MONOGRAPHIC SECTION

# Pragmatism, Truth and the Ethics of Belief

## Presentation

Classical American pragmatists, such as Peirce, James and Dewey, made valuable contributions to our understanding of the notions of truth and belief. Some of their insights have been reworked by self-proclaimed (neo-)pragmatists such as Rorty, Putnam or Brandom, to name but a few. The papers included in this section on "Pragmatism, Truth and the Ethics of Belief" look back and forth, both to the seminal ideas put forward by classical pragmatists, and to their significance for contemporary philosophical discussion by authors within the pragmatist tradition, and beyond.

Susan Haack's paper "The meaning of pragmatism: the ethics of terminology and the language of philosophy" begins with a look at the early history of pragmatism, conceived of by its founding fathers as a new approach to philosophy, rather than a system defined by a set of theses. Haack explains that, for Peirce, an important part of this new approach meant making philosophy scientific, which involved in part a commitment to the idea that the meaning of a term grows as the empirical search for truth advances. The paper ends by drawing some lessons for the language and practice of philosophy today.

In "The landscapes of pragmatism", Simon Blackburn relates his previous defence of quasi-realism to contemporary (neo-)pragmatism. Thus, he distinguishes between a global and a local stance in the (neo-)pragmatist discussion of the semantic notions of truth and reference. Both stances agree in their rejection of global representationalism, according to which all types of thought and talk are to be understood in representational terms (including truth-makers and the like). The difference between the stances is that global (neo-)pragmatism defends anti-representationalism globally, in all areas of thought and talk; whereas local (neo-)pragmatism allows for a representationalist account of certain areas of discourse (namely, thought and talk about commonsense objects, and science), but promotes a different anthropological

or genealogical story of our discourse regarding modality, mathematics or normativity. Whithin this context, the core of the paper offers a defence of local (neo-)pragmatism.

Juan José Acero's paper "The Gettier problem and the demands of inquiry" explores the link between a popular theme in contemporary epistemology – namely, Gettier-type counterexamples to the traditional analysis of knowledge as justified true belief – and Dewey's view of logic. In particular, it argues that Gettier-type examples rest on a dubious use of certain principles of inference; dubious in so far as they are not properly based on the nature of the particular inquiry being conducted. Furthermore, it claims that Dewey's views provide an alternative account of the relation between inquiry and principles of inference that blocks the problems posed by Gettier-type examples.

María José Frápolli's "Relativism of truth *versus* dogmatism about truths: a false dichotomy" addresses the question as to the nature of truth, in the context provided by contemporary neo-pragmatist discussions of the topic. Thus, a common reaction to Rorty's views about truth is the charge of relativism, levelled on behalf of dogmatism. However, Frápolli argues that the debate between relativism and dogmatism is based on a false dichotomy, stemming from a poor understanding of the notion of truth. Thus, she goes on to defend Ramsey's insights on this matter – namely, that truth is a variable-like expression, whose function in language is closely related to the nature of assertion.

In "The fixation of superstitious beliefs", Konrad Talmont-Kaminski compares scientific beliefs with the different ways in which superstitious and religious beliefs are fixed. Building on the untestable nature of superstitious and religious beliefs, their meaning is explained in non-cognitive terms – that is, not in terms of truth, but rather in terms of the function performed by the practices associated to the beliefs in question.

Sergi Rosell focuses on the relation between belief and will in "A new rejection of doxastic voluntarism". As the title indicates, the paper is an attack on the idea that it is possible in some circumstances to form a belief in the absence of evidential reasons. Thus, it is argued first, that only evidential reasons are reasons for belief, to the effect that alleged cases of doxastic voluntarism do not in fact involve belief, but rather acceptance, an attitude with an appropriate motivational element; and second, that there is an immediate relation between possession of evidence and belief.

Veli Mitova's concern in "A quasi-pragmatist explanation of our ethics of belief" is the explanatory question as to why we have an ethics of belief; in

other words, why we accept norms as epistemic agents. She answers this question by exploring the conceptual link between intentions and epistemic norms; and argues that having intentions entails curiosity about the world, and curiosity about the world implies epistemic norms.

In "Beliefs: the will besieged by the evidence", Víctor Santamaría returns to the topic of believing at will, and defends the view that it is conceptually impossible to do so. But he takes the discussion further, by connecting it with cases of self-deception, in so far as the latter apparently involve the formation of beliefs at will. The paper ends by reviewing the different problems posed by such an account of self-deception.

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