

## INTRODUCTION TO THE FOCUS OF ABSOLUTE PRAGMATISM

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The impetus for this in-depth study of Absolute pragmatism came from a paper given by Scott Pratt at the 2024 meeting of the Central European Pragmatist Forum in Vienna. A revised version of that paper heads this collection. Pratt was and is worried about the capacity of pragmatism to respond effectively and ethically to a post-truth world. Pragmatism was “soft on truth,” one might say, from James’s 1907 *Pragmatism* forward. Its allergy to idealism, to the Absolute, and to foundations of all kinds, grew slowly through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, culminating in a neo-pragmatism that was admittedly nominalist, and, many have charged, perniciously relativist. While the latter charge is clearly neglecting the nuances of, for example, a Deweyan pragmatism, there can be little doubt that pragmatism has struggled with the question of truth for many decades. That struggle delivers pragmatists into the present with doubtful tools for addressing fake news and alternative facts.

Pratt here delivers a call for a more “insurrectionist” ethic, in the sense elaborated and defended by Leonard Harris (who was the featured speaker at the Vienna meeting), but with the different idea that reviving the Absolute will help with the resistance. This suggestion brought lively discussion, to say the least. Everyone is struggling with how to respond to the current situation.

In our breaks and editorial meetings, we decided that we should recruit some senior scholars from varying perspectives to mull over Pratt’s idea.

Two of the papers, by Banerjee and Harrelson, go straight at the idea of reviving the Absolute, with varying degrees of sympathy. Banerjee sees promise in the idea if sufficient nuance is applied. Harrelson suspects the cure may be worse than the disease, since keeping the Absolute under control has always proven difficult, and in the present, the darker powers would be sure to misuse (and already are misusing) the Absolute. The middle paper, by Seibert, steps back into the existentialist and tragic side of Royce’s philosophy. The prescription of wandering as a therapy for our fragmentariness would seem to mitigate some of the tendency to politicize the ethic Royce left to us. The last two papers are deep dives into the history of the ideas of the Absolute and of pragmatism. Beisecker examines how the Absolute, as it came to the US from Germany (and especially the Left Hegelians, the 48ers), was anything but a reactionary philosophy. My own essay examines in great detail Royce’s “Absolute pragmatism” period, roughly 1895 to 1906. I argue that his Absolute is not the worrisome type, and his idea of pragmatism is an alternative to the version we inherited from James.

In all, we hope that these contributions to contemporary discussion, and to Royce interpretation can spur pragmatists to a more serious (and less nominalist) consideration of the ground of pragmatic philosophy. Pragmatists can be insurrectionist against the growing populism and neo-fascism that is growing all around us.