also far from Dewey’s<sup>62</sup>—and, I would say, from James’s too.

One of the things that distinguished classical pragmatism from the earlier positivism of Auguste Comte was, precisely, that while Comtean positivism repudiated all metaphysics as meaningless, pragmatism proposed to reform and renew it:<sup>63</sup> think of Peirce’s agapism and tychism in cosmology, or his objective idealism in philosophy of mind;<sup>64</sup> of James’s “pluralistic universe” and his radical empiricism; of Dewey’s efforts to articulate the relation of experience and nature. But Rorty dismisses the traditional metaphysical projects, and assures us that he has no more time for the idea of “the way the world is”<sup>65</sup> than he has the idea of objective truth.

---

<sup>62</sup> In a symposium on Rorty’s *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1982), responding to critics well versed in Dewey’s work, Rorty acknowledged that “practically everyone in this room has read more James and Dewey than I have, and read them more recently,” and that “[p]erhaps it would have been better not to taken Dewey’s name, or the term ‘pragmatism,’ in vain.” Richard Rorty, “Comments on [Ralph] Sleeper and [Abraham] Edel,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, XXI.1. 1985: 39-48, p.39. (I believe this symposium was held at the annual meeting of the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy, though the published version does not say so.)

<sup>63</sup> See Susan Haack, “The Legitimacy of Metaphysics: Kant’s Legacy to Peirce, and Peirce’s to Philosophy Today,” *Polish Journal of Philosophy*, 1, 2007: 29-43.

<sup>64</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers* (note 9 above), 6.287-317 (1893) (on agapism); 6.47-65 (1892) (on tychism); 6.24-25 (1894) (on objective idealism).

<sup>65</sup> Richard Rorty, “The World Well Lost” (1972), in Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (note 62 above), 3-18.

On this last point, perhaps you will again allow me a personal anecdote. Once, at a conference in Brazil, I found myself obliged to make polite small talk with Rorty while we waited for the lecture room in which we were both to speak to open. Thinking the topic suitably neutral, I asked whether his wife had come with him on this trip. No, Rorty replied, she hadn't; they were bird-watchers, he continued, and Mary only accompanied him when he was going to places where there were birds they had never seen before. I was on the point of exploding: "but, look, you say you don't believe in 'the way the world is'; so what could you possibly *mean* by 'places where there are birds we have never seen before'?" But luckily, our conversation was interrupted by a pure black hummingbird flying by, and we were able to chat politely about that instead.

Now let me turn to the question about philosophy and democracy, where it might seem that Rorty really is quite close to Dewey. But once again, I would say, the appearance of agreement is quite misleading. Yes, Dewey associated philosophy and democracy; and yes, there are affinities between the fallibilism of his epistemology and the gradualism of his political philosophy, and between the social aspects of his epistemology and democracy specifically. But there is really all the difference in the world between Dewey's social philosophy and Rorty's. For Dewey is very clear that if we are to improve society we need to know what the present situation is, what different situation would be preferable, and what means might get us from here to there; while Rorty, who denies that there are any objective epistemological standards, and even that there is such a thing as the way the world is, can acknowledge none of this. If it is intended seriously, Rorty's anti-philosophical stance leaves his rhetoric about democracy entirely hollow.

**SY: Professor Haack, what is your assessment of the prospects for the development of pragmatism? Would you take the pessimistic stance that traditional pragmatism is nearing extinction? Or do you harbor a hope that we can rescue pragmatism from its seemingly inevitable demise? What do you see as the future of pragmatism in the United States?**

**SH:** Let me begin with some thoughts about the present situation. There is, first of all, a continuing stream of scholarship on the pragmatist tradition—mixed in quality, inevitably, but

some of it very fine indeed. There are, also, philosophers whose work shows the influence of the pragmatist tradition—among whom, besides Putnam, Rescher, and others, I would include myself. My *Evidence and Inquiry*,<sup>66</sup> for example, offers a reconstruction of epistemology steeped in the ideas of that tradition, and specifically trying to transcend the raft of false dichotomies that have bedeviled twentieth-century epistemology; my *Defending Science—Within Reason*<sup>67</sup> offers an account of the place of scientific inquiry within inquiry more generally thoroughly imbued with the spirit of Peirce’s synechism; my papers on logic in the law<sup>68</sup> and on jurisprudence<sup>69</sup> draw on Holmes and on the other old pragmatists. And there are many outside philosophy, also, whose work is influenced by pragmatism: the “institutional economists” who look to Dewey’s social philosophy, for example, the legal theorists who appeal to Peirce’s idea of abduction, the semeioticians who acknowledge Peirce as a founder of their discipline, the Deweyan literary theorists looking to the interaction of reader and text, the “symbolic interactionists” in social science who look to Mead; and so on.

I have the impression—of course, it can be *only* an impression—that, since Rorty’s death in 2007, the influence of his work in the U.S. has declined quite sharply; more so, probably, than elsewhere in the world. I also have the impression that, even before this, the neo-analytic party (which is still dominant in the profession, though intellectually close to exhaustion) had already begun to colonize and domesticate previously outlaw territory: so that we began to see blandly analytic variants of such formerly-radical projects as feminist epistemology, social epistemology—and of pragmatism. For example, Robert Brandom’s so-called “analytic pragmatism” seems to have acquired something of a following—perhaps in part because of the tangled obscurity of Brandom’s writing, which makes it a tempting target for Ph.D. students in search of a topic; and perhaps in part because of Brandom’s having won a spectacularly large grant. So far as I understand it, however, Brandom’s exercise seems better described as a neo-

---

<sup>66</sup> Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry* (note 5 above).

<sup>67</sup> Haack, *Defending Science—Within Reason* (note 35 above); see also Haack, “Not Cynicism but Synechism: Lessons from Classical Pragmatism” (2005), in Haack, *Putting Philosophy to Work* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2008), 79-94.

<sup>68</sup> Susan Haack, “On Logic in the Law: Something, but not All,” *Ratio Juris*, 20.1, 2007: 1-31.

<sup>69</sup> Susan Haack, “The Pluralistic Universe of Law: Towards a Neo-Classical Legal Pragmatism,” *Ratio Juris*, 21.4, 2008: 453-80.

later-Wittgensteinian project in the pragmatic underpinnings of language than as a descendant of the classical pragmatist tradition.<sup>70</sup>

I find myself extremely reluctant, however, to predict what the future of pragmatism will be; there are just too many contingencies involved. Who could possibly have imagined, when I was starting out in philosophy, that someone like Brian Leiter would by now have so extraordinary an influence on the profession? At that time, after all, the internet did not exist; and it would have been close to inconceivable that a single individual might set up a ranking of philosophy graduate programs that, in a decade or so, would become so influential that it could distort departments' (and even universities') priorities, skew hiring decisions, and contribute to the coarsening and corruption of the entire profession. By now, Leiter's influence is such that when he edits a book on *The Future for Philosophy*<sup>71</sup> there will no doubt be many who look to this as somehow authoritative; in fact it may, even, to some degree influence what the short-term future of philosophy *is* – a most unfortunate upshot, in my opinion.

I will, however, venture to say what I *hope* the future of pragmatism will be. The classical pragmatist tradition, in all its variousness, was an extraordinarily fruitful one; moreover, it was in some ways ahead not only of its own time, but also of ours. My hope is, simply, that there will continue to be those who learn from it and to develop the insights to be found in it in new and fruitful ways—and, of course, those who see ways to marry pragmatist insights with others from other traditions.

---

<sup>70</sup> Robert Brandom, *Between Saying and Doing: Towards an Analytic Pragmatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). I note that while in this book Brandom occasionally alludes to Dewey, none of these allusions is anchored by a specific reference; and that he makes only one casual reference to James, and none to Peirce or Mead.

<sup>71</sup> Brian Leiter, ed. *The Future for Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).