

**IMMEDIATE PERCEPTION AND DIRECT EXPERIENCE:  
IMMEDIACY, INDEXICALITY, AND INTELLIGIBILITY**

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**ABSTRACT:** Though anti-skeptical, the classical pragmatists and the later Wittgenstein do not endeavor to refute the radical skeptic in a direct manner. There is no attempt on either side to “prove” the existence of the external world, while there is considerable attention paid to our relationship to the world. For both parties, the relationship of human beings to the everyday world is taken to be not that of knowers to the known (or what is presumed to be knowable); it is rather envisioned as that of actors to an arena of action. In that context and indeed even in ones far removed yet ineradicably tied to this context (e.g., theoretical inquiry), immediate perception and direct experience play a critical and ineliminable role. But these and related expressions are anything but unambiguous. In disambiguating such expressions, the author shows how experience in particular is, at once, direct yet mediated. The appeal to immediate perception or direct experience is, however, not made by the classical pragmatists or the later Wittgenstein in order to provide an incorrigible foundation for our epistemic claims. Rather this appeal is made primarily for the sake of an *experiential* recovery of the everyday world: the point is not to secure the possibility of knowing, but rather to embrace the actuality of this world.

**Keywords:** belief *and* doubt; categories (Peirce’s); experience; immediacy and mediation; perception; practice; pragmatism; signs (linguistic and otherwise); skepticism; world

**Introduction**

Countless thinkers from pre-Socratics to postmodernists have, in one way or another, called into question the world we directly encounter in experience. The disposition or resolve to call this world into question, in a radical way, seems to be constitutive of philosophy. Simply to be a philosopher would seem to entail not only being critical but also being radically critical, not taking anything for granted. Here the word *radical* implies the necessity to call everything, including the existence of the world, into

question.<sup>1</sup> And this implies both the inherent possibility and the human ability to question everything virtually all at once.<sup>2</sup>

The classical pragmatists<sup>3</sup> and the later Wittgenstein<sup>4</sup> however call into question the intelligibility of such questioning. They have radical doubts about such radical skepticism.<sup>5</sup> In effect, the possibility of calling into question the existence of the world presumes the possibility of withdrawing into oneself and then establishing, solely

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<sup>1</sup> “The bottom of being is,” William James asserts in “The Sentiment of Rationality,” in *The Will to Believe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), “left logically opaque to us, as something we simply come upon and find, and about which (if we wish to act) we should pause and wonder as little as possible. The philosopher’s tranquility is thus in essence no other than the boor’s. They differ only as to the point at which each refuses to let further considerations upset the absoluteness of the data he assumes” (p. 64). At some point, we cannot help but acknowledge the world, though the forms of this acknowledge often mark differences that make a difference. See James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 41-42. Also see Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, II, 226; also *On Certainty*, #343. See Anna Boncompagni on hinge propositions.

<sup>2</sup> As Susan Haack astutely observes in “Descartes, Peirce, and the Cognitive Community,” in *The Relevance of Peirce*, edited by Eugene Freeman (La Salle, IL: Monist Library of Philosophy, 1983), Peirce and others are not entirely fair to Descartes when they contend that he tries, *in a single stroke*, to call everything into question. In my judgment, this criticism is itself just.

<sup>3</sup> By this expression, I mean Charles S. Peirce, William James, John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, and to a less extent C. I. Lewis.

<sup>4</sup> Those interpreters associated with the “new” Wittgenstein are disposed to stress the continuity between the early and later phase of his philosophical life. See Crary and Read 2000. My focus on the later Wittgenstein should not be taken to run counter to this hermeneutic turn on the part of very gifted scholars. Even so, the affinity between this enigmatic figure and the classical pragmatists is more evident in reference to his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) and *On Certainty* (1969) than *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922).

<sup>5</sup> See, however, Peirce on the art of doubting, “one which has to be acquired with difficulty (6.498). He goes so far as to claim that the pragmatist’s “genuine [rather than sham or make-believe] doubts will go much further than those of any Cartesian” (*ibid.*). In accord with established practice, I am citing *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* (1931-58) by identifying the volume and, then, the paragraph number (so, 6.498 refers to volume 6 of *The Collected Papers*, paragraph #6.498).

within the sanctuary of one's innermost self, the epistemic authority to use such words as *I*, *think*, and *doubt* in an intelligible manner. Even radical skeptics are precluded from doubting the relatively stable meaning of the words on which the articulation of their doubts is dependent. For the intelligibility of their doubts depends on the meaning of their words. If only in relation to itself at a later moment, the skeptic is ineluctably an implicated member of a linguistic community (the *reflexive* community<sup>6</sup> of earlier and later selves<sup>7</sup> is, in however circumscribed a form, a human community). The meaning of our words, not least of all that of *doubt*, stretches indefinitely across a span of time; moreover, it, in principle, encompasses an indefinite number of other possible meanings (in other words, it can never be invincibly private). A philosophical meditation in the manner conducted by Descartes cannot avoid being a dialogue of the self with itself and, thus, a process extended across a span of time. Accordingly, the minimal conditions of intelligibility require that the seemingly solitary *cogito* is, however well disguised, a dialogical subject. The possibility of saying anything meaningful is destroyed by severing meaning from community and history. The solitary self who is imprisoned in the present moment is deprived of using the sound or inscription *doubt* meaningfully. The "word"

*doubt* so used is, in truth, a sound or shape without meaning. Its *use* implicates us in a community no less open-ended than the history to which this use ties us.

Linguistic agency is just that – a distinctive form of human agency – and, as such, is itself intelligible only in the context of our practices. The limits of intelligibility are, accordingly, defined by the range of our practices and the experiences available through our engagement in those practices. C. S. Peirce makes this point emphatically when he writes: "I hold ... that man is so completely hemmed in by the bounds of his possible practical experience, his mind is so restricted to being an instrument of his needs, that he cannot, in the least, *mean* anything that transcends those limits" (5.536). But the meaning of this claim regarding the limits of meaningfulness is likely to be misinterpreted. This becomes readily apparent when we juxtapose the passage just quoted with one written around the same time: "if pragmatism is the doctrine that every conception is a conception of conceivable practical effects, it makes conception reach far beyond the practical" (5.196) or what we so often reductively conceive as "the practical." Pragmatism "allows [and, indeed, encourages] any flight of imagination, provided this imagination ultimately alights upon a possible practical effect" (*ibid.*). Hence, it is crucial to see that Peirce attaches an expansive, rich sense to the word *practical*, as used in such expressions as "conceivable practical effects" or consequences. In a narrow sense, however, the practical sharply contrasts with the theoretical; in the expansive sense, it encompasses the full array of our theoretical practices.<sup>8</sup> Theory is itself a form of practice but, even in its loftiest aspirations (e.g., framing a theory of the cosmos), it must ultimately fall back on the most rudimentary practices, such as immediate perception or direct experience.<sup>9</sup> Above all, what we must appreciate is

<sup>6</sup> In *Toward a General Theory of Human Judgement* (NY: Dover Publications, 1979), Justus Buchler helpfully distinguishes between the reflexive community from community in its more commonplace sense, the social community (a group of individuals rather than a relationship of the individual self to itself). "The individual in himself constitutes," Buchler insists, "a community, the reflexive or proceptive community. Logically and generically, the reflexive community presupposes a social community. The soul converses with itself ... but it also articulates itself, ears with itself, consoles itself, and fools itself. It is a community not just of two roles but of at least two roles" (p. 39). Cf. Peirce, 5.421 ("a person is not absolutely an individual," i.e., an *individuum*, but in truth an indefinitely divisible being, there being no determinate limits to the forms or degree of self-division).

<sup>7</sup> As Peirce notes, "even in solitary meditation every judgment is an effort [by the present self] to press home, upon the self of the immediate future and of the general future, some truth. It is a genuine assertion ... and solitary dialectic is still of the nature of dialogue" (5.546; see, e.g., also 4.6).

<sup>8</sup> As most of us do, Peirce used the word *practical* in both its narrow and expansive sense. Hence, pains must be taken to ascertain in any given context how he is using this word.

<sup>9</sup> We learn how to observe and to make judgments on the basis of our observations. While we do not learn this by rules, we do acquire a repertoire of competences, for the most part, in the company, and under the guidance,

that Peirce<sup>10</sup> in his insistence upon humans being “hemmed in by the bounds of their possible practical experience” does not foreclose possibilities of what we might yet mean by some word or other sign, but only ties those possibilities to our practices.

#### The “Practical” Limits of Even Theoretical intelligibility

But does not this unduly restrict the range of meaning or intelligibility? And, returning to a point made above, could not the language in which the dialogue of the self with itself is carried on conceivably be the invention of a solitary self or is it necessarily an inheritance from others? To the readers of this journal, the answers to these questions by the later Wittgenstein and the classical pragmatists are well known. There are no invincibly private languages. So, too, there are no completely “abstract” meanings, if we mean by this expression the use of signs having no bearing upon how we might comport ourselves in the world. As Peirce puts it, “there is no distinction of meaning so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference of practice” (5.400). It would be hard to exaggerate the importance of the adjective *possible*: meaning is inextricably tied to possible differences in one or another of our shared practices. This does not make meaning crudely practical, but it does make meaning necessarily practical in a sophisticated sense and practically possible in the unpredictable differences discoverable by imaginative practitioners.

Even as theorists and philosophers, we are agents in the world, a world of other human beings and of natural entanglements. For Wittgenstein and the pragmatists, the self can no more extricate itself from other selves than s/he can extricate herself from the world. But their drive to call into question our capacity to call the world into question also draws heavily upon an unabashed commitment to *immediate experience* and to kindred phenomena (e.g.,

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of elders. Wittgenstein thus refers to “*die Praxis des empirischen Urteilens*” (On Certainty, #140).

<sup>10</sup> I am taking Peirce here to be representative, not only of other such pragmatists as William James and John Dewey but also a pronounced tendency in the later Wittgenstein.

direct experience or immediate perception). This brings us to the center of our concern, the topic to which this number of this journal is devoted: immediacy and experience between the pragmatists and Wittgenstein. More precisely, my focal concern is our immediate perception or direct experience of the everyday world, a world so often in the history of philosophy called into question. Are the classical pragmatists and the later Wittgenstein naïve or uncritical or dogmatic in refusing either to call this world into question or to prove its existence?

For some purposes, it might be important to try to get behind even the most forceful disclosures of immediate perception or direct experience. But in this very endeavor we cannot avoid falling back on such perception or experience. In one context a theorist, in the role of an experimental psychologist, might argue that what we ordinarily take to be immediate perception is an unconscious inference and, as an inference, is a mediated cognition. But this same theorist,<sup>11</sup> in the context of phenomenology, might insist upon painstaking attention to the salient features of whatever we directly observe, without speculating about the processes by which the immediate object of our direct awareness might have become available to us. The world of our experience cannot be gainsaid, though it unquestionably can be questioned in myriad and deep-cutting ways. For such questioning to be intelligible, it however must grant immediate perception and direct experience their full weight (i.e., the weight they have in our practices).

Since these are hardly equivalent terms or expressions, distinctions are critical. Since the words *immediate* and *direct* are not necessarily synonyms,<sup>12</sup> disambiguation is

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<sup>11</sup> Of course, Peirce is just such a theorist. He is not contradicting himself when, in the context of experimental psychology, he defines perception as unconscious inference and, in the context of phenomenology and indeed also that of critical commonsensism, he defends what he calls the doctrine of immediate perception.

<sup>12</sup> Of course, *immediate* and *direct* are often used synonymously. But, in some contexts at least, this makes for confusion. Part of my task in this paper is to suggest how we might avoid such confusion.

essential. This distinction is especially pivotal, since (to use the language of Peirce's categories<sup>13</sup>) the *secondness*<sup>14</sup> of perception or experience is ordinarily interwoven with thirdness<sup>15</sup> (or intelligibility). Observation and experience are affairs in which secondness is predominant, though thirdness is hardly absent. In perception or experience, we encounter what is irreducibly other than us: without regard necessarily for our desires or expectations, objects and events forcefully assert themselves and, therein, we are confronted with their secondness. Perceived objects and experienced events strike us with a force and insistence typically greater than (and in other respects different from) the manner in which imagined or dreamt objects and events strike us. But they are, to some extent, inherently intelligible and therein we are faced with their thirdness. In the contexts of our practices, identification, description, and often even explanation are unproblematic. In such contexts, innumerable objects and events are immediately intelligible in the sense that we are able spontaneously, effortlessly, and (for our purposes) effectively to make sense of them.

<sup>13</sup> For a brief accessible, accurate, and illuminating account of these categories, see Richard J. Bernstein's *Praxis and Action* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 177-83, also T. L. Short's *Peirce's Theory of Signs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), Chapter 3. "There is," Bernstein stresses, "a descriptive, empirical, pragmatism temper manifested in Peirce's use of the categories" (179). While much ink has been spilled and much ingenuity expended to show how Peirce, inspired by the example of Kant, tried to offer a transcendental deduction of his three categories, Bernstein is sage to suggest, the "'proof' or, more accurately, the adequacy of the categories is to be found in the ways in which Peirce uses them to illuminate fundamental similarities and differences in everything we encounter" (ibid.). They seem quite apt for identifying distinct and seemingly incompatible facets of perception and experience.

<sup>14</sup> Our experience of what Peirce calls *secondness* is that of opposition, of being energetically and forcefully opposed, "a sense of resisting as much as being acted upon" (5.45) (there being no effort without resistance, no resistance without effort). It designates "not mere twoness but active oppugnancy" (8.291; emphasis omitted). It calls attention to "that which 'jabs you perpetually in the ribs'" (6.95).

<sup>15</sup> While the category of secondness is that of brute opposition, the category of thirdness is that of indefinite or boundless mediation. To complete the picture, the category of firstness is that of qualitative immediacy.

To press doubt as far as we can intelligibly extend it, there will always be some immediately intelligible objects and events, including the meanings of our words and the force of our utterances. "My *life* consists," Wittgenstein reminds us in *On Certainty*, "in my being content to accept many things" (#344). The possibility of rejecting some things depends upon having accepted and continuing to accept countless other things, just as the "game of doubting itself presupposes certainty" (*OC*, #115). This is however not transcendent certainty, but the everyday certitude on which we ineluctably rely whenever we make use of our linguistic inheritance or simply exert ourselves in the rough-and-tumble world of our quotidian engagements.

My recognition that *this* is my hand is however one thing, the philosophical appeal to this everyday certainty, made for the sake of *proving* the external world, is quite another.<sup>16</sup> In general, the philosophical appeal to, say, immediate perception or direct experience is made in response to theoretical claims and, hence, needs to be understood in that context. It assumes a discursive background, frequently an extensively mediated network of claims and counterclaims. In addition, such appeals are made for a variety of reasons and even for opposite reasons (sometimes the purpose of such an appeal is to call the world into question, but sometimes it is used to prove the existence of the world being called into question by skeptics). The appeal to immediacy cannot be immediately comprehended. It can only be historically appreciated (it is a move in a language-game and, unlike many games, linguistic or otherwise, the appeal to immediacy, as such a move, needs to be understood historically<sup>17</sup>).

<sup>16</sup> See, of course, G. E. Moore, "Proof of an External World" in *Proceedings of the British Academy* (1939), also in his *Philosophical Papers* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1949), but also Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*, especially #19, 24, 32.

<sup>17</sup> There is an ambiguity here. In a sense, all moves in a language game or, more broadly, a game need to be understood historically (e.g., in a game of chess, an individual moves the remaining castle in light of previous moves and anticipation of anticipated ones). In another sense, however, the game might be taken as it stands, without reference to how it evolved from precursors into its present form. The moves within a language-game

What is, for our purpose, most striking is that the later Wittgenstein and the classical pragmatists reject the problematic of modernity, not because it is untrue but because the kind of radical doubt by which it established itself cannot be intelligibly formulated. “If you tried to doubt everything,” as Wittgenstein puts it in *On Certainty*, “you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty” (#115). The endeavor of the self to call into doubt the existence of the world and, from within itself, to recover most (if not all) of that world is a self-defeating project.

By considering this topic, we can bring into sharper focus than has yet been done the deep affinity between these pragmatists and the mature Wittgenstein but also fundamental differences. Doing so means joining these thinkers in their efforts to clarify the meaning of our practices and experience at least as much as that of our words and utterances. That is, our task is as much philosophical as it is hermeneutic. *Immediacy* and its cognates (especially its adjectival and adverbial forms) must be disambiguated, not least of all by means of painstaking attention to actual usage and pragmatic clarification in its Peircean sense. We must consider not so much how such expressions as *immediate experience* might be abstractly defined but ultimately on how these expressions are actually used,<sup>18</sup> especially outside of philosophy. Moreover,

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are intelligible only as events in a history. In some cases, the language-game itself (especially a language game in which appeals to immediacy play such a critical role) need to be understood historically. How did we get to this point? What are we doing when we are making such appeals? Why are they – or why do they feel to be – necessary? See Wittgenstein’s *Investigations*, #644. But to the Wittgensteinian question (“What does history have to do with me?”), the pragmatists would almost certainly say, “Everything, whether or not you know its inescapable significance or try to ascertain its present import.” And here is a difference of fundamental importance, though Wittgenstein’s position is perhaps more subtle and qualified than this question taken in isolation suggests.

<sup>18</sup> “One cannot guess,” Wittgenstein insists in the *Investigations*, “how a word functions. One has to look at its use and learn from that” (#340). This is harder than we appreciate: “the difficulty is to remove the prejudice which stands in the way of doing this.” This prejudice is

we must identify how these expressions function in our practices (what roles they play, what work they do). This involves also identifying the habits woven into the very meaning of these expressions (e.g., the disposition to *go on* in certain ways alongside that of going on certain judgments, without trying to get behind or underneath them). While the issues being debated by F. H. Bradley, Bertrand Russell, G. E. Moore, and earlier historical figures (most notably, René Descartes and Immanuel Kant) – that is, by the figures against whom the pragmatists and Wittgenstein were reacting – appear to be abstruse, what is at stake for the pragmatists and Wittgenstein is the defense of nothing less than an orientation toward the world. The world in question is the everyday world of human experience. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that, despite appearances, these authors are not directly engaged in epistemological disputes. They are truly trying to change the conversation, to treat traditional topics in an innovative manner but also to consider hitherto ignored matters. Yet it is all too easy to miss what they are doing, all too common to position them squarely within one or another of the familiar polemics of academic philosophy. In fact, they are in overlapping ways engaged in a polemic against such philosophy. This is evident in their treatment of a number of topics, not least of all their stance toward immediacy.

As a result of the disputes to which I have alluded, our relationship to our world becomes attenuated to the point of being conceivably severed, if not at least temporarily dissolved. In its most extreme form, the act of calling into question the world of our experience takes as unproblematic only the immediate data of one’s own solitary consciousness and, then, only those data in the self-luminous immediacy of the present moment,<sup>19</sup> judging all

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not stupid. The more intelligent we are, the more likely we are to fall prey to it.

<sup>19</sup> Adding this reference to time (to the luminosity of the present) might seem redundant, i.e., it might seem already implied in the expression “the immediate data of one’s own solitary consciousness,” but this is part of what is at issue. For Peirce, James, and Dewey, the present is not an instant (a temporal atom in principle separable from past and future) but a stretch of time. We immediately perceive and experience continuity:

else to be either invincibly unknowable or (at best) problematically inferable.<sup>20</sup> In such instances, the appeal to immediacy renders dubitable or distant what commonsensically seems beyond doubt, what could not be any closer to hand. Such appeals can however be made for the sake of restoring, recovering, or even “proving” what most people never question, an enveloping world frequently at odds with human desires. Part of my purpose in this paper is to highlight how philosophical appeals to immediacy serve a variety of intellectual aims, including opposite goals. For the moment, however, let us focus on those made for the sake of rendering problematic the world in its totality.

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time in its immediacy is not a self-contained present but a self-differentiating continuum in which any one of the dimensions of time mediates between the other two (while the present obviously mediates between the past and the future, the past at least in the form of memory and, to a greater extent, habits mediates between the present and the future, just as the future in the form of imagination and the release of impulses capable of altering the vectors of habituation mediates between the past and the present). We are not located in the present in such a way that both that *from* which we have moved and that *toward* which we are moving are less real than that *through* which we are now moving. In our experience, past, present, and future are inherently inseparable, though distinguishable in myriad ways. See especially Dewey’s “Events and the Future” (LW 2, 62-68). “No becoming can be perceived or thought of,” he insists in this important essay, “except as out of something into something, and this involves a series of transitions which, taken distributively, belong both to the ‘out-of’ and the ‘into,’ or form a ‘through.’ The present has thus nothing privileged about it; it is as legitimate to speak of the present century or the present geological age as of the present ‘moment’ [or ‘instant’]. The present is defined in relation to an ‘out-of’ and by a future or ‘into,’ as truly is the past by the present” (LW 2, 66). See also MW 10, 9-10.

<sup>20</sup> Though there are numerous examples of philosophers starting with the immediate and allegedly indubitable data of present, solitary consciousness. the opening chapters of George Santayana’s *Skepticism and Animal Faith* provide an especially good example of such methodic skepticism.

Such thinkers have in effect *derealized* this world,<sup>21</sup> that is, stripped it of ultimate significance by divesting it of its full or primordial ontological status.<sup>22</sup> From their perspective, the actual world of our immediate experience is ontologically derivative and, as a consequence, largely (if not wholly) illusory. Nature appears *to us* adorned in qualities, but (in truth, as least as alleged by the thinkers in question) it is *in itself* utterly devoid of them. Accordingly, a chasm opens between the world as it appears to us and the world as it really is in itself. As A. N. Whitehead puts it in *Science and the Modern World*, sensations are, on the account offered by Galileo, Descartes, and their multitudinous progeny, “qualities of the mind alone.”

These sensations are projected by the mind so as to clothe bodies in external nature. Thus, the bodies are perceived with qualities which in fact are purely the offspring of the mind. Thus nature gets credit which should in truth be reserved for ourselves: the rose for its scent: the nightingale for his song: and the sun for his radiance. ... Nature [in itself] is a dull affair, soundless, scentless, colourless, merely the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly. (54)

For the most part, however, these thinkers have questioned the world only to reaffirm it,<sup>23</sup> though their reaffirmations have rarely extended to a full recovery of the qualitative

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<sup>21</sup> “In a world where both the terms [or *relata*] and their distinctions [and relationships] are affairs of experience, conjunctions that are experienced must be,” William James insists, “at least as real as anything else. They will be absolutely ‘real’ conjunctions, if we have no transphenomenal [or trans-experiential] absolute ready, to *derealize* the whole experienced world by, at a stroke” (MT, 230; emphasis added).

<sup>22</sup> This is an example of what Whitehead calls “the fallacy of misplaced concreteness.” “No alternative system of organizing the pursuit of scientific truth has been suggested. It is not only reigning, but it is without rival” (54). “And yet – it is quite unbelievable. This conception of the universe is surely framed in terms of high abstractions, and the paradox arises only because we have mistaken our abstractions for concrete realities” (54-55).

<sup>23</sup> Of the “doubts and negations” pressed by “Saint Michel de Montaigne,” R. W. Emerson means “honestly by them, – that justice shall be done to their terrors. I shall not take Sunday objections, made up on purpose to be put down. I shall take the worst I can find, whether I can dispose of them or they of me” (“Montaigne; Or, the Skeptic,” 328).

world of our immediate experience<sup>24</sup> (Descartes' Sixth Meditation is emblematic of this tendency). They tend to admit only a greatly reduced or austere world (e.g., one in which bodies possessing mass, shape, and position are objectively real, whereas qualities are not). In their judgment, the doctrine of direct realism and that of immediate perception are instances of naïve realism. Being naïve, they take them to be untenable. This is the inevitable result of granting theoretical knowers ultimate authority. The world posited by such knowers is taken by them and countless others to be the really real, while the one directly encountered in our experience is judged to be in some fundamental ways subjective or illusory. But if the classical pragmatists and later Wittgenstein are correct, the primordial relationship between human beings and the experiential world in which they are inextricably entangled is not that of knower to known (especially not that of the theoretical knower to the abstracted domain of contemporary physics). It is rather the relationship of an agent to the world as an arena of action. We inhabit and indeed incorporate the world (it is as much in us as we are in it).

In the later Wittgenstein's writings, the appeal to everyday language is bound up with his commitment to a recovery of our everyday world. This appeal takes our linguistic utterances themselves to be bound up with the circumpressure of the world, as registered indexically in "the circumpressure of experience itself."<sup>25</sup> Such experiential pressure is never more acutely felt than when it results from our energetic exertions to address practical

exigencies. In the writings of the classical pragmatists, the insistence upon human *experience* in its varied forms is bound up with their commitment to the recovery of just this world. Just as Wittgenstein's notion of language-games includes action, so the pragmatist conception of experience encompasses language.

We appear to be confronted with the choice of turning our backs on nature, as it is disclosed in our immediate experience,<sup>26</sup> or on science, as it claims for itself the ultimate authority to identify the most fundamental features of the real world. The world as disclosed in our immediate experience thus stands in marked contrast to the world as revealed in what seems to be the most reliable source of ontological insight (certain highly successful branches of natural science, above all, theoretical physics). In truth, no choice is necessary, at least if natural science is not allowed to usurp the primordial world of our immediate experience.<sup>27</sup>

From Wittgenstein's perspectives, nothing warrants calling into question the reality of the everyday world. The attempt to sketch a metaphysics of this world however undermines the very world such a sketch tries to recover or save. So, too, the very possibility of providing a proof of this world is in his judgment ruled out. Things speak adequately and, indeed, eloquently, for themselves. They do so however in a practical rather than philosophical or theoretical idiom: the rough-and-tumble give-and-take of everyday action is effect a dialogue in which objects and events have their say.<sup>28</sup> There is consequently no exigency

<sup>24</sup> See especially Dewey's "Affective Thought" (LW 2, 104-110), "Qualitative Thought" (LW 5, 243-62), "Peirce's Theory of Quality" (LW 11, 86-94), and of course *Art as Experience* (LW 10).

<sup>25</sup> In *The Meaning of Truth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), James writes: "The only *real* guarantee we have against licentious thinking is the circumpressure of experience itself, which gets us sick of concrete errors, whether they be a trans-empirical reality or not" (p. 213). We however instinctively take the circumpressure of our experience to be *indicative* of the pressure of the world itself, however modified this pressure might be by the constitution and state of a given human organism.

<sup>26</sup> Our immediate experience of distinct colors plays an important role in how Wittgenstein thinks through issues of immediacy. On this occasion, however, I can only note this connection.

<sup>27</sup> "The world as we experience it is," Dewey stresses, "a real world [we might interject: *the* real world]. But it is not in its primary phases a world to be known, a world that is understood, and is intellectually coherent and secure" (LW 4, 235). It is rather a world in which we act and undergo the consequences of our actions. Experiences are primarily *had*, not known.

<sup>28</sup> Dewey appropriates for his purpose a pun hit upon by the classicist Basil Gildersleeve: "Object is that which objects, that to which frustration is due" (LW 1, 184). The object in the sense of that which has the power to object, to thwart our purpose or oppose our efforts, is

to speak in their behalf, especially when this is done in the form of an *apologia*.

We are in direct yet mediated contact with reality, both the “internal” reality of our own minds and the “external” reality of what is distinct from those minds. Though often used as synonyms, *immediate* and *direct* can be distinguished. Doing so is a delicate task, since the result can readily be made to appear to be a distinction without a difference.<sup>29</sup> Part of the problem here is that our understanding of mediation tends to seduce us into supposing any mediated relationship is one in which a wedge is driven between the terms being mediated (say, human beings and the everyday world in which they are ineluctably entangled). Certain instances of mediation certainly do involve gross distortions (e.g., the manner in which various forms of deeply rooted prejudices occlude the perception of, say, a woman or a person of color).

While experience is a phenomenon in which secondness is predominant, it is also a phenomenon in which firstness and thirdness are discernible. Indeed, to begin to do justice to this phenomenon, we need to use Peirce’s categories to delineate at least these features of experience: qualitative immediacy, brute opposition, and boundless intelligibility. It would be better to speak not of our affective experience but the affection dimension or facet of any human experience, since this dimension is inextricably intertwined with the conative and the cognitive dimensions of experience. Firstness is in this instance inseparable from secondness and thirdness.

However complexly and variously our relationship to the world is mediated, it is *not* mediated in these ways. First, it is not mediated in the way insisted upon by

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distinguishable from the object in the sense of that which we aim at. But the senses can be practically conjoined, since our purpose might be to discover the contexts and ways in which various objects exert their distinctive or differential resistances to human effort and ingenuity.

<sup>29</sup> While we may use the same word to distinguish the two senses calling for disambiguation (by saying *immediate* in one sense and, then, in another sense), it seems to me more effective to use two different words to clarify this situation. In the case of Peirce especially, this is desirable.

representationalists. Inner or mental representations of external reality are not the original data of human cognition. They do not mediate between mind and reality. Our perceptual judgments, the most rudimentary level of human cognition, are indexical signs and, thus, instances in which there is a causal relationship between the perceiving organism and the perceived object.<sup>30</sup> Here it is instructive to recall a distinction drawn, but left undeveloped by Peirce: “We experience vicissitudes, especially. We cannot experience the vicissitude without the perception which undergoes the change; but the concept of *experience* is broader than that of *perception*, and includes much that is not, strictly speaking, an object of perception” (CP 1.336). In brief, we observe objects but experience sequences of events, especially changes of an unwelcome or disconcerting character. Experience is “the compulsion, the absolute constraint upon us to think otherwise than we have been thinking” (*ibid.*). It is a phenomenon in which secondness is predominant. But even from Peirce’s perspective, it is not illicit to speak of “perceptual *experience*,” since the object of perception constrains our consciousness of it. This relationship between the perceiver and the perceived is at once causal and semiotic. Our knowing is tethered to the world by innumerable and insistent indices (or indexical signs).

The other two senses can be dealt with much more briefly. Second, our relationship to the world is *not* mediated by language as a *tertium quid*, if interposing language in this sense implies that there is a gap to be bridged between mind and world (Sorrell). The need for such a bridge assumes the existence of a chasm. From both the Wittgensteinian and the pragmatists perspectives, however, there is no such chasm, hence no such need. We are always already entangled in a world. Third and finally, no mode of symbolization other than language is needed to bridge this alleged gap. For there is no gap here to be

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<sup>30</sup> “The index,” Peirce asserts, “asserts nothing; it only says ‘There!’ it takes hold of our eyes, as it were, and forcibly directs them to a particular object, and there it stops” (W 5, 163). By only such signs as these are we able to distinguish between the actual world and an imaginary one (W 5, 164).

bridged. We are *in* the world in such a way as to be unable intelligibly to extricate ourselves.<sup>31</sup>

“Few things are more completely hidden from my observation,” Peirce wryly notes, “than those hypothetical elements of thought which the psychologist finds reason to pronounce ‘immediate,’ in his sense” (CP 8.144). The first impressions of sense, as conceived by a variety of theorists (not just psychologist), are in fact hypothetical entities, not experienced data. “When we wake up to the fact that we are thinking beings and can exercise some control over our reasonings, we have to set out upon our intellectual travels,” Peirce adds, “from the home where we already find ourselves” (ibid.). This “home is the parish of percepts”: it is not inside our skulls but out in the open. We directly observe the external world. Of course, such direct perception does not preclude error. But the correction of our errors and indeed the very detection of them takes place at the level of judgment, not beneath that level.

While “our knowledge of the external world is fallible,”<sup>32</sup> “there is a world of difference between fallible knowledge and no knowledge” at all (CP 1.37), that is, between, Peircean fallibilism and radical skepticism. The possibility of error is ubiquitous and radical. But such fallibilism should not be mistaken for skepticism. The only way of detecting, let alone correcting, our mistakes is by a critical appeal to direct experience. On this account, immediate cognition in the sense of an intuitive grasp of an

immutable form is replaced by the uncontrollable judgments of perceptual experience. These judgments do not serve as a foundation for knowledge. Rather they serve as invaluable constraints for monitoring and altering our deliberate endeavors.

What such an understanding or clarification of our condition grants is a reprieve from the task of proving the existence of the world. The everyday world of our immediate experience is truly the matrix from which philosophy and, indeed, all forms of thought spring forth. To conjure the image of a world other than the quotidian and, then, to use that image to discredit the everyday are so deeply woven into the intricate fabric of traditional philosophy that insistence upon the quotidian worlds seems to many philosophers to be the abandonment of their historical task. Even worse than this, it appears to them to be an uncritical acquiescence in inherited prejudices.

This is deceiving. To accept the everyday world does not entail acquiescing in such prejudices (see, e.g., Dewey LW 1, 40-41). Far from being such an acquiescence, “philosophy is,” Dewey suggests, “a critique of prejudices” (40), undertaken for the sake of what we might call a transvaluation of the everyday (LW 1, 41). As often as not, it involves contesting some of its most salient features. The task of acknowledgment however means giving finitude, transience, temporality, sociality, and relationships more generally their due. It does not thereby jettison the possibility of knowing. Quite the contrary, it shows how these and other features of our condition secure that possibility.

Skepticism is not a position to be refuted but an experience to be undergone and, ordinarily, endured without any assurance of coming out the other side (Cavell 2005, Ch. 6; Rorty 1982, Ch. 10). While Wittgenstein’s later philosophy and classical pragmatism are both anti-skeptical and anti-foundationalist, Wittgenstein, on the one side, and Peirce, James, and Dewey, on the other had immediate experience of the most radical doubts and, moreover, a commonplace confidence in the capacity of ordinary people to meet their spiritual crises. It is, after all, these crises to which both sides are responding. As so often happens in a

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<sup>31</sup> “Only because the [human] organism is in and of the world, and its activities correlated with those of other things in multiple ways,” Dewey asserts, “is it susceptible to undergoing things and capable of trying to reduce objects to means of securing its good fortune” (MW 10, 11). Decades before this, James in “Remarks on Spencer’s Definition of Mind” (1878) in *Essays in Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), insists: “the knower is not simply a mirror floating with no foot-hold anywhere. ... The knower is an actor. ... In other words, there belongs to mind, from its birth upward, a spontaneity, a vote. It is in the game, and not a mere looker-on” (p. 21).

<sup>32</sup> Peirce’s anti-Cartesianism is in its own way radical, for he contends our knowledge of our own minds is fallible. See my “A Peircean account of first-person ‘authority’: The radical implications of thoroughgoing fallibilism” in *Thinking Thinking*, edited by Donata Schoeller and Vera Saller (Munich: Verlag Karl Alber, 2016), 160-80.

therapeutic situation, the problem turns out to be its own solution in disguise. The unmasking of the problem as a solution is central to Wittgenstein and the pragmatists. Looking behind, or beyond, or beneath, the condition in which the problem arises is itself symptomatic of being held in the vise of the problem. Attending more patiently, carefully, humbly to the most salient features of the problematic condition is, in contrast, an indication that the recovery of self and world is underway. How could something as wayward and contingent as human experience provide the resources to address our mundane problems, let alone our philosophical perplexities? How could something as parochial and (again) contingent as ordinary language do so?

Seeking resources beyond such experience or language<sup>33</sup> hardly points to a solution. The effort to do so only exacerbates and indeed multiples problems and perplexities. This is true because our linguistic inheritance is a bottomless source of rhetorical innovation, just as our experience is itself such a source of novelty, intended and otherwise. There are not only traditions of innovations but also the irrepressible tendencies of even the most hidebound inheritances to modify themselves in their ongoing struggle to maintain themselves.

The appeal to immediate experience has assumed myriad forms and served various functions. Nothing could be farther from either Wittgenstein or the pragmatists than making this appeal for the sake of securing unshakable foundations for the edifice of human knowledge. But, then, nothing could be more central to their aspiration than, in the case of Wittgenstein, a circuitous and hence indirect “defense” of immediate experience or, in the case of the pragmatists, a more direct and “metaphysical” account of the everyday world. As much as anything else, both sides were convinced that such experience and this world needed to be defended against their defenders (e.g., G. E. Moore and the realists with whom James and Dewey took issue). To imagine that the everyday world needs to be proven

betrays a misunderstanding of everything (most obviously, a misunderstanding of mind, world, language, and proof). In turn, to imagine that human experience needs to buttress itself by transcendental structures reveals a fatally flawed comprehension of our human practices, including the evolved and evolving practices of experimental inquiry. The public criteria inherent in these shared practices make of even our solitary performances (e.g., observing a bird alight on the branch of a tree) publicly corrigible endeavors. As Wittgenstein implies in *On Certainty*, observation is itself a practice.

As Cora Diamond has noted, a realistic spirit pervades the Wittgensteinian corpus (1995, Chapter 1). For the pragmatists under consideration here, this is also true (arguably, even truer). The critical appeal to experiential reality (or “immediate” experience) is, for both sides, a defining feature of their philosophical endeavors. The form of life in which such appeals are ceaselessly made is, at once, a humanly recognizable one (Could we imagine any human form of life in which such an appeal was altogether absent?) and our historically identifiable form of human life.<sup>34</sup> We ineluctably appeal to others but we do so in circumstances in which we are ordinarily also appealing to commonly observable phenomena. Others help the individual see what stares that person in the face.<sup>35</sup> What seizes the attention of the individual might be so forceful yet unexpected as to prompt that person to seek the corroboration of others. We ordinarily do not have to ask, “Do you perceive what I perceive?” since our somatic attunement to one another is so spontaneous, massive, and

<sup>34</sup> This bears upon the question of whether we ought to interpret *Lebensform* trans-culturally or relativistically.

<sup>35</sup> In an interview in *The Paris Review*, James Baldwin offers this recollection: “I remember standing on a street corner with the black painter Beauford Delaney in the Village, waiting for the light to change, and he pointed down and said, Look. I looked and all I saw was water. And he said, Look again, which I did, and I saw oil on the water and the city reflected in the puddle. It was a great revelation to me. I can’t explain it. He taught me how to see, and how to trust what I saw. Painters have often taught writers how to see. And once you’ve had that experience, you see differently” (2007 [1984], 243). See Wittgenstein, OC, #140.

<sup>33</sup> It is not my intention to imply an equivalence between the Wittgensteinian appeal to ordinary language and the pragmatist appeal to everyday experience.

yet delicate that this goes without saying. In subtle, almost imperceptible, and dramatic, often explicit, ways we *show* one another what is on our minds or what is being disclosed in our experience. A gestural conversation of a typically intimate character is taking place between human animals whenever they are in proximity of one another and, indeed, but only between such animals but also humans and other animals (see, e.g., Peirce; Mead).

For pragmatists at least, the relationship between mind and world is in its most primordial form that between one embodied mind and other. For the infant, the mother so mediates between it and the world that she is its world (or the infant is itself the world inclusive of the mother) (Winnicott 1990, Chapter 3, especially p. 39, footnote 1; see also Margolis, Chapter 1). This is an urgently practical relationship, though it can evolve into a boundlessly theoretical stance (James, *MT*, 277-80; Dewey, *MW* 14, 128-31). The other from whom one is compelled by experience to differentiate oneself is a being inscribed in the innermost recesses of the self and, at the same time, an elusive, even enigmatic, being from whom the self feels separated (Mead, Chapters 18 and 24). How can this relationship be both unseverable and attenuated to the point of being destroyed? The world of our immediate experience is however just that: a world from which we can never be absolutely exiled,<sup>36</sup> yet one in which we are time and again finding ourselves “on the outs.” The face of one of the most intimate of our friends without warning turns into that of a stranger.

The scandal of skepticism primarily concerns the self in relation to others and, only secondarily, in relationship to the world without any reference to other selves.<sup>37</sup> It

concerns our acknowledgment of others in their irreducible otherness. The acknowledgment in question is primarily practical: it concerns how we comport ourselves toward other concrete beings, especially sentient ones.

To recall the lesson derived from Peirce’s categories, the qualitative immediacy and brute otherness of human experience need to be conjoined to an unfathomable intelligibility. Such intelligibility is secured only by means of mediation but recourse to mediation always threatens the loss of felt immediacy, irreducible otherness, or both. The recovery of a lively and orienting sense of immediacy and facticity paradoxically often relies on one or more forms of mediation, not least of all therapeutic recollections and philosophical maps charting paths to direct experience waiting to be *had* (Dewey, *LW* 1, 389). It is far from clear that James is right when he asserts, “The return to life [and of course he means life *in its immediacy*] can’t come about by talking. It is,” James insists, “an *act*” (1977, 131). Talk or discourse as itself an instance of action woven into an expanding tapestry of conjoined activities might in fact be one of the most effective ways of returning to life. The paradox of pragmatism, Jamesian and otherwise, bears eloquent testimony to the efficacy of what is in effect “talk therapy.” The act of returning to the precarious yet indestructible world of immediate experience is, accordingly, the point of pragmatism, also that of Wittgenstein. If an immediate or instantaneous return were possible, we would enact it. Even when it does not seem possible, we should act as though it were.<sup>38</sup> Alas, such a return, such a marshalling of our energies, is often not possible. Much mediation, many words, are frequently needed. There is nothing silly or stupid about the confusions into which we are thrown. Our bewitchment by language and our betrayals of experience are rooted in noble aspirations *and* ignoble fears, not just such fears and

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contends, “to recognize myself as denying another, to understand that I carry chaos in myself. Here is the scandal of skepticism with respect to the existence of others. I am that scandal” (2005, 151).

<sup>38</sup> This is what James advises in “The Energies of Men.” See *Essays in Religion and Morality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), especially, 131-32.

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<sup>36</sup> This of course needs to be qualified. *Except for death*, it is a world from which one cannot be absolutely exiled. There is arguably a sense in which even the dead person is, for a time at least, not altogether banished.

<sup>37</sup> “But in the everyday ways in which denial [of the other] occurs in my life with the other – in a momentary irritation, or a recurrent grudge, in an unexpected rush of resentment, in a hard glance, in a dishonest attestation, in the telling of a tale, in the believing of a tale, in a fear of engulfment, in a fantasy of solitude or of self-destruction – the problem is,” Stanley Cavell

anxieties. While an immediate recovery of immediate experience is of course possible, a mediated return to everyday life is the requisite route for most human beings, at least for those who have succumbed to the myriad seductions of a transcendent hope (the seemingly irrepressible hope to transcend the finite world of human experience).<sup>39</sup> Wittgenstein explicitly advises us to go back to the rough ground, while the pragmatists at least tacitly do so (PI, #107; also see Scheman). There and only there, life is to be lived. There and only there, experience is to be *had*. There and only there, is any act an action, rather than the pathetic posturing of “parlor soldiers” (Emerson, 194).<sup>40</sup>

“In the beginning was the deed” (OC, #402; CV, 31). But, along the way, the *word* as deed (CV, 50) is needed to recover the world as an arena of action, even simply to recollect adequately that the sense in which action stands at the origin of our world (cf. Emerson 263). The recovery of immediacy tends to be circuitous rather than linear or immediate. Words as deeds in the service of deeds in other senses than words are ordinarily at the center of such recovery. “Words, words, words.” There are no words without a world and, in turn, there is no world in any

recognizably human sense without words and other symbols.<sup>41</sup> Words and world cannot be prised apart. Any attempt to bridge an alleged gap between language and reality (or mind and world) can only perpetrate and, indeed, exacerbate what it is designed to alleviate or eliminate. The point is to do philosophy in such a way that the scandal of having failed to prove the existence of the external world is seen for what it is<sup>42</sup> – a fool’s errand. However ingenious and sophisticated are the thinkers who attempt such a proof, the proof itself is doomed not only to fail but also to prolong a futile exercise.

At this juncture, to go on doing philosophy entails, among other things, orienting ourselves toward the world in ways quite different from some of the theoretical fixations of traditional philosophy. Wittgensteinian consideration of actual usage and pragmatic clarification provide therapeutic and, thereby, emancipatory insights. For the purposes of philosophy, as various and indeed heterogeneous as they are, there is no need – to get behind or beyond or beneath immediate experience. Indeed, there is no possibility of

<sup>39</sup> “The demand for a standpoint *outside history* from which to deliver judgements of value is,” Sabina Lovibond suggests, “linked with the demand for a standpoint *outside the body* from which to survey reality: for an embodied creature necessarily exists in time” (143). “The sickness which philosophy sets out to treat ... has,” she goes on to claim in connection with Wittgenstein, “its origins, he implies, in the incomplete acceptance of our embodied condition, and in the failure to acknowledge the significance of that condition for the reflective understanding of such topics as *meaning* and *rationality*” (206).

<sup>40</sup> This is an allusion to R. W. Emerson’s “Self-Reliance”: “We are parlour soldiers. We shun the rugged battle of fact, where strength is born. This passage suggests an equally famous one in an essay by William James (“Is Life Worth Living?”): “If this life be not a real fight, in which something is eternally gained for the universe by success, it is,” James emphatically asserts, “no better than a game of private theatricals from which we may withdraw at will. But it feels like a real fight – as if there is something really wild in the universe which we, with all our idealities and faithfulnesses, are needed to redeem; and first of all to redeem our own hearts from atheisms and fears. For such a half-wild, half-saved universe our nature is adapted” (WB [Dover], 61).

<sup>41</sup> This is one of the points where we readily observe a convergence among distinct philosophical traditions (Wittgenstein, pragmatism, and hermeneutics). See Has-Georg Gadamer’s “The Nature of Things and the Nature of Language” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976). The position sketched in this essay is very close to those of Wittgenstein and the pragmatists.

<sup>42</sup> In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant suggests: “It still remains a scandal to philosophy and to human reason in general that the existence of things outside us (from which we derive the whole material of knowledge, even for our inner sense) must be accepted merely on faith, and that if anyone thinks good to doubt their existence, we are unable to counter his doubts by any satisfactory proof” (34). “The ‘scandal of philosophy’ does not consist in the fact that this proof is still lacking up to now, but,” Martin Heidegger counters in *Being and Time*, “in the fact that such proofs are expected and attempted again and again” (197). See Dewey’s “The Existence of the World as a Logical Problem” (MW 8, 83-97. This essay was originally published in *Philosophical Review*, 24 (1915) and appeared in revised form in *Essays in Experimental Logic* (1916). “It is not the common-sense world which is doubtful ... but *common sense* as a complex of beliefs about specific things and relations *in* the world. Hence never in any usual procedure of inquiry do we throw the existence of the world into doubt, nor can we do so without self-contradiction” (MW 8, 96-97).

doing so. At some point, our efforts to do so inevitably fall back upon the undoubted deliverances of direct experience. If in some respects, for some purposes, we can doubt aspects of these deliverances, that is only because there is a massive background of undoubted beliefs and, deeper than these beliefs, of unacknowledged investments that make specific doubts intelligible. Our games of doubting inescapably take place against this background. But the background itself cannot be doubted since it defines the conditions for the intelligibility of our doubts. For this reason, it cannot be proven. To continue to seek a ground for our certainty in the undoubted commonplaces of everyday life (i.e., to seek nothing less than a transcendent certainty) betrays either a misunderstanding of what grounds are or (more likely) a deeper malady, one connected to failures of acknowledgment. We must, “Forget this transcendent certainty, which is connected with our concept of spirit”<sup>43</sup> (OC, #47; see Scheman). And we must do so as a way toward acknowledging the undoubted certainties of everyday life, including the uncontrollable judgments forced upon us by our perceptual experience. Are there circumstances in which one or another of these certainties might be rendered dubitable?<sup>44</sup> Yes, of course. Even so, perceptual experience *is* experience (and this means that during its duration we experience a series of alterations). In yet other words, such experience is attuned to distinct objects as defining features of the enveloping scenes of everyday life, not to objects in abstraction from such situations. But, then, it is as attuned to affordances as obstacles, at least as much to opportunities to go on as to obstructions.

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<sup>43</sup> This sentence is slightly modified. In the original, it is: “Forget this transcendent certainty, which is connected with your concept of spirit.”

<sup>44</sup> “If you try to doubt everything you would not get,” Wittgenstein insists, “as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty” (OC, #115). OC, #343.

## Conclusion

The world directly encountered in our experience, “immediately” glimpsed in our perceptions, is first and foremost an arena of action.<sup>45</sup> Our form of life is that of an ingenious animal (all too often, all too clever an animal!) having a natural history in which “commanding, questioning, recounting, charting, are as much a part ... as walking, eating, drinking, playing” (PI, #25). “What has to be accepted, the given, is – so one could say – forms of life” (PI, II, p. 226). With any form of life, what is always already acknowledged in countless and irrevocable ways (if only tacitly acknowledged) is the world as an arena of action. Proofs regarding the reality of that world are, as much as the doubts to which those proofs are response, not so much idle as unintelligible. If countless philosophers and indeed others imagine otherwise, that is because they profoundly misunderstand the conditions of intelligibility. The classical pragmatists and the later Wittgenstein were devoted to clarifying these conditions and, central to their endeavor, the appeal to our practices eclipses the appeal to intuitions (Rorty 1961; Colapietro). What strikes us immediately as true ... is not a kind of *seeing* on our part: it is rather “our *acting*” (OC, #204). On this account, practical fluency replaces cognitive immediacy. Even so, perceptual judgments, at least when they are taken to be the uncontrolled result of what is a rudimentary human practice,<sup>46</sup> are among the starting

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<sup>45</sup> “Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end; – but the end is not certain propositions’ striking us as immediately true, i.e., it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of our language game” (OC, #204). I read this as an anti-intuitionist stance. See Rorty, “Pragmatism, Categories, and Language” in *The Philosophical Review*, 70, 2 (April 1961), 197-223; also my “Allowing Our Practices to Speak for Themselves” (2011).

<sup>46</sup> “We do not learn the *practice* [*Praxis*] of making empirical judgment by learning rules” (emphasis added); rather “we are taught *judgments* and their connexion with other judgments” (OC, #140; Colapietro 2011). To learn how to make such judgments is to be initiated into the *practice* of looking and seeing. The experience of failing to see is critical. See also Wittgenstein’s *Investigation*, II, p.

points of all human endeavors. The piece of wax, stripped by Descartes of its sensory qualities and defined solely in terms of quantitative dimensions, could not be weighed, measured, or subjected to any other procedure pertaining to these dimensions, except by perception. Perception is truly primordial, even if it is fallible (see Buchler 2000). But it does not provide a foundation for the edifice for our knowledge; rather it provides not only the indispensable means for self-correction but also those for identifying the subject matter of experimental inquiry. The indexical signs by which immediate perception and direct experience are equipped to assist self-correction and, at the most basic level, to enable us to identify a subject to be investigated are, at once, a causal and a semiotic relationship. Nothing less than the everyday world is implicated in their ubiquitous force.<sup>47</sup>

It is the world from which we ineluctably set out and that to which we necessarily return, after the illusion of having severed ourselves from it. To conclude emphatically (or at least to move toward our conclusion in this manner), let us recall Peirce's claim: "we have *direct experience of things in themselves*. Nothing could be more completely false than that we can experience only our own ideas" (CP, 6.95).<sup>48</sup> We directly experience

the world, though experience is itself always a process of mediation in which the possibility of error is ineliminable. Direct perception cannot be gainsaid, though anything directly perceived might, in the light of subsequent perceptions, prove itself unreliable for the attainment of some purpose. Ultimately, we have no recourse but to rely on immediate perception or direct experience. There is no inner world except what is an offshoot of the external world, no outer world except what might disclose itself to us in our "possible practical experience." The limits of intelligibility are defined by the range of our practices, but that range extends far beyond anything yet established. Within these practices, our observations and experiences are tethered to the everyday world by the ubiquitous force of indexical signs. The significance of the objects and events to which such signs so forcefully call our attention is, however, more far-reaching and deep-cutting than our most reliable theories and efficacious habits have even intimated. The world of our experience is, thus, a world at once immediately intelligible and inexhaustibly knowable (arguably, even mysterious).

In their refusal even to try proving the existence of this world, also in their insistence upon conceiving conceivability in reference to our practices (albeit, the full range of our shared practices and the *possible* consequences flowing from our fateful engagement in these shared practices), and finally in granting, in their philosophical accounts, immediate perception and direct experience the tremendous weight they have in our everyday lives, the writings of the classical pragmatist and the later Wittgenstein make this and much more manifest. Between the immediate disclosures of our

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extra-personal world long before we study or are aware of processes occurring in our own bodily tissue, so we live in a world of objective acceptances and compulsions long before we are aware of attitudes of our own, and of the action of say the nervous system, in bringing us into effective relationship with them. The knowledge of our own attitudes and of the operation of the nervous system is no more a substitute for *the direct operation of things* than metabolic processes are a substitute for food materials" (LW 1, 381; emphasis added).

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<sup>47</sup> In "The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy," Dewey observes: "if anything seems adequately grounded empirically it is the existence of a world which resists the characteristic functions of the subject of experience, which goes its own way, in some respects, independently of these functions, and which frustrates our hopes and intentions" (MW 10, 18).

<sup>48</sup> "One of the curiosities of orthodox empiricism is that its outstanding speculative problem is," Dewey notes, "the existence of an 'external world.' For in accordance with the notion that experience is attached to a private subject as its exclusive possession, a world like the one in which we appear to live must be 'external' to experience instead of being its subject-matter. I call it a curiosity, for if anything seems adequately grounded empirically it is the existence of a world which resists the characteristic functions of the subject of experience [i.e., the human animal], and which frustrates our hopes and intentions" (MW 10, 18). Near the end of his life, he made much the same point when he insisted: "Being and having, exercising and suffering such things as these [i.e., barriers, mountains, rivers, seas, forests, and plains], exist in the open and public. As we digest food derived from the

direct experience and the boundless mediations resulting from the dynamic conjunction of everyday experience and philosophical imagination, our lives stretch. While these lives are tethered by indexical signs to the external world, they are emancipated from the tyranny of its brute compulsion by the power of linguistic and other symbols.<sup>49</sup> Our world is one in which our transactions overwhelmingly take the form of an exchange of signs.<sup>50</sup> This does nothing to make the world a tissue of signs, though it does much to help us see<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> In "The Poet," in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Selected Essays*, edited by Larzer Ziff (NY: Penguin, 1982), Emerson calls our attention to the power of symbols to facilitate this result: "The use of symbols has a certain power of emancipation and exhilaration for all men. We seem to be touched by a wand which makes us dance and run about happily, like children. We are like persons who come out of a cave or cellar into the open air" (276). Language is anything but a prison-house, even if certain pictures, having their roots in language, can hold us captive (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, #). Any prison-house in which we are sequestered can, in principle, be identified as such because of our linguistic resources and, beyond this, is one from which we might be able to escape only because of these resources.

<sup>50</sup> "Signs, the only things with which a human being can, without derogation, consent to have any transaction, being a sign himself, are," Peirce insists, "triadic" (6.344). While our experience is always to some extent a play of forces, it is more than this: it is a drama in which that play provides opportunities for discovering the most intricate networks of intelligible relationships. See Wittgenstein's *Blue Book* (1958), 6-8. "If we say that thinking is," Wittgenstein notes, "essentially operating with signs, the first question you might ask is: 'What are signs?' – Instead of giving any general kind of answer to this question, I propose to you to look closely at particular cases" (1958, 16). Even so, there are at least implicit generalizations derived from his painstaking attention to particular cases, just as Peirce's "broad generalizations" (2.14) are derived from attention to particulars. The would have (to say the least) severe reservations about a general theory of signs, while the latter would have little sympathy with the claim that the philosopher should avoid from putting forth theses.

<sup>51</sup> In his *Investigations*, Wittgenstein objects to himself by saying, "You have a new conception [of a familiar object] and interpret it as seeing a new object." "What you have primarily discovered is," he continues, "a new way of looking at things" (#401). He appears, here and elsewhere, to be disparaging his own pretense to have accomplished anything notable. But, in truth, he has hit upon a novel way of seeing familiar things. In a very different context, animated by largely divergent motives, James announces

how immediately and intimately, yet elusively significant is our everyday world.

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in *The Meaning of Truth*: "The whole originality of pragmatism, the whole point in it is its use of the concrete way of seeing. It begins with concreteness, and returns and ends with it" (pp. 281-82). For the most part in quite different ways, Wittgenstein and the pragmatists champion a "concrete way of seeing" familiar things. To some extent their motives overlap, since both sides are preoccupied with the experiential (not simply the intellectual) recovery of the everyday world. The "craving for generality" (Wittgenstein 1958, 17) – more pointedly identified, "the contemptuous attitude toward the particular case" (18) – prompts too quickly and strongly to ride roughshod over particulars. Thus, both sides exemplify a cherishing concern for irreducible particularity, without abandoning the abiding need for broad generalizations (though Wittgenstein is, to a greater degree, wary of such generalizations than the pragmatists). "Broad generalization is," Peirce affirms, "glorious when it is the inevitable outpressed juice of painfully matured details of knowledge; but when it is not that, it is a crude spirit inciting only boils between [sic.] a hundred little dogmas. ... It is the usual fruit of sloth" (2.14).

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