

## THE STORY OF PRAGMATISM\*

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### Abstract

This paper examines the first of William James' Lowell lectures, the lectures that became his famous book *Pragmatism; A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*, and particularly the way in which that lecture connects the idea of philosophy as a way of life with the important role of temperament in forming philosophical systems. The way in which Dewey left Idealism to become James' successor as the leader of the pragmatist movement is then recounted, and the way in which Dewey was already a philosopher of education in his idealist period is emphasized. The essay closes by explaining how neither James nor Dewey were «Rortian relativists», and by emphasizing James' realism.

**Key words:** James, Dewey, philosophy as a way of life, role of temperament, failings of rationalism. Dewey as James' successor, Dewey as philosopher of education, realism, idealism, relativism.

In Boston, in November and December of 1906, William James delivered the Lowell Lectures which were published the following year under the title, *Pragmatism: a New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*. The opening Lowell lecture bears the dry title, «The present dilemma in philosophy». But that lecture is anything but dry; considered on its literary merits alone, it must surely be one of the finest examples of philosophical prose written in this country. And its contents are certainly provocative. Yet it has received remarkably little discussion; even James's most hostile critics, who might expect to be infuriated by it, generally pass over it in silence. I shall speculate about why this is the case.

But first let us say how this Lowell lecture relates to my reasons for being interested in James as a philosopher today. It is clear to everyone who has read James that he regards philosophy as something terribly important. When philosophy first separated

\*This paper originated as one of three David Ross Boyd Lectures at the University of Oklahoma, October 24, 2005. Although this lecture, the first of the three, is titled «The Story of Pragmatism», it might have been titled «The Story of James and Dewey.» because I did not talk about the third of the great «classical pragmatists», Charles S. Peirce, until the second lecture.

itself off self-consciously from sophistry one of its central objectives was to provide rational guidance on how to live. That objective –which is James’s objective– remained characteristic of philosophy for many centuries. It is beautifully expressed in the following passage from Philo Judaeus:

«Every person –whether Greek or Barbarian– who is in training for wisdom, leading a blameless, irreproachable life, chooses neither to commit injustice nor return it unto others, but to avoid the company of busybodies, and hold in contempt the places where they spend their time –courts, councils, marketplaces, assemblies– in short, every kind of meeting of thoughtless people. As their goal is a life of peace and serenity, they contemplate nature and everything found within her: they attentively explore the earth, the sea, the air, the sky, and every nature found therein.....Such people consider the world as their city, and its citizens are the companions of wisdom; they have received their civic rights from virtue, which has been entrusted with presiding over the universal commonwealth. Thus, filled with every excellence, they are accustomed no longer to take account of physical discomforts or exterior evils, and they train themselves to be indifferent to indifferent things; they are armed against both pleasures and desires, and, in short, they always strive to keep themselves above passion..... It is obvious that people such as these, who find their joy in virtue, celebrate a festival their whole life long. To be sure, there is only a small number of such people; they are like embers of wisdom kept smoldering in our cities, so that virtue may not be altogether snuffed out and disappear from our race. But if only people everywhere felt the same way as this small number, and became as nature meant for them to be: blameless, irreproachable, and lovers of wisdom, rejoicing in the beautiful because it is beautiful, and considering that there is no other good besides it.... then our cities would be brimful of happiness. They would know nothing of the things that cause grief and fear, but would be so filled with the causes of joy and well being that there would not be a single moment in which they would not lead a life full of joyful laughter; indeed the whole cycle of the year would be a festival for them.»<sup>1</sup>

Commenting on this passage in a remarkable book on just this aspect of philosophy, Pierre Hadot writes:

«In this passage from Philo of Alexandria, inspired by Stoicism, one of the fundamental aspects of philosophy in the Hellenistic and Roman eras comes clearly to the forefront. During this period, philosophy was a way of life. This is not only to say that it was a specific type of moral conduct; we can easily see the role played in the passage from Philo by the contemplation of nature. Rather, it means that philosophy was a mode of existing-in-the-world, which had to be practiced at each instant, and the goal of which was to transform the whole of an individual’s life.

<sup>1</sup> Philo Judaeus, *On the Special Laws*, 2, 44-8, quoted in Pierre Hadot, Arnold Davidson (ed), *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1995, pp. 264-265.

«For the ancients, the mere word *philo-sophia* –the love of wisdom– was enough to express that conception of philosophy. In the *Symposium*, Plato had shown that Socrates, symbol of the philosopher, could be identified with Eros, the son of Poros (expedience) and of Penia (poverty). Eros lacked wisdom, but he did know how to acquire it. Philosophy thus took on the form of an exercise of the thought, will, and the totality of one's being, the goal of which was to achieve a state practically inaccessible to mankind: wisdom. Philosophy was a method of spiritual progress which demanded a radical conversion and transformation of the individual's way of being.»<sup>2</sup>

William James was certainly not a Stoic, and he did not think that wisdom was practically inaccessible to mankind; but his aim, no less than that of Philo, was to change our way of life as well as our way of thinking. That is why he can begin his lectures with a tribute to a thinker whose outlook in all other respects was diametrically opposed to his own: the Roman Catholic G. K. Chesterton. What Chesterton and James share is the conviction that philosophy «affects matters»; as Chesterton puts it, «the question is not whether [philosophy] affects matters, but whether in the long run anything else affects them.»

Perhaps here we have one of the reasons why this lecture has received so little discussion. In James's own time, «philosopher» was coming to imply «professor», and as James says, «Whatever universe a professor believes in must at any rate be a universe that lends itself to lengthy discourse.»<sup>3</sup> Of course, James does not actually say that the professor is interested in lengthy discourse and not in how people should live, but very often that is also the case. For James, the priorities are quite different; he is not afraid of technical argument, but his audience is decidedly not the professoriat. When he writes that,

«Philosophy is at once the most sublime and the most trivial of human pursuits. It 'bakes no bread' as has been said, but it can inspire our souls with courage; and repugnant as its manners, its doubting and challenging, its quibbling and dialectics, often are to common people, no one of us can get along without the far-flashing beams of light it sends over the world's perspectives,»<sup>4</sup> he is addressing all of us. As William James Earle very well put it, «James addressed himself to the people, not to other philosophers, and he listened to the people to find out what life meant to them. He respected not so much their common sense as their common feelings and hopes and would not allow his philosophy to dismiss cavalierly that which figured largely in the experiences of men.»<sup>5</sup> In part, the professoriat has responded by discussing every aspect of James's thought *except* his conception of what philosophy is all about!

<sup>2</sup> *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, p. 265.

<sup>3</sup> PMT [*Pragmatism and the Meaning of Truth*, Harvard], p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> PMT pp. 10-11.

<sup>5</sup> «James, William», in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Macmillan, New York, 1967, volume 4, p. 241.

But there is a second reason for the virtual silence of James's critics about Lecture I. What makes this lecture so provocative is its central thesis: that philosophy is, in the end, a matter of temperament. If that thesis has not had the scorn poured upon it that has been poured upon, say, James's theory of truth—a theory that has been badly misrepresented<sup>6</sup>—that is, perhaps, because it would be a little embarrassing to reply: «No, James: philosophy is just a matter of rational argument.» After all, if that is all philosophy is, it is a little mysterious why philosophical disagreement should continue for so long! It is, in the end, undeniable that temperament must play a large role in the acceptance of philosophical views. One might, of course, say that that is «true but irrelevant»; but that is a bit dangerous. (A little bit like saying, «My views are dictated by reason itself; we only have to appeal to temperament and similar psychological factors to explain why others are not able to see that my views are the only reasonable ones.») Safer to ignore this whole question!

But James's talk of «temperament» must not be misunderstood (which is probably what has happened). James is not saying that philosophy is just a matter of subjective choice and that is the end of the matter. James also believes that there are better and worse temperaments. Temperaments too can be criticized. But such criticism will not change people at once; to affect a change in the «temper of a time» is a long slow process. And it is in that sort of process that James is interested.

## The threat of scientism and the blindness of rationalism

What concerns James, as it has concerned many other thinkers in the last two centuries, is the way in which the growth in our understanding of nature, the increase in the sophistication and power of our natural science, has led to a loss of confidence in human values. «For a hundred and fifty years past,» he writes, «the progress of science has seemed to mean the enlargement of the material universe and the diminution of man's importance. The result is what one may call the growth of naturalistic or positivistic feeling. Man is no law-giver to nature, he is an absorber. She it is who stands firm; he it is who must accommodate himself. Let him record truth, inhuman though it be, and submit to it! The romantic spontaneity and courage are gone, the vision is materialistic and depressing. Ideals appear as inert by-products of physiology; what is higher is explained by what is lower and treated forever as a case of 'nothing but'—nothing but something else of a quite inferior sort.»<sup>7</sup> James admires the natural sci-

<sup>6</sup>For a description of the misrepresentations see my «Comment on Robert Brandom's paper.» *Hilary Putnam: Pragmatism and Realism*, ed. Urszula M. Zeglen and James Conant, Routledge, London and New York, 2002, 59-65; for what I think is the right reading of James on truth, see my «James's Theory of Truth.» *The Cambridge Companion to William James*, ed. Ruth Anna Putnam, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, pp. 166-185.

<sup>7</sup>PMT p. 15.

ences, and particularly admires their love of fact, their rejection of all pretensions to a priori or transcendent sources of knowledge, their fallibilism and experimentalism, but is dismayed at the materialism and the skepticism which he sees accompanying those admirable traits in the case of those whom he calls «the tough-minded» (and whom we might today call the «scientific»).

At the same time, James finds no acceptable alternative in the writings of his Idealist contemporaries, who seem to him to «dwell on so high a level of abstraction that they never even try to come down.»<sup>8</sup> And he sees even less hope in traditional religion, which he describes as «fighting a slow retreat.»<sup>9</sup> James employs a remarkable literary device to dramatize the extent to which the combination of traditional theism and philosophical abstraction are, in his view, out of touch with the realities of life, with the problems that are really there for us to see, and for us to do something about.

James's device is to use as a hideous example, not a passage from one of his Idealist contemporaries nor a passage from a contemporary theologian, but a passage from Leibnitz's *Theodicy*<sup>10</sup> (as if to say: «this temperament is *always* this out of touch with reality».) In this passage, it is assumed by Leibnitz that the number of the eternally damned is infinitely greater, in our human case, than the number of the saved, and Leibnitz reconciles this with God's goodness by arguing, first, that the number of saved *on other planets* may be vastly greater than the number of damned, and, second, that it is «fitting» that «the damned draw to themselves ever new penalties by their continuing sins.» James's response is memorable:

«Leibnitz's feeble grasp of reality is too obvious to need comment from me. It is evident that no realistic image of the torment of a damned soul had ever approached the portals of his mind. Nor had it occurred to him that the smaller the number of 'samples' of the genus 'lost soul' whom God throws as a sop to the eternal fitness, the more unequivocally grounded is the glory of the blest. What he gives us is a cold literary exercise, whose cheerful substance even hell-fire does not warm.» And he adds, «And do not tell me that to show the shallowness of rationalist philosophizing I have had to go back to a shallow wigpated age. The optimism of present-day rationalism is just as shallow to the fact-loving mind.»<sup>11</sup>

But the fireworks are not over. To Leibnitz's cheerful theodicy, «whose substance even hell-fire does not warm», James juxtaposes a description of one of the real evils in our own big cities: John Corcoran, a clerk, loses his position through illness, and «during the period of idleness his scanty savings disappeared.» Corcoran is too weak

<sup>8</sup> PMT p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> PMT p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> For a full reference, see PMT p. 150

<sup>11</sup> PMT 20.

for snow-shoveling – the only employment available. «Thoroughly discouraged, Corcoran returned to his home late last night to find his wife and children without food and the notice of dispossession on the door.» The next morning he committed suicide by drinking carbolic acid. (One cannot help remarking that if the present tendency to limit assistance to the poor continues in the United States, such stories will again appear in our newspapers – if they print them.) And, as if to remind us that the spirit of Leibnitz is still with us, James then quotes Royce and Bradley to the effect that the Absolute (or «the eternal order») is richer for every evil in the temporal order.

The relation to our present-day concerns is clear. It is true that we no longer have around as optimistic a form of rationalism as the Absolute Idealism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to justify the sorts of evils James cites (although the celebration of «the free market» as the solution to all our problems does look suspiciously like a secularized version of Leibnitz's and Royce's and Bradley's theodicies.) But the idea that it is, in some sense, a «result of science» that objective values do not exist was very popular in twentieth century anglo-saxon metaphysics.<sup>12</sup> If James promises us an outlook that will enable us to hold on to both our love of fact and our confidence in our «human values», and to do so without so transcendentalizing those values that they become ineffectual, he is making an offer that it would be irresponsible not to examine with care. And that is precisely what he does offer us:

«I offer the oddly-named thing pragmatism as a philosophy that can satisfy both kinds of demand. It can remain religious like the rationalisms, but at the same time, like the empiricisms, it can preserve the richest intimacy with facts.»<sup>13</sup>

James speaks here of pragmatism as a philosophy that can «remain religious», and this reflects his lifelong hope for a satisfactory philosophy of religion, but that hope is not one that James was able to satisfy, in my judgment at least. The great *Varieties of Religious Experience* was «intimate with facts», but, as James was well aware, the lectures of which that book consists dealt, apart from a few brief pages at the end, with the psychology of religious belief, and the question of the justification of such belief is deliberately postponed. Only in his final work, *A Pluralistic Universe*, does James attempt it, and that work, far from being «intimate with facts», consists largely of declarations about what James finds personally satisfying, with what he wishes to believe. However, James interest in the lectures I have been describing was not only in the clash between the religious and the anti-religious temperaments, but just as much in our right to believe that there is an objective moral order.

Nowadays the issue is ubiquitous. Recently, for example, I read John Gardner's novel

<sup>12</sup> Among the important late twentieth century philosophers who attacked the idea of objectively correct value judgments one can list Simon Blackburn, Alan Gibbard, Gillbert Harman, John Mackie, and Bernard Williams; earlier, of course, there were the logical positivists and Charles Stevenson.

<sup>13</sup> PMT p. 20.

*October Light*. A charming device of that novel is that one of the two main characters, Sally, is reading a «trashy novel» pages of which are embedded in the main story. And in the «trashy novel» some of the characters (the evil ones, in fact) repeatedly tell us that we are nothing but machines. For example, a character called «Santisillia» says,

«Everything's got to be an accident unless you decide there are gods and devils. We do nothing. Peter Wagner's uncle plows out snow and saves freezing people by pure accident, because he's caught in the Sundayschool bag, or his father was a doctor, or God knows what. Captain Fist does all these ungodly things because it happened to rain all through his childhood, or his father was a drunk, or he's an XXY, or his blood's deficient in, say, riboflavin. So everybody's a machine. An automaton, unless you decide there are gods and devils and there's some magic way they can get to you.»<sup>14</sup>

So the problem that James pointed to when he wrote that to more and more people in the preceding hundred and fifty years «Ideals appear as inert by-products of physiology; what is higher is explained by what is lower and treated forever as a case of 'nothing but' – nothing but something else of a quite inferior sort» isn't a problem that concerns only religious people. And the philosopher who more than any other secularized James's philosophical project of constructing a philosophy which respects facts and respects science but also respects humanistic values was John Dewey, to whom I now turn.

## Dewey as a successor to James

Until 1903, James had thought of John Dewey primarily as an American representative of Hegelian Idealism, a sort of younger version of James's colleague Josiah Royce. But in a letter to James dated March 20, 1903<sup>15</sup>, Dewey writes that he is «sending you some proof from a forthcoming Decennial volume, *Studies in Logical Theory*, written by Moore, MacLennan Thompson Stuart, one or two others & myself as editor. You may not have time nor inclination to read, but I wish you would glance the pages (sic) enough to see whether you could stand for a dedication to yourself.» That fall James writes that «On returning from the country yesterday, one of the first things that greeted me was your logical studies, and the to me surprising words that close its preface. What have I done to merit such a tribute».<sup>16</sup> What Dewey had written was: «For both inspiration and the forging of the tools with which the writers have worked there is a

<sup>14</sup> John Gardner, *October Light*, Knopf, New York 1976, pp. 324-345.

<sup>15</sup> Collected in *The Correspondence of William James, vol. 10, 1903-March 1905*, pp. 214-215.

<sup>16</sup> Letter dated October 17, 1903 Collected in *The Correspondence of William James, vol. 10, 1903-March 1905*, p. 321.

pre-eminent obligation on the part of all of us to William James, of Harvard University, who, we hope, will accept this acknowledgment and this book as unworthy tokens of a regard and an admiration that are coequal.»<sup>17</sup> From this point on Dewey and James are firm philosophical allies, and after James's death Dewey emerges as unmistakably James's successor as leader of the pragmatist school, even if he distances himself from James's theological speculations.)

While Dewey's strategies for constructing and defending a world-view which respects both science and humanistic values are different from James's, they are for the most part ones of which James would have approved. A principal one is to attack a whole series of what Dewey regarded as untenable dualisms, including facts and values, the mind and the body, the mind and nature, and the individual and society—all dualisms that James had tried to subvert. And even more than James, Dewey was a «public intellectual» through and through—indeed, he was to become the most famous American public intellectual of his time. (An excellent description of this side of Dewey can be found in Cornell West's *The American Evasion of Philosophy*.) And above all, Dewey was an *educator*—still probably the most read educational philosopher. Indeed, Dewey wrote in 1916 that «if a theory makes no difference in educational endeavor, it must be artificial. The educational point of view enables one to envisage the philosophical problems where they arise and thrive, where they are at home, and where acceptance or rejection makes a difference in practice. If we are willing to conceive education as the process of forming fundamental dispositions, intellectual and emotional, philosophy may even be defined as *the general theory of education*.»<sup>18</sup>

To give you a taste of just how Dewey practiced education, I shall quote from «Teaching Ethics in the High School», an essay Dewey published in *Educational Review* in 1893.<sup>19</sup>

«Ethics, rightly conceived, is the statement of human relationships in action. In any right study of ethics, then, the pupil is not studying hard and fixed rules for conduct; he is studying the ways in which men are bound together in the complex relations of their interactions. He is not studying, in an introspective way, his own sentiments and moral attitudes; he is studying facts as objective as those of hydrostatics or the action of dynamos. They are subjective, too, but subjective in the sense that since the pupil himself is one who is bound up in the complex of action, the ethical relations have an interest and concern for him which no action of fluid or dynamo can possibly have. While this subject-matter should be taught from the lowest grade up, I shall choose an illustration of the mode of teaching it better adapted for high schools...

<sup>17</sup> *The Middle Works of John Dewey*, vol. 2, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, 1976, pp. 296-297.

<sup>18</sup> John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, McMillan, New York, 1916, p. 328.

<sup>19</sup> *The Early Works of John Dewey*, vol. 4, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, 1976, pp. 54-61. The passage I quote is on pp. 56-57.



«Let the teacher, at the outset, ask the pupils how they would decide, if a case of seeming misery were presented to them, *whether* to relieve it and, if so, *how* to relieve. This should be done without any preliminary dwelling upon the question as a 'moral' one; rather, it should be pointed out that the question is simply a practical one, and that ready-made moral considerations are to be put to one side. Above all, however, it should be made clear that the question is not what to do, *but how to decide what to do*. As this is the rock on which the method is likely to split, let me indicate the force of the distinction. Anyone who is acquainted with the methods in which the well organized Associated Charities do their work knows that they never discuss giving relief to someone on the basis of abstract principles of charity. They construct, from all the available data, an image of the case in question, and decide the particular question upon the basis of the needs and circumstances of that particular case. Now the whole object of the method I am bringing forward is not to get children arguing about the moral rules which should control the giving of charity—that is a relapse into the method of precepts against which I have protested. The object is to get them into the habit of mentally constructing some actual scene of human interaction, and of consulting them for instruction as to what to do. All the teacher's questions and suggestions, therefore, must be directed toward aiding the pupil in building up in his imagination such a scene. To allow them to discuss *what* to do, save as relative to the development of some case, is to fall back into the very moral abstractions we are trying to avoid. So when children begin to argue (as they are almost sure to do) about the merits of some proposed plan of action, care must be taken not to let them argue it in general, but to introduce their ideas into the case under consideration so as to add new features and phases. The whole point, in a word, is to keep the mental eye constantly upon some actual situation or interaction: to realize in the imagination this or that particular needy person making his demand upon some particular person. It follows from this, of course, that the line of illustration chosen, that of charity, has no value in itself; it is taken simply as a basis with reference to which to get the child to fix his mind carefully upon the typical aspects of human interaction. The thought which underlies the method is that if instruction in the theory of morals has any practical value it has such value as it aids in forming, in the mind of the person taught, the habit of realizing for himself and in himself the nature of the practical situations in which he will find himself placed. The end of the method, then, is *the formation of a sympathetic imagination for human relations in action*; this is the ideal which is substituted for training in moral rules, or for analysis of one's sentiments and attitudes in conduct.»

Dewey still considered himself an idealist, or more precisely an «experimental idealist» in 1893, although «generally favorable» references to James are beginning to appear in his writing,<sup>20</sup> but the passage I have quoted is one he would still have endorsed after his conversion to pragmatism, and it seems to me to express, if not to explain in detail, a great deal of his later philosophical outlook. In 1893, how-

<sup>20</sup> See the Introduction to *The Early Works of John Dewey*, vol. 4, by Wayne A. R. Leys, pp. iv-v.

ever, Dewey was still far from formulating that later outlook. The intuitions were, perhaps, already in place—certainly they are in place in this short article—but the later philosophical outlook as a whole, embracing, as it came to, aesthetics (*Art as Experience*), an account of human nature (*Human Nature and Conduct*), an account of scientific method in Dewey's generous sense of the term (*Logic, the Theory of Inquiry*), the 1908 *Ethics* and its revision in 1932, and much, much more almost eight million words, in fact! is obviously impossible to describe in detail in the present essay. But if one is going to focus on just a few aspects of Dewey's philosophy, it seems to me that that Dewey's suggestions as to how we might teach ethics to high school students, namely, the refusal to identify ethics with a fixed set of rules and principles, the insistence that ethical problems are practical problems, and the belief that reason and emotion can and should work together and inform one another in approaching all practical problems, are insights that we need today and that are, alas! still often neglected in professional moral philosophy.

### A few concluding remarks

This essay is titled «the story of pragmatism». If your mental image of pragmatism was formed by reading Richard Rorty, this essay may have surprised you: I did not say, for example, as Rorty does, that pragmatists think that «warrant [is] a sociological matter, to be ascertained by observing the reception of S's [the speaker's] statement by her peers.»<sup>21</sup> Warrant, or «warranted assertibility» is, as Rorty well knows, the central notion in Dewey's account of the rational formation of belief, the account in Dewey's *Logic: the Theory of Inquiry*, and nothing could have been farther from Dewey's mind than the idea that warranted assertibility is just a culture-relative matter, something to be ascertained by sociologists. I did not say, as Rorty also does, that for pragmatists calling some sentences true is just paying them a «compliment» because they «seem to be paying their way and fit in with other sentences which are doing so»<sup>22</sup> The pragmatists were *not* cultural relativists about «warrant» and they all insisted that there *was* such a thing as truth and such a thing as reality, and that truths have to agree with reality. The problem, as James, puts it in *Pragmatism*<sup>23</sup> is what «agreement» means, and he recognizes that that is a difficult metaphysical question. But that a sentence can be «paying its way» and not be *true* is something he repeatedly points out. In fact, the idea that satisfactions (which is what Rorty means

<sup>21</sup> Richard Rorty, «Putnam and the Relativist Menace», *Journal of Philosophy* 60:9, 1993, pp. 443-461. The quotation is from p. 449.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1982, p.xxv.

<sup>23</sup> See Lecture 6 in *Pragmatism*, «Pragmatism's Conception of Truth».

by a belief's «paying its way») are *sufficient* for truth is explicitly listed as a «misunderstanding» of pragmatism by James in *The Meaning of Truth*.<sup>24</sup> «Such anti-pragmatism as this,» James says, «seems to me a tissue of confusions. To begin with, when the pragmatist says 'indispensable,' it confounds this with 'sufficient'. The pragmatist calls satisfactions indispensable for truth-building, but I have everywhere called them insufficient unless reality be also incidentally led to. If the reality assumed were cancelled from the pragmatist's universe of discourse, he would straightway give the name falsehood to the beliefs remaining in spite of all their satisfactoriness.»

But the clearest statement of James's realism occurs in a letter to Dickinson Miller dated Aug. 5, 1906 in which James uses the following analogy:<sup>25</sup>

«The world *per se* may be likened to a cast of beans on a table. By themselves they spell nothing. An onlooker may grasp them as he likes. He may simply count them all and map them. He may select groups and name them capriciously, or name them to suit certain extrinsic purposes of his. What ever he does, so long as he *takes account* of them, his account is neither false nor irrelevant. If neither, why not call it true? It *fits* the beans-*minus* him and *expresses* the *total* fact, of beans-*plus*-him.»

In brief, the classical pragmatists may have had controversial theories about truth, reality, and warranted assertibility, but they took them seriously.

To sum up, I did not discuss James's or Dewey's views on truth and meaning in the present essay, except for denying that they are «Rortian». Instead, I focused on what I see as the central philosophical aim of these two great pragmatists, the aim of producing a philosophy which would do justice to our respect for science, and for fact in general, *as well as* our humanistic values and concerns (and, in James's case, our religious feelings). This does not mean that I want you to think of either James or Dewey as *merely* «public philosophers», and much less as «popular» philosophers. Rather, I see them as in the line of the great philosophers of the past who wanted philosophy to be simultaneously popular and technical, or better, to bring the best thought of their day, both inside and outside of technical philosophy, to bear on the question, «How to Live». I gave a brief account of the way in which Dewey left the Idealist movement which was so dominant in James's time (that is the movement led by followers of Hegel), and how he converted to pragmatism, becoming James's great ally and, eventually, James's successor. I emphasized that Dewey's achievements as an educator were closely linked with his philosophical achievements; indeed, for Dewey every philosophical

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Chapter VIII of *The Meaning of Truth*, «The Pragmatist Account of Truth and its Misunderstandings», James's reply to what he calls the fourth misunderstanding, 270 ff. The «fourth misunderstanding» is «No pragmatist can be a realist in his epistemology.»

<sup>25</sup> *The Letters of William James*, edited by his son Henry James, The Atlantic Monthly Press, Boston, 1920, Vol. II, p. 295.

idea worthy of respect makes *some* difference to education, and I gave an example of this from very early Dewey—«pre-pragmatist» Dewey, in fact—an 1893 article on teaching ethics to high school students.

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[rebut el 8 de novembre de 2010; acceptat per a la seva publicació el 18 de gener de 2011]