

DOI:10.14394/eidos.jpc.2023.0032

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## Pragmatic or Absolute Establishment of Philosophy

### Abstract:

At the foundation of systematic thinking lie decisive assumptions that cannot be articulated and treated in a theoretical manner. Nonetheless, they are settled practically and metaphorically to orient and provoke the systematic attempts of philosophy. This field of non-theoretical assumptions is the theme of this paper. In the following, I articulate one specific metaphorical and practical answer that defies theoretical and systematic treatment. While it is among the most fundamental and fatal answers that can ever be ventured in the entire field of systematic thinking, they cannot occupy center-stage in theoretical thinking. The problematic concerns *the pragmatic or absolute establishment of the edifice of philosophy*. In the following, I try to portray a fundamental but irresolvable conflict in a back-and-forth movement between rival answers given to this problematic. This investigation concludes by emphasizing the irremediable failure to settle, once and for all, the conflict portrayed between the two opposed designations of philosophy in principle.

### Keywords:

pragmatic standpoint, absolute, metaphorology, epistemological standpoint, intellectualism

### Introduction

The order in which I tackle the problematic of how to establish the foundation of philosophy will be: first, I outline the main characteristics of this metaphorical field of inquiry, to which my proposed problematic belongs. Second, I propose to characterize the nature of the conflicts inherent in that field of metaphorology as

somewhat analogous to Kant's treatment of the antinomies of pure reason. Afterwards, I formulate a certain *epistemological standpoint* by appealing to Dilthey's introductory remarks in his attempted critique of historical reason. For the most explicit formulation of a rival standpoint to that epistemological stance, I turn to Charles S. Peirce's later characterization of the pragmatic maxim in his Harvard lectures and William James' *Pragmatism*. Afterwards, in another attempt to strengthen the epistemological standpoint and counter the pragmatic one, I turn to Husserl's later formulation of his phenomenological philosophy in comparison to the pragmatic formulation. Finally, I revert to John Dewey's pragmatic portrayal of the genesis of Greek thought (and not his own view on those matters) and his thematic wrestling with what he labels, following Bergson, *intellectualism*. The choice of the thinkers and their respective texts is certainly not a comprehensive choice from the history of philosophy. Rather, I am most concerned about elaborating on a meta-philosophical problematic by appealing to several philosophers that I found emblematic of either of the alternative practical choices. This back-and-forth survey of the metaphorological investigation ends by emphasizing the irremediable failure to settle or decide theoretically, once and for all, the somewhat unnegotiable conflict between two opposed portrayals of philosophy in principle.

Sketching the Metaphorological Field of Inquiry In an early passage from the inaugurating chapters of his *Paradigms for Metaphorology*, Hans Blumenberg attempts to delineate a field of inquiry which cannot be exhausted, in principle, by logos. In this field, metaphors hold sway in such a way that they cannot be done away with:

[Metaphorological] analysis seeks to disclose the questions to which answers are sought and risked, questions of a pre-systematic nature whose intentional fullness "provoked" the metaphors, as it were. We should not shrink from the supposed naïveté of spelling out these fundamental questions, regardless of whether they were ever actually posed in so many words. To what extent does mankind partake of the whole truth? What situation do those who seek the truth find themselves in? Can they feel confident that what exists will freely reveal itself to them, or is knowledge to be acquired only through an act of violence, by outwitting the object, extorting information from it under duress, interrogating it on the rack? Is our share in truth meaningfully regulated by the economy of our needs, for example, or by our aptitude for superabundant happiness in accordance with the idea of a *visio beatifica*? These are all questions that barely a philosophical school has attempted to answer with systematic means; we nonetheless maintain that everywhere in the language of philosophy, *indications* can be found that answers to these questions have always already been given in a subterranean stratum of thought, answers that, although they may not be contained in the systems in propositional form, have never ceased to pervade, tincture, and structure them.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike conceptual analysis that unveils and elaborates the essential and necessary linkages between more or less clearly defined concepts, metaphorology undertakes the delineation of a field whose boundaries cannot be strictly determined. Nonetheless, there are questions implicitly ventured whose naïveté has kept them away from thematic and explicit articulations. How can we pose the question of the relation between mankind and truth in principle, without adequately defining what we mean by man and truth in the first place? Through the medium of knowing, people come to know the relation between a capacity to know and the truth in principle. However, this specific knowledge about people and truth presupposes the truth-telling value of human knowledge in principle. Oddly enough, the risk of implicitly giving a temporary answer to such questions is felt

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1) Blumenberg, *Paradigms*, 7.

in various stages of conceptual analysis and argumentative thinking in the form of tacit assumptions. Those implicit assumptions cannot become fully explicit in order for conceptual thinking to circumscribe it with its strict armaments. Those vague answers and their underlying questions, Blumenberg maintains, have never ceased to “pervade,” “tincture,” and logically “structure” the fate of conceptual thinking.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper, I want to address another such subterranean question, to which the possible alternative answers cannot be adequately formulated in a systematic and argumentative vein. These questions have to do with the *ends* or *purpose* of knowledge, especially with regard to the well-being of the agent of knowing. The practical outcome of possessing knowledge is to motivate, sustain and guarantee the intellectual endeavor demanded for acquiring knowledge. Indeed, here lies the “intentional fullness” that is not satisfied by conceptually articulated answers. Rather, this question motivates or “provokes” what cannot be adequately addressed by appealing to a conceptual arsenal. The paradigmatic cases in the field of metaphorology are “absolute metaphors that “answer” the supposedly naïve, and in principle unanswerable questions, whose relevance lies quite simply in the fact that they cannot be brushed aside, since we do not *pose* them ourselves but find them already *posed* in the ground of our existence.”<sup>3</sup>

### The Antinomian Character of Metaphorological Answers

An existential question like that of the ends or purpose of knowledge cannot be extinguished by arguments. Their essential character is reminiscent of Kantian antinomies in the Transcendental Dialectic of Pure Reason. For Kant, the antinomy of pure reason is a sort of rational conflict or contradiction that is not a contingent import of individual failures, but arises out of the necessary principles and procedures of pure reason. Furthermore, Kant contends that “all questions raised by pure reason must absolutely be answerable, and that here we cannot be permitted to excuse ourselves from such answers by pleading the limits of our cognition.”<sup>4</sup> This is so because these necessary self-entanglements are not occasioned by an element extraneous to thought. Rather, they are the immediate product of “reason’s intrinsic self-arrangements.”<sup>5</sup>

Likewise, the field of metaphorology sketched by Blumenberg is prone to such intrinsic conflicts that are occasioned by reason’s own motivations. Although reason cannot deal with those questions with its conceptual panoply, those questions and their temporary answers permeate the entire systematic and argumentative activities situated within them. The function of those temporary answers in this field is indeed regulative, albeit without explicitly figuring among the premises of arguments.

In the following, I show the conflict between two major trends in response given to a very fundamental question. These responses permeate the field that metaphorology attempts to delineate: *what is the most primordial thesis among the constellation of theses proposed by philosophy, particularly in its epistemological or even ontological discernment?* This question is based on a foundational metaphor for the entire structure of knowledge.

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2) The field sketched by a sample of inevitable yet systematically unanswerable questions in the long quote from Blumenberg’s *Paradigms* can be compared to what became thematic in Husserl’s late philosophy, namely, “life-world” and what Gadamer calls “tradition” in his philosophical hermeneutics. The most common feature of these three crucial terms is the primacy and dominance of the practical understanding over the theoretical. Tradition and pre-judgment are two main characterizations proposed by Gadamer. One controversial theme in the 1967 debate between Gadamer and Habermas is “*the status of reflexive self-understanding* within interpretation [a universally situated occasion of finite understanding] and science.” For a detailed and solid account of the main themes in that debate see: Kögler, “Dialogue on Dialogue,” 288–303.

3) Blumenberg, *Paradigms*, 14.

4) Kant, *Pure Reason*, A695/B723.

5) Ibid.

Indeed, there is a hierarchy of implications in the structural unity of the edifice of philosophy, as it were, with its foundation and its superstructure. Ultimate clarity and self-sustained validity come from going back to that foundational clarity, which serves as the paradigm for the clarity of the rest of the edifice. In that foundation, or sometimes in the margins, metaphors figure within propositions that are not explicitly taken into account in the pool of the premises. Those metaphors function like scaffoldings, although not as only temporary parts of the edifice of a fully articulated philosophy. Among those foundational theses of philosophy as a whole, are concerns of the value of knowledge in principle.

### The Conflict about How to Determine the *Value* of Knowledge: Dilthey's Insight

On the one hand, there is a position pertaining to the absolute value of knowledge, as Wilhelm Dilthey lucidly designates it in the form of the epistemological standpoint:

All experience must be related back to and derives its validity from the *conditions* and *context* of consciousness in which it arises, i.e., the totality of our nature. We designate as "epistemological" this standpoint which *consistently recognizes the impossibility of going behind these conditions*. To attempt this would be like seeing without eyes or directing the gaze of knowledge behind one's own eye.<sup>6</sup>

The term "epistemological" acquires a stricter sense in the context Dilthey adopts it. A standpoint is epistemological when that standpoint is tied to a fundamental discernment: there are "conditions" and a "context" for the enterprise of knowing as such that knowledge cannot surpass. Amazingly enough, Dilthey illuminates the impossibility of that ambition by an allegory. Since knowing can be assimilated to seeing (as it has been taken to be throughout the history of thought), that ambition must make use of, rely on, and indeed presuppose what it aims to reveal the conditions thereof. How can those conditions be known, if those conditions render their own revealing possible in the first place? In other words, what is revealed in that foundational inquiry is a conditioned component of knowledge, instead of a condition thereof. What is more of interest concerns those conditions that cannot be revealed since they are conditioned, in principle, by knowledge. Those conditions are like eyes for the knowledge aspiring to see them, as it were.

Another diagnosis of the epistemological standpoint is that knowledge arising from this standpoint condemns knowledge to be merely phenomenal, a sheer appearance deferring, forever, the reality of the object known. In Dilthey's eloquent phrasing, "From this standpoint [i.e., the epistemological], our conception of the whole of nature proves to be a mere shadow cast by a hidden reality."<sup>7</sup> Dilthey's remedy for such an indispensable shortcoming is to dig into the conception of reality encapsulated in the preceding diagnosis. In contrast to the reality cast by the epistemological standpoint,

A historical as well as psychological approach to whole human beings led me to explain even knowledge and its concepts (such as the external world, time, substance and cause) in terms of the manifold powers of a being that wills, feels, and thinks; and I do this despite the fact that knowledge seems to be woven of concepts derived from the mere contents of perception, representation, and thought.<sup>8</sup>

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6) Dilthey, *Human Sciences*, xvii, 50.

7) *Ibid.*

8) *Ibid.*

The barrier against following this path is immediately recognized by Dilthey. What impels Kant and his rationalist and empiricist predecessors to construct a representational idea of knowledge (the one Dilthey aspires to contest), is that it seemed as though what constitutes knowledge derives only from the *contents* of knowledge. Apart from that content, the rest is banished to the periphery of the questions regarding *how* that knowledge of a certain content is acquired, while severed irrevocably from the question of *what*.

That banishment is not arbitrary though. It concerns the same absolute value of treating knowledge in its validity. The question regarding the validity of knowledge, albeit seemingly relevant to its value, is inherent and intrinsic to knowledge. However, the matter of the value of knowledge seems to reside beyond the *validity* of knowledge as such. It has more to do with the value of knowledge *for the knowing agent*, their survival, and well-being. In short, the value of knowledge as pertaining to the agent of knowing comes from the *function* of knowledge for that agent.

Dilthey's eloquence in recapitulating the absolute value of knowledge as espoused by the epistemological approach stems from his eagerness to surpass that approach toward a more concrete account of the agent of knowledge. This more concrete treatment of the epistemological problem was made impossible in the Kantian aftermath. Rudolf Makkreel refers to a gap opened by Kant which makes psychological descriptions irrelevant to the epistemological norms:

While Kant had separated psychology and epistemology, Dilthey's work in aesthetics and history led him to reopen the question about the extent to which psychological descriptions have a bearing on epistemological theories. This was of especial concern to Dilthey, for in reflecting on his Critique of Historical Reason he found that the categories of the Kantian epistemology were inadequate to cope with historical experience.<sup>9</sup>

Without incorporating psychological and descriptive elements of the accounts of knowledge, Dilthey maintains, "no real blood flows in the veins of the knowing subject constructed by Locke, Hume, and Kant, but rather the diluted extract of reason as a mere activity of thought."<sup>10</sup> Dilthey's rehabilitation of the pale epistemological account of reason tends toward incorporating other mental acts like willing and feeling. To seek the relative *value* or *function* of knowledge for the agent of knowing (which is not reducible to the epistemological *validity* of knowledge), is another possible viewpoint that can be occupied from that field which lies beyond the reach of systematic and argumentative thinking.

The most decisive point here is that such alternative viewpoints cannot be adopted based on a rigid argument. One might think that the inconceivability of getting *behind* the epistemological standpoint is the ultimate argument against any other alternative viewpoint trying to capture something beyond the truth value or falsity of knowledge. Accordingly, the value or function of knowledge cannot be known in a pure manifestation of truth that is not distorted by the economy of the function of knowledge. This foundational clarity achieved in this functional viewpoint is not equivalent and identical to that epistemological and foundational clarity. Rather, it is the ultimate destination of philosophical inquiry as such. I propose that latter viewpoint is that specific realm ventured into by the so-called pragmatic viewpoint.

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9) Makkreel, *Dilthey: Human Studies*, 8.

10) Dilthey, *Human Sciences*, xviii, 50.

## The Pragmatic Portrayal of the Nature of Philosophy: Charles S. Peirce and William James

As someone who preferred to be a logician than a metaphysician, Charles S. Peirce propounded a method for ascertaining the meaning or intellectual content of every conception. Following the way Peirce construes the nature and function of belief as *a rule for action* forming a specific habit and paired with his acute understanding of the experimental attitude cherished by science, his pragmatic maxim serves as a sort of verification method. Encountering the reception of his rather logical conception of pragmatic maxim, Peirce was forced to reformulate his early 1878 logical characterization.<sup>11</sup> In his address in Harvard, Peirce put that maxim in a metaphysical vein: “Pragmatism is the principle that every theoretical judgment expressible in a sentence in the indicative mood is a confused form of thought whose only meaning, if it has any, lies in its tendency to enforce a corresponding practical maxim expressible as a conditional sentence having its apodosis in the imperative mood.”<sup>12</sup>

The imperative mood of the apodosis for a conditional formulation of theoretical judgments manifests the pragmatic or rather, *experimental* outcome of the application of the pragmatic maxim. If that conditional imperative does not enforce a sort of “what to do,” a change to be affected in reality and what to expect as a result in an experimental fashion – even as a possibility, that judgment does not have meaning.<sup>13</sup> Put differently, two different statements that their “practical bearings” are not different have the same meaning, however different their phrasing may be. As Peirce explicitly maintains, there is no meaning in thought or conception except one that can be directed to a possible practical change in reality – be it external reality or mental. A thought or conception is true just the way an invention is true, namely, the way an invention “works” or fulfills its intended purpose. In that way, by applying the pragmatic maxim we have a conditional statement with an imperative apodosis that anticipates a particular outcome.<sup>14</sup>

Henceforth, the practical or rather pragmatic “foundation” of meaning cannot be grasped theoretically, simply because *theoria* itself is pragmatically founded, that is, enforces a practical instruction with anticipating a particular experimental result.<sup>15</sup> It is quite noteworthy that for Peirce even the metaphysical formulation of his

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11) In his paper “How to Make Our Ideas clear” Peirce introduced his pragmatic maxim as follows: “Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object” (Peirce, “How to Ideas,” 258). It is noteworthy what Peirce emphasizes in this early paper is the central role reserved for those “effects” as being *sensible*:

“I only desire to point out how impossible it is that we should have an idea in our minds which relates to anything but conceived sensible effects of things. Our idea of anything *is* our idea of its sensible effects.” (Ibid.)

12) Peirce, “Lecture 1,” 15.

13) Josiah Royce had a more intricate pragmatic method even before being adopted and proposed by Jamesian pragmatism as famously proposed in Berkeley in 1898. This method helps Royce both to extract a hypothetical practical bearing from a conception that informs the conduct of life, and to generalize from a particular feeling to form a universal – yet hypothetical – conception. For a more detailed account of Royce’s version of the pragmatic maxim see, Auxier, *Time, Will, Purpose*, 110–13.

14) We will be dealing with Dewey’s insights especially his anti-intellectualism extensively towards the end of this paper, but here I appeal to another formulation of Dewey concerning the relation of a true knowledge and a working invention: “Suppose the idea to be an invention, say of the telephone. In this case, is not the verification of the idea and the construction of the device which carries out its intent one and the same? In this case, does the truth of the idea mean anything else than that the issue proves the idea can be carried into effect?” Dewey, “Intellectualist Criterion,” 67. Also, one of the most refined and subtlest accounts of what pragmatism is belongs to John Eloff Boodin. In my estimation, it is Peirce’s pragmatic theory of meaning developed most articulately apart from what can be regarded as “misinterpretations” of James and Dewey. For further details see: Boodin, “Pragmatism,” 627–35. As we will be discussing Dewey’s anti-intellectualism later on, the question remains as whether Boodin’s account of pragmatism is still intellectualist or anti-intellectualist. Deciding on this matter requires another paper.

15) Among other Cartesian ambitions set for philosophy, Peirce renounces the necessity and need for establishing an ultimate foundation for philosophy. However, one should not neglect what is at stake in Peirce’s renunciation. That can be reduced to the unity of a single method, namely, the geometrically deductive procedure assigned to philosophy. Also, having a more natural, or in a more Heideggerian



pragmatic maxim, is meant to discover the *meaning* of a theoretical statement, and not the *truth* of that statement. Another point deserving attention in Peirce's both early and late formulations of the pragmatic maxim is that "the effects," or "conceivable practical bearings" of a conception (to combine the early and late formulations in one phrase) is not the effects that follow from *belief* in that conception. Rather, the meaning of that conception is to derive its ultimate meaning from those practical bearings or effects that we expect the *object* of that conception to have. That expectation is different from possible effects that may happen after endorsing that conception. Peirce's pragmatic maxim concerns objective bearings or effects of a conception and as we will see that turns out, in James's construal, to be the subjective or formal effects of having belief in a conception. There is an immense hiatus between interpreting effects of a conception objectively or subjectively, because only in James's construal does there appear room for interpreting the true as being "good" in the manner of belief. Peirce's metaphysical characterization of his pragmatic maxim incorporates an imperative *apodosis* that relates tightly to someone's probable action. This imperative, however, relies on expected particular objective effects of a certain conceptions. Accordingly, Peirce's pragmatic maxim is based on an objective "transcript" of reality, in which you cannot expect whatever effect you may demand from any particular conception. We will see in the following if that objective dimension of Peirce's pragmatic maxim can still be discerned in James's discussion of what pragmatism means for him.

It is common to designate the Jamesian version of pragmatism as less nuanced, compared to Peirce's but the most well-known formulation of the functional attitude toward knowledge, or rather, toward truth, belongs to William James and his pragmatism. Henry Jackman meticulously addresses the differences between Peirce's account of the pragmatic maxim and James's, especially in dialogue with the analytic tradition.<sup>16</sup> However, I have to tackle the same problematic from a different angle.

For James, pragmatism is both a method of clarification for the ultimate significance of philosophical terms and also a theory of what truth ultimately consists in. In the chapter entitled "What Pragmatism Means" from his *Pragmatism*, James addresses the complex relation between the true and the good. According to the pragmatic maxim, the significance of any term concerns "what conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involve."<sup>17</sup> Applied to the conception of truth, the gist of what a metaphysician means by truth, James contends, is that specific role truth plays in *connecting* rather disparate phenomena of experience: "Purely objective truth,

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jargon, a more *factual* view toward doubt, instead of apodicticity or the absolute evidence of belief, Peirce among other pragmatists, vouches for a more empirical and pragmatic/experimental justification of belief. Indeed, the metaphor of foundation goes back to a logical *precedence* among different bits of knowledge. As a logician, Peirce was well aware that "the very first lesson that we have a right to demand that logic shall teach us is, how to make our ideas clear; and a most important one it is, depreciated only by minds who stand in need of it. To know what we think, to be masters of our own meaning, will make a solid *foundation* for great and weighty thought." (Peirce, "How to Ideas," 251, my italics) Evidently, for him pragmatic maxim is meant to lead to that "foundation" of meaning.

16) Henry Jackman, "Meaning Elasticity," 274–84. Despite his subtle treatment of the difference between respective formulations of the pragmatic maxim in Peirce and James, what is missing in his paper is that Jackman does not address Peirce's later amended proposal in his Harvard lectures.

17) James, "Pragmatism," 46–47. In his reformulation of the pragmatic maxim in Harvard lectures Peirce claims:

A conception, that is, the rational purport of a word or other expression, lies exclusively in its conceivable bearing upon the conduct of life; so that, since obviously nothing that might not result from experiment can have any direct bearing upon conduct, if one can define accurately all the conceivable experimental phenomena which the affirmation or denial of a concept could imply, one will have therein a complete definition of the concept, and there is absolutely nothing more in it. (Peirce, "Pragmatism," 273)

In this lecture before proposing his formulation of the pragmatic maxim, Peirce provides a detailed account of what he calls the "experimental attitude." He needs to emphasize the experimental attitude to sharpen his conception of "practical bearings" upon the conduct of life and distinguish it from James's construal of the maxim.

truth in whose establishment the function of giving human satisfaction in marrying previous parts of experience with newer parts played no role whatever, is nowhere to be found. The reasons why we call things true is the reason why they *are* true, for 'to be true' *means* only to perform this marriage-function."<sup>18</sup>

For James, the practical *effect* of truth is a certain kind of human *satisfaction* in the process of integrating or marrying new and previous parts of experience.<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, this marriage function is at the service of finding our way around and simplifying the complex, bewildering, and chaotic environment in which we find ourselves. The latter characterization, however, should not be interpreted overtly as purely subjective, because that "simplification" and "marriage function" must come to terms with the way things function *in reality*.

In the vocabulary adopted in the previous section, the *validity* of our knowledge is intrinsically tied to the *value* of knowledge in unifying different parts of our experience. The latter unification can only be adequately measured against the *use* of the unified in the context of the manipulation and well-being of the agent of knowing. As James maintains, "No theory is absolutely a transcript of reality, but that any one of them may from some point of view be *useful*. Their great use is to summarize old facts and to lead to new ones. They are only a man-made language, a conceptual shorthand someone calls them, in which we write our reports of nature; and languages, as is well known, tolerate much choice of expression and many dialects."<sup>20</sup>

We should be cautious, though, in identifying the true with the good, or the useful. This is urgent in order to shun absurd results as the following: whatever suits our living or is profitable would be counted as true. This seems to be the indispensable implication of James' claim that pure objectivity must be accompanied by the value of knowledge in its unifying function of the different parts of our knowledge. Nonetheless, it is expedient, to resist such an absurd reduction, especially because the true is only a very special *kind* of usefulness: "The true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good, in the way of belief, and good too, for definite, assignable reasons."<sup>21</sup> Being good to such "assignable reasons" is, in the last analysis, a certain *aptitude* in establishing connections and in unifying the disarray of things to the benefit of our manipulation and employment for the sake of our prosperity:

Surely you must admit this, that if there were *no* good for life in true ideas, or if the knowledge of them were positively disadvantageous and false ideas the only useful ones, then the current notion that truth is divine and precious, and its pursuit a duty, could never have grown up or become a dogma. In a world like that, our duty would be to *shun* truth, rather. But in this world, just as certain foods are not only agreeable to our taste, but good for our teeth, our stomach, and our tissues; so certain ideas are not only agreeable to think about, or agreeable as supporting other ideas that we are fond of, but they are also helpful in life's practical struggles.<sup>22</sup>

There is no more efficient way to show the inextricable connection between the good and the true than this thought experiment James suggests. Although the question of the relative value of truth threatens the abso-

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18) James, "Pragmatism," 64.

19) Henry Jackman underlines a remarkable aspect of the difference between Peirce's and James's as being about James's emphasis on the knower's *belief* about rather than the truth of meaning: "Peirce understands a proposition's meaning in terms of what follows from its *truth*, while James understands a proposition's meaning in terms of what follows from its being believed," (Jackman, "Meaning Elasticity," 277).

20) James, "Pragmatism," 57, italicized for emphasis.

21) *Ibid.*, 76.

22) *Ibid.*



lute value or validity of truth; as depicted by the epistemological standpoint, it seems quite valid and revealing especially in relation to the fundamental value of knowledge in general and truth in particular. Truth must be good and agreeable to the way human beings are made or attuned. The only aim sought for its own sake with no further need for other justifications is happiness. The question as to why we are to pursue happiness seems ridiculous, because happiness at least *seems* to *suit* our way of being. However, every moral man knows that something's being pleasurable is no justification for its being morally right. Aside from this, James' discussion about the meaning of truth is a matter of theoretical knowledge.

Is the latter viewpoint incompatible with the epistemological viewpoint tied to securing the absolute value or intrinsic validity of knowledge? The point of departure for my discussion is that the relevance of truth to human prosperity is far from evident and is worth investigating.

### Another Blow from the Epistemological Standpoint: Edmund Husserl

In seeking the most foundational principle in the hierarchy of evidence with regard to the edifice of human knowledge, phenomenology lays claim to the most secure point of departure for phenomenological investigations. In section six of his *Cartesian Meditations*, that secure starting point is what Husserl calls absolute certainty or *apodicticity*. By this, Husserl aims at a certain perfection or adequacy of evidence that is not merely related to the reduction of the expectant or currently unfulfilled components of experience to the attendant and fulfilled ones. For the purported adequacy of all constitutive components of the evidence, we have not yet arrived at apodictic evidence. Even more, apodicticity operates on a different plane than that of the adequacy or completeness of the evidence. This is so to such an extent that apodictic evidence may not be even adequate or complete. Every evidence is grasping of a certain being as *it itself*, whose reversal reverts that being to non-being. Accordingly, apodicticity has to do with the logical inconceivability of such a reversal. Such an apodicticity does not accompany the natural evidence of the world. However, by manipulating or "reducing" the direction of consciousness through Cartesian doubt or, in its Husserlian reworking in the form of phenomenological reduction, such apodictic evidence becomes comprehensible.<sup>23</sup>

Apart from all the revisions implemented by Husserl as concerning a Cartesian project of securing reliable knowledge, Husserl's phenomenology remains, like that of Descartes, a foundationalist project which seeks the ultimate source, foundation, or *arche* of knowledge. Even if not conceivable or attainable at the beginning, Husserl's principal orientation is towards clarification with the aim of attaining higher levels of completeness or adequacy of evidence.

In a pragmatic conception of philosophy, the Cartesian and foundationalist point of departure is called into question. The ambition of attaining the most *primordial* principle in phenomenology, or the most evident principle in the manner of apodicticity, is also strictly tied to the epistemological character of the phenomenological enterprise, at least in its Husserlian formulation. This brings us again to the confrontation of the so-called epistemological standpoint (in the strict sense that has been elaborated in this paper), with another standpoint which can be formulated as pragmatic. Based on the pragmatic maxim, the cash value of every theoretical evidence (to borrow a Cartesian verbiage), is dependent on the *practical* difference that piece of theoretical knowledge makes in the world. In other words, in such a confrontation, the foundational evidence of knowledge cannot be ultimate, due to the non-ultimate character of even the most apodictic piece of theoretical knowledge. One of the most eloquent expressions of a pragmatic analysis of the Greek *theoreia* can be found in John Dewey's *magnum opus: Experience and Nature*.

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23) Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, §6, 14–16.

### John Dewey's Pragmatic Portrayal of the Greek Metaphysics

In chapter four of his *Experience and Nature*, Dewey reinterprets an apparently metaphysical distinction in Greek metaphysics between objects. This interpretation is suggestive for our purpose in this paper, which is to see whether theoretical arsenal in philosophy can be adequately, determined based on itself, or is to be metaphorically borrowed from what does not belong originally to that arsenal.

In Dewey's account of the Greek metaphysics, there are on the one hand, objects consummatory and final in fine arts and, on the other, things partial and instrumental in industrial arts. The latter are not immediately enjoyed and not aesthetically contemplated, as is the case in fine arts. In industrial arts, things are encountered in their sequential bonds as *signs* and *instruments*. As Dewey construes ancient Greek metaphysics, for the Greeks, "things have potentialities or are instrumental because they are not Being, but rather Being in process of becoming. They lend themselves to operative connections that fulfill them because they are not themselves Real in an adequate sense."<sup>24</sup> Consequently, the value ascribed to theoretical knowledge in Greek metaphysics as the exemplary form of knowledge is the correlate of the identification of instrumentality with being subservient and slavish:

The social division into a laboring class and a leisure class, between industry and esthetic contemplation, became a metaphysical division into things which are mere means and things which are ends. Means are menial, subservient, slavish; and ends liberal and final; things as means testify to inherent defect, to dependence, while ends testify to independent and intrinsically self-sufficing being. Hence the former can never be *known* in themselves but only in their subordination to objects that are final, while the latter can be known in and through themselves by self-enclosed reason. Thus, the identification of knowledge with esthetic contemplation and the exclusion from science of trial, work, manipulation and administration of things, comes full circle.<sup>25</sup>

According to this crucial and difficult passage, the characterization of the object of knowledge with final and self-sufficing being, and of the corollary knowledge with aesthetic contemplation, is not itself an ultimate and self-evident characterization of knowledge and its proper object. Rather, those derive from the social division of the Greek society and the distribution of labor among its members. Put differently, the priority and value assigned to aesthetic contemplative observation as opposed to the manipulative or administrative and experimental knowledge is nothing self-evident *by itself*. That priority is not and indeed *cannot* be decided by theoretical knowledge in an argumentative fashion, because it must be presupposed for the theoretical knowledge to embark on its task. Such a pragmatic decision borrowed from another non-cognitive realm (that was different in ancient times from that in the modern period), belongs to that exclusive territory that lies beyond argumentative settling. It resides in the realm proper to Blumenberg's metaphorology due to the practical borrowing and *the metaphorical transference* from a certain social order to another order, namely, the order of knowledge.

Assessed by the criterion of the epistemological standpoint, that is, the inherent and absolute value or the validity of knowledge, this latter pragmatic perspective in settling what theoretical knowledge ought to be is far from being based on primordial or apodictic evidence. Rather this pragmatic viewpoint delves into a practical or pragmatic decision that is not thematically articulated, especially in the period of the dominion of the decision. However, does the strict criterion of epistemological standpoint tolerate a pragmatic characterization? In

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24) Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 102.

25) *Ibid.*

other words, is the pragmatic and metaphorological nature of the “ultimate” principles of theoretical knowledge to be known by the same knowledge with the same principal characteristic: namely, being pragmatically apt, good, or useful just for the sake of extrinsic components of knowledge? Put differently, by what right can such a pragmatic designation be theoretically established? Or to what practical effect a theoretical designation such as in the Greek metaphysics, like that ventured by Dewey, is to be reduced? The self-referential character of all knowledge-claims is another indication of what knowledge is condemned to capture as its object.

### Dewey’s Attack on Intellectualism

In this chapter I do not undertake the elaboration of Dewey’s developing theory of truth in his long career, especially after his *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*. For the central theme of this paper, (namely, the absolute or pragmatic establishment of philosophy), we need to investigate his early views on the then current intellectualism of people like F. H. Bradley. Several papers after his publication of *Studies in Logical Theory*<sup>26</sup> in 1902 are devoted to this polemic.

In his 1907 article published in *Mind* “The Intellectualist Criterion of Truth,” Dewey assesses F. H. Bradley’s *Appearance and Reality*. Bradley’s influence, Dewey contends, is “towards disintegration of intellectualism of the epistemological type, and towards the substitution of a philosophy of experience.”<sup>27</sup> For Dewey and other pragmatists like James, intellectualism is the stigma of a method of defining reality, in which knowledge innocently mirrors how reality is in a static way, apart from knowers’ contribution to the *truth* of their knowledge. As Dewey himself puts it:

In the assertion ... that the great vice of philosophy is an arbitrary “intellectualism,” there is no slight cast upon intelligence and reason. By “intellectualism” as an indictment is meant the theory *that all experiencing is a mode of knowing*, and that all subject-matter, all nature, is, in principle, to be reduced and transformed till it is defined in terms identical with the characteristics presented by refined objects of science as such. The assumption of “intellectualism” goes contrary to the facts of what is primarily experienced. For things are objects to be treated, used, acted upon and with, enjoyed and endured, even more than things to be known. They are things *had* before they are things cognized.<sup>28</sup>

As he claims in this passage, overcoming intellectualism is a way of redeeming experience from the shackles of objective “refined” knowledge. Moreover, that indictment goes as deep as cognition in general as opposed to things simply had in experience. The “truth” of things is not captured cognitively, because cognition is a very specific and purposively limited form of experience.

Dewey later adds another nuance in his definition of intellectualism in his *Quest for Certainty*: “By [intellectualism] is meant something which may also be termed the ubiquity of knowledge as a measure of reality. Of the older philosophies, framed before experimental knowing had made any significant progress, it may be said that they made a definite separation between the world in which man thinks and knows and the world in which he lives and acts.”<sup>29</sup>

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26) Dewey, *Logical Theory*, 293–378.

27) Dewey, “Intellectualist Criterion,” 50.

28) Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 28, italicized for emphasis.

29) Dewey, *Quest for Certainty*, 232–33.

This nuance concerns the relation of the intellectualist type of philosophy and the experimental type and the contribution of the knower. This contribution is the knower's action instructed by the anticipated *experimental effect* of that piece of knowledge under consideration. Again, like Peirce, the emphasis is on the experimental feature of the truth sought by pragmatism. "The ubiquity of knowledge as a measure of reality" has a very special outcome: since knowledge is equated with the theoretical type, the world we encounter in our everyday dealings is deprived of any knowledge content. That resulting ubiquity of knowledge remains, after all, entrapped in the sole theoretical engagement of the knower, which does not constitute the majority of the pre-occupations of the knower.

Having seen the role of the knower in the process of knowledge, Dewey is impelled to rethink the very idea of truth. For Dewey (as like James):

Truth is a character which belongs to a meaning so far as tested through action that carries it to successful completion. In this case, to make an idea true is to modify and transform it until it reaches this successful outcome: until it initiates a mode of response which in its issue realizes its claim to be the method of harmonizing the discrepancies of a given situation.<sup>30</sup>

According to this passage, truth is a *function* of some ideas equivalent to "harmonizing the discrepancies of a given situation." Apart from that function, truth does not have any other meaning, pragmatically speaking. In other words, the truth of ideas can only be ascertained by fulfilling that function in our experience and their meaning *is* what occasions that function. Instead, from an intellectualist perspective, the meaning of reality and its essential framework is what is depicted through knowledge, stripped of all the emotional and volitional aspects of the knower. The curious occasion in the case of the intellectualist is that for them "Reality is an 'absolute experience' of which the intellectual is simply one partial and transmuted moment. Yet this reality is attained unto, in philosophic method, by exclusive emphasis upon the intellectual aspect of present experience and by systematic exclusion of exactly the emotional, volitional features which with respect to content are insisted upon!"<sup>31</sup> According to Dewey though, "from every point of view knowledge operates under conditions, (and these not externally imposed but inherent in its own nature as judgment) that render it incapable of realizing its aim of complete union of existence and meaning."<sup>32</sup> That failure of the union between existence and meaning occurred by the very intrinsic nature of judgment, which concentrates existence in the subject part of the judgment, and banishes all meaning which is supposed to be attributed to the predicate part of the judgment. "Truth" is the very outcome of the dissection of the pre-existing union of meaning and existence in things for the sake of knowledge and its underlying judgment. By securing an extra dimension of experience which is not of knowing, Dewey redeems himself from the commitments of an absolute idealist like Hegel.

The existence of that extra dimension of experience beyond the reach of knowledge renders the project of giving philosophy *absolute* foundations impossible, because the absolute character of that activity *becomes* absolute only under the conditions *intrinsic* to knowledge, that is, a very specific kind of experience at the service of the agent of knowing. Accordingly, the whole problematic of the foundation of philosophy becomes the business of knowledge, but knowledge cannot exhaust everything that is to experience. Henceforth, knowledge cannot provide the ultimate foundation of experience.

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30) Dewey, "Intellectualist Criterion," 67.

31) Ibid., 51. Intellectualism is close to what I called, in company with Dilthey, the epistemological standpoint, but they are not the same indictment. But a thorough examination of their relation is beyond the task of this paper.

32) Ibid., 53.

### The Epistemological Standpoint Suffers from an “Ego-centric Predicament”

In a short remark in only five pages entitled “Some Implications of Anti-intellectualism,”<sup>33</sup> Dewey pushes the matter to the extreme by adopting different takes on anti-intellectualism, discriminating the latter’s three different interpretations. By elucidating these subtly diverse renderings, Dewey is capable to raise his instrumentalist anti-intellectualism to a level that does not fall prey to what we referred to, following Dilthey, as the epistemological standpoint.

As a distinct source of knowledge, if the emphasis is laid on intellect in contradistinction to sensation, or as providing the main contents of knowledge, anti-intellectualism amounts to an epistemological doctrine and the ultimate source of *episteme*. As Dewey eloquently puts it, “It may hold that knowledge is the true access to existence, and that things *are* what they are known to be.”<sup>34</sup> Following that diagnosis, the anti-intellectualist of this kind proceeds to incorporate other modes of relation to the world such as feeling, volition, and other non-logical relations somehow into the constitution of reality. This is so, because those other modes of relation are *indicative* and *revealing* with respect to reality. The distance of those modes of relation from what is rational or logical enables these latter sorts of anti-intellectualists to emphasize more on the ultimate arrival of knowledge at the particular, and the givens of particular situations of knowledge. This is so, because after all, theoretical knowledge belongs to universals.

However, interpreted more radically, anti-intellectualism does not merely dispute the main provider of the ingredients of knowledge, but concerns itself with an ill-suited task and capacity of knowledge as to be the ultimate criterion of how Being is supposed to be. Yet, the former versions of anti-intellectualism do not sufficiently catch sight of the ultimate source of the predicament, that same predicament of the absolute anchoring of knowledge, a standpoint which was appealed to by Dilthey (among others). In this latter interpretation, Dewey maintains, “The vice of intellectualism from this standpoint is not in making of logical relations and functions in and for knowledge, but in a false abstraction of knowledge (and the logical) from its working context.”<sup>35</sup> More succinctly, the knowledge standpoint is not yet absolute by being merely abstract and by not considering the context out of which knowledge has its proper functions. This latter contextualization of the absolute claim of knowledge “render[s] nugatory any wholesale inquiries into the nature of Being.”<sup>36</sup> The most ultimate blow, in this rather prolonged debate, is in my estimation (and one which Dewey appeals to), is what Perry calls “the egocentric predicament.”<sup>37</sup> As Dewey articulately reinterprets it,<sup>38</sup>

From the intellectualistic point of view, the self that is implicated in every knowledge event has to be conceived as a term of the knowledge relation; the intellectual function being final and inclusive, there is no other way of disposing of it. Hence the self, the ego, the subject, is at once identified with “mind” or “consciousness” (or whatever), and the latter is treated as one of the two correla-

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33) Dewey, “Anti-intellectualism,” 86–90.

34) Ibid., 86–87.

35) Ibid., 88.

36) Ibid., 88–89.

37) Perry, “Ego-centric Predicament,” 5–14.

38) Though it might be regarded as a deviation, the gist of Perry’s argument lies somewhere else in my estimation: the ego-centric predicament indicates the indispensable character of the relation of anything known to the knowing relation to the I. But that predicament does not show an ontological hindrance, but only the futility of the method adopted to solve the problem. Oddly enough, I could hardly find any trace of Dewey’s reconstruction of Perry’s argument in Perry’s original proposal.



tive constituents of knowledge, the object known being the other. Then the whole brood of “epistemological” problems swarms.<sup>39</sup>

The decisive conflation occurs, when the concrete agent of knowing – which is *factically* or empirically not the abstract and intrinsic term of knowledge – is taken to be what completes the circle of the knowing and known relation. Dewey’s remedy for this predicament deserves full citation *ad verbatim*:

Sticking to the facts of empirical situations, the ego, subject, self is seen, however, to be simply the agent that undertakes and is responsible for the cognitive event. The relation in question is that of *an agent to its act*, not that of one of the two terms of knowledge to the other term. Difficulties may be attached to the proper conceiving of the relations of agent and act; but at all events they are specific, concrete difficulties of the same sort that manifest themselves in the consideration of any function of any living organism.<sup>40</sup>

By appealing to a distinction of a very peculiar sort, Dewey manages to escape from the allegedly indispensable trap of the epistemological standpoint. Two terms intrinsic to any knowledge conceivable have a *normative* value and cannot be delineated in a descriptive fashion. But that normative characterization of how knowledge ought to be (if it is to be knowledge at all), does not determine *how* an agent – heed the evocation of *indefinite* article of “an agent” – *factically* behaves and acts in a *given situation*. This latter act, even though being cognitive in nature, is to be empirically described in a concrete fashion. In other words, the ego-centric problematic or “predicament” arises when the normative vocabulary of the terms of knowledge as such is conflated with the empirical ego that cannot be by any means the center of knowledge.

## Conclusion

The irremediable conflict in the way of grounding knowledge lies in the following *aporia*: on the one hand, no epistemological grounding can be ultimate as it regards the agent of knowing. Pragmatically formulated, knowledge is no mere transcript of reality and does functionally attune the agent of knowing to find her way around the world, and that function remains extrinsic to the epistemological norms divided between “true” or “false.” Also, the inherent value of theoretical knowledge rests implicitly on some practical and metaphorological scaffolding that is not to be settled theoretically. On the other hand, regarded from what Dilthey characterized as the epistemological standpoint, every pragmatic and functional designation of knowledge is doomed to be self-defeating, since in that case the very business of knowledge would be subordinated to the function of knowledge to be announced. If the intrinsic function is to be declared, that very declaration cannot be made, thanks to the circular trap or to the functional character of that very declaration. Rather, that declaration must be only a truthful characterization of what knowledge consists in, apart from serving any other extrinsic function or value. Accordingly, the issue of grounding knowledge either pragmatically or absolutely cannot be decided in a theoretical and argumentative fashion. Instead, it is practically and implicitly decided in an antinomian fashion.

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39) Ibid., 89–90.

40) Ibid., 90.



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