

ON THE UNITY OF THE PRAGMATIC MOVEMENT

by Charles Morris

William James stressed in his *Pragmatism* that "the one" and "the many" are not contradictory categories by showing how the universe may be one in some respects and many in others. This insight applies to the pragmatic movement as well. To claim that there is an underlying unity in the movement is not to deny that there are important differences between the major pragmatists, differences in their problems, their emphases, and even in some of their doctrines. The pragmatic movement, like the universe, is "one" in certain respects and "many" in other respects. The present essay aims to investigate the sense in which American pragmatism is a unitary philosophic movement.

This task requires some guiding conception of what constitutes a philosophy. Since the term "philosophy" is today explicated in many, and often opposing, ways, it is necessary to choose some conception of philosophy to serve as a reference point for the analysis. A quite traditional point of view will be chosen: a philosophy, as a conception of the cosmos and man's place in it, includes a cosmology, a theory of value (axiology), and the acceptance of a certain method for conducting inquiry (epistemology and logic). Such a conception of philosophy is only one possible conception among many. Its choice is not, however, capricious, since it reflects a position, made explicit by the Stoics, which has dominated much of the history of philosophy. It will be claimed that the pragmatic movement has a cosmology, axiology, and methodology, and that these are integrated into a distinctive philosophical orientation through an actional or behavioral theory of signs (semiotic). The stated conception of philosophy provides the framework for the following analysis. The problem of the unity (or disunity) of the pragmatic movement would, of course, take different forms if other conceptions of philosophy were chosen.

I

We must now ask what is the distinctive focus of attention of the American pragmatists. That the basic focus is upon human action is

unmistakable: the pragmatists are centrally concerned with man as actor. They are not, however, concerned with human action in all its aspects. As philosophers they center their attention upon thinking man, and hence upon reflective or deliberative action. Their approach to thinking man has certain characteristic features.

There is a clear post-Darwinian evolutionary undertone, a sense for the living creature in its physical and social background. Evolutionary biology inevitably raised the question as to the nature of mind, thought, and intelligence when approached within the evolutionary framework—and pragmatism may in part be conceived as a sustained attempt to answer this question.

Secondly, the acceptance of the evolutionary framework went along with a rejection of the traditional mind-body dualism. The pragmatists were from the beginning anti-Cartesian, and constitute one phase of what Arthur Lovejoy called the "revolt against dualism." The tendency to think of mentality as a form of action increasingly dominated their thinking. Finally, there is in all the pragmatists a great respect for scientific method, and the belief that philosophy was to align itself as far as possible with the scientific enterprise; even if the task of philosophy was not to be identified with that of science, it was not to be conceived in opposition to science.

The pragmatists' account of reflective human action was at the level of ordinary observation and was not based on experiment, but it was empirical in intent and direction. It is for this reason that the pragmatic orientation helped prepare the way for later developments in the behavioral sciences.

II

So oriented, the inquiry into thinking man led directly to the central place of the topic of meaning within the movement. Charles Peirce wished that philosophy become observational and cumulative like science, and so in effect proposed that philosophers use language as the scientist does. The oft-quoted statement of Peirce must bear quotation again: For "the typical experimentalist, you will find that whatever assertion you may make to him, he will either understand as meaning that if a given prescription for an experiment can be and ever is carried out in act, an experience of a given description will result, or else he will see no sense at all in what you say." This is to affirm that to an experimental scientist a sign signifies that *if one acts in a certain kind of way a certain kind of experience will result.*

The emphasis here is on the intrinsic relation of action and experience, an emphasis which brings together the actional and the empirical orientations of the pragmatists. Now this formulation is not the full

story of Peirce's account of signs (or "meanings"), but it does form what might be called the "hard core" of the pragmatic position. It is accepted, with some differences of emphasis, by all the major pragmatists; and even where there are doubts as to the sufficiency of the "hard core" formulation, all the pragmatists accept the view that signs function within, and must be interpreted with respect to, action. This actional theory of signs (or "meanings"), this *behavioral semiotic*, is the central unifying principle of the pragmatic movement, and one of its most original contributions. This does not mean that such a behavioral semiotic was the historical starting point of the major pragmatists, nor that their interest in the relation of signs ("meanings") to action was everywhere the same, nor indeed that a sufficiently comprehensive behavioral semiotic was ever formulated by any of the main builders of the pragmatic movement.

Peirce expressed the conviction that the main features of his (and James') thought would have been substantially the same if the pragmatic maxim of meaning had never been formulated. His main logical and cosmological ideas preceded his papers on pragmatism. Pragmatism was for him essentially a formulation of the criterion for admissible hypotheses if one works within an essentially scientific mode of thought. His general analysis and classification of signs was originally explicated with reference to his metaphysical categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness, and it was never brought into a clear relation to his later formulation of pragmatism. It was not even "behavioral" in its original form; only in a late paper, unpublished in his lifetime, did he explicitly defend the position that in the final analysis the interpretant of a sign (the effect on the interpreter in virtue of which something is a sign) was a habit or disposition to respond. He never reworked his semiotic from this point of view; he never gave a detailed exposition of this late point of view with respect to many kinds of signs (such as mathematical and normative terms); he never raised the question as to how far his earlier metaphysical categories and doctrines were compatible with his late behavioral analysis of the interpretant of a sign.

Peirce, therefore, cannot be said to have presented a systematic and comprehensive behavioral semiotic. But his analysis in the pragmatic maxim of an inseparable relation of action and experience (in signs with a "rational purport"), and his view that the interpretants of such signs are habits or dispositions to action, clearly are foundation stones of a behavioral semiotic. Even his belief that there is a level of meaning in addition to that formulated in the pragmatic maxim (such as in the meaning of certain religious terms) still connects such meaning with action: the meaning of such terms is stated to lie in their contribution to rational self-controlled conduct. Even here meaning is explicated with ref-

erence to action. In this sense Peirce can be said to have moved toward a consistently behavioral conception of signs.

The situation is much the same with William James, but because of James' special moral and religious problems, there are some differences of emphasis. James in a sense begins where Peirce ends, by giving a slightly different interpretation of Peirce's pragmatic maxim. In this maxim, as we have seen, Peirce stressed the necessary relation of action and experience in the meaning of signs with "rational purport." James' own formulation of Peirce's pragmatic maxim is in terms of "what sensations we are to expect . . . , and what reactions we must prepare." Here there is not an essential relation but merely a conjunction of "sensations" and "reactions," and in some formulations the relation is even weaker: "or" takes the place of "and." In this looser formulation James can admit as meaningful doctrines which affect the action of their interpreters even if these doctrines do not predict specific perceptual experiences—and he gives certain metaphysical and religious doctrines as examples. Peirce had come to essentially the same result, but only by admitting a level of meaning over and above that formulated in the "hard core" pragmatic maxim; James reaches this position by a looser formulation of the pragmatic maxim itself. In both Peirce and James the meaning of signs is consistently viewed in the context of human action.

George H. Mead did not refer to Peirce or to James in the presentation of his analysis of meaning. His orientation, however, is distinctly and unqualifiedly behavioral. Of all the pragmatists, Mead is most seriously concerned with developing a general theory of human action. His particular contribution to a behavioral semiotic is his stress upon the basically social character of both nonlinguistic signs and the linguistic signs which are built upon them as a foundation. Human action is for him in origin social action. The first human signs arise when the beginning of a response of one person is reacted to by another person as an indication of later stages in the response of the first person. Mead called these "nonsignificant symbols"; they became "significant symbols" (or language symbols) when vocally produced sounds, operating in this context, carried the same indication to the person making the sound that it did to others who heard the sound and interpreted it by the tendencies to action which it provoked. The interpretant of a sign is thus for Mead—as for the later Peirce—a disposition to action occasioned by the sign. Mead, however, spelled out in detail, in a way that Peirce did not, the social context in which language originated and operated.

John Dewey takes over much of Mead's analysis. He extends the approach by a more explicit treatment of signs in art, and the normative signs that occur in evaluations. C. I. Lewis (whose orientation is to Peirce rather than to Mead) is especially concerned with the mean-

ing of judgments of value and judgments of obligation. Some further reference to value terms will be made in later pages. Here it is sufficient to note that the later pragmatists, whether influenced more by Peirce or by Mead, extend, but continue to build upon, the behavioral analysis of meaning characteristic of the pragmatic movement from its beginning.

III

The stress upon the behavioral functioning of signs is closely related to the guiding interest of the pragmatists in reflecting or inquiring man. This underlines a second unifying theme of the pragmatic movement: *a behavioral theory of inquiry*. Inquiry, as the attempt at the reflective solution of a problem, is carried on by means of signs (signs of course do not function only in inquiry). Inquiry is itself seen as a form of action, a phase of action to solve problems within a wider course of action in which it is embedded. As a form of action, inquiry can of course encounter problems within its own development, and so there arises inquiry to deal with problems which arise in inquiry. To this extent inquiry can become autonomous (to use Dewey's term), as it does to a large degree in mathematics and theoretical science. But in the main, inquiry is for the sake of first-level problems encountered in the action of the living creature in its physical and social environment. Inquiry is ultimately for the sake of such actions. Inquiry into inquiry is only a special form of inquiry, and hence of action.

Such an account of inquiry seems to me to present views common to Peirce, Mead, and Dewey. The importance for the pragmatic movement of such a behavioral theory of inquiry can be made evident by the following considerations.

In the first place, on this account, the occurrence of inquiry presupposes the existence of behaving organisms and an enviroing world which in various ways supports and hinders their activities. It therefore presupposes a level of behavior antecedent to reflective or inquiring behavior, in which inquiry arises and to which it ministers. Similarly, inquiry into inquiry itself presupposes the occurrence of a body of inquiries which constitutes its own subject matter.

Next, it is evident that this behavioral stress upon inquiry has close connections with the pragmatist approach to the topic of truth. It is natural to look at truth in terms of inquiry, as, for instance, a property of signs which in a process of reflection resolve the problem which was their occasion, and hence permit the ongoing of the behavior in which they arose. If signs with "intellectual purport" signify, in the narrower Peircean formulation, that such and such would be observed consequent upon such and such action, then signs whose predictions are fulfilled might well be called "true"—either in the case of a particular inquiry

or more generally in the case of a prolonged and continuing inquiry which extends over many (and perhaps an endless number of) specific problems of a common sort. This, of course, is not intended as a full account of the pragmatists' treatment of truth (for there are many differences in the various analyses) but to suggest that a common denominator is found in locating the problem of truth within the context of a behavioral theory of inquiry. If signs are behavioral at the core, then the "correspondence" of signs to "reality" must be restated in terms of the relation of signs to the total process of behavior-in-an-environment in which they occur.

In the third place, while Peirce admitted a number of forms of inquiry, he held that the scientific form of inquiry is superior to the others in that it is cooperative in nature and inherently self-corrective. While it would not follow from this that the solution of all problems must be sought through the scientific mode of inquiry, or even that all problems can be solved through such inquiry, all of the pragmatists do share Peirce's esteem for scientific inquiry and advocate its extension to a range of human problems.

In terms of these considerations it becomes evident that the direction of the pragmatic analysis has been to replace the traditional epistemology, in whole or in part, by the theory of inquiry. Epistemology in its Western postmedieval form was connected with a mind-body dualism, experience was regarded as mental and private, and the task of the theory of knowledge was to show how the thinking individual could come to know the material world and other minds—or why he could not do this. The pragmatist has held that the individual never finds himself in this predicament—that problems always arise within an area of the unproblematic, and that accordingly "the existence of the world" can never become a problem for knowledge. The theory of knowledge, to repeat, is replaced (in whole or in part) by a behavioral theory of inquiry. Such a development is one of the novel themes of the pragmatic movement.

It may be noted in passing that a similar shift occurs in the interpretation of logic. In a wide sense logic is regarded as part of the theory of signs (Peirce). The formal principles of logic are regarded by Dewey and Lewis as derived from successful inquiry and held as norms for the further prosecution of inquiry: Lewis speaks of them as "pragmatically a priori" and Dewey as "operationally a priori," both using these terms with respect to the conduct of inquiry.

IV

It is not easy to name satisfactorily the third characteristic theme of the pragmatic movement: it is *the approach to axiology (to values and evaluations) in terms of preferential behavior*. None of the pragmatists

did in fact employ the term "preferential behavior." But it may serve as a general term covering what Dewey referred to as "selective-rejective behavior," what James had called "demands," and what R. B. Perry (taking off from James) spoke of as "interests." Preferential behavior, roughly characterized, is action which tends to favor or disfavor one object (thing, situation, idea, behavior) rather than another. It is positive preferential behavior if the object is favored; negative preferential behavior if the object is disfavored. A preferential-behavior axiology attempts to locate all values and evaluations within the context of preferential behavior. It seems to me that in this sense the axiology of pragmatism is a preferential-behavior axiology, even though this label was not applied by the thinkers here under consideration.

There are of course various ways in which the term "value" can be explicated with respect to preferential behavior. It might be suggested that a positive value is any object of positive preferential behavior. James seems to do this in holding that the essence of value is to satisfy a demand, as Perry later explicitly did in giving as the generic meaning of "value" "any object of any interest." I think this position is found in C. I. Lewis who finds the meaning of "immediate value" in the liking or preferring of some contents of immediate experience (other things having value only in the dispositional sense of their capacity to lead to such immediate value experiences). Dewey's position would limit the term "value" to those objects of positive preferential behavior which continue to be favored after a consideration of the consequences of favoring them. In spite of these differences in the range of denotation of the term, all these pragmatists appear to interpret value with respect to what we have here called preferential behavior.

Evaluations on this approach may be regarded as eventuations of those inquiries where the problem concerns what is to be favored as an object of preferential behavior. If all inquiry occurs within an area of the unproblematic, then value inquiries (in the distinctive normative sense) may be regarded as inquiries concerning values which occur within an area of unproblematic values, and which can be completed only with respect to such unproblematic values. Inquiries as to what objects and experiences are in fact preferred, or inquiries as to the capacity of objects to arouse or sustain preferences, are not normative value inquiries in this distinctive sense, for the resolution of the inquiry involves no judgments made on the basis of unproblematic values. C. I. Lewis' "judgments of value" (or judgments of good) seem in this sense to be nonnormative, while his "judgments of obligation" (or judgments of ought) seem to be distinctively normative.

There are important differences of emphasis in the axiology of the various pragmatists. Nevertheless, the distinctive mark of pragmatic axiol-

ogy seems to lie in the approach to the topics of value and evaluations within the context of preferential behavior. When so approached, it seems to me that terms referring to values remain meaningful within the pragmatic theory of meaning, and that evaluations fall within the general pragmatic theory of inquiry. One can, if one wishes, limit "scientific inquiry" to nonnormative inquiry, and in this case distinctively normative inquiries are not scientific; but this decision should not obscure the fact that the main difference between scientific and normative inquiries lies in the fact that in (distinctively) normative inquiries it is preferential behavior that has become problematic and that the resolution of such value problems is always done with respect to unproblematic values. Since careful normative inquiry will need to take account of the results of non-normative inquiries, no limit can be set to the potential importance of science in the furthering and improving of man's value decisions.

V

A fourth unifying doctrine in the pragmatic movement may be called *the semiosical conception of mind*. "Semiosis" is the term used by Peirce for a sign process; semiotic is then the study of semiosis. To hold that mental processes can be regarded as sign processes can then be called the semiosical conception of mind. On this view mind is not regarded as a substance, nor is mentality regarded as the intrinsic nature of any property or event—thus experience as such is not regarded as mental. Experience is mental only to the extent that signs are operating within it, that is, to the extent that behavior is sign-behavior. Neither the sign itself (the sign-vehicle), nor the sign's interpretant (as a disposition to respond in a certain way caused by the sign), nor the object signified is as such intrinsically mental; it is the semiosical process as a whole that is called mental. To say that an organism has a mind is to say that signs are operating in its behavior.

Peirce had maintained that mind is a sign developing according to the laws of inference. James had written that consciousness as a stuff did not exist, but only processes in which one aspect of experience functioned as substitute or sign for other portions of experience. Mead did not equate mentality with all sign processes, but only with signs which he called "significant symbols"—signs which had the same signification to their producers and their interpreters, a view which restricted mentality to organisms that engaged in language behavior. There are obvious differences in these various views, but their common core is in linking mind and mentality with the occurrence of sign processes.

VI

There remains the problem of the pragmatist cosmology. The term "cos-

mology" seems preferable in this connection to the term "metaphysics." The latter term was indeed used by Peirce, James, Dewey, and Lewis. However, Dewey later withdrew the term as applicable to his views, Mead tended to use the term as a term of disparagement, and Lewis meant by the term an analysis of basic categories and not a concern for cosmology. So the term "metaphysics" is hardly an appropriate term for what is here under consideration.

Regardless of terminology, pragmatism has a place for cosmology conceived as an empirically based study of generic characteristics of the cosmos. For the pragmatists, as we have seen, the "world that is there," "the experienced world," is not regarded as a whole as mental, subjective, or private—these latter terms being used to describe only certain features of the world that is there. Accordingly, there is no general problem of the "existence of the world": since for the pragmatists problems arise only within a context which is unproblematic, there is no context within which the "world that is there" could as a whole become a problem. It is then, from this point of view, legitimate to attempt to characterize certain general features of the world, provided that this can be done in terms whose application can be controlled by observation of this world. In this sense there can be a pragmatist cosmology, which would differ in generality from the particular and partial accounts of the world furnished by the special sciences.

It is, however, difficult to find a phrase which clearly signifies a conception of the cosmos common to all pragmatists. Here indeed the differences between the pragmatists loom very large: Peirce's "objective idealism," James' "world of pure experience," Dewey's "cultural naturalism" are cases in point. And if we say that the pragmatic cosmology is "evolutionary" or "temporalistic" or "activistic," then it can be replied that these are not traits distinctive of the pragmatist cosmology since they have been emphasized by other cosmologists as well. It might seem, accordingly, that in the cosmological area the thesis of the unity of the pragmatic movement breaks down.

I do not believe, however, that this is the case. For if human reflective behavior is as the pragmatist maintains it to be, then such behavior is itself part of the cosmos, and the rest of the cosmos must be such as to permit the occurrence of such behavior. Since such behavior occurs in the world that is there, it is legitimate to attempt to describe certain general characteristics of that world, and to note what features of the cosmos are required to make such behavior possible.

Peirce held that the most general characters of the cosmos were expressed in the three categories Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness—which correspond in part to the notions of possibility, existence, and law (or habit). These were seen as pervasive cosmological traits; while all

were "real," possibilities and laws did not "exist" in Peirce's sense of existence, since existence for Peirce involved dynamic interactions which were only possible between particular things. Peirce supported his doctrine of the categories by phenomenological observation, by appeal to the results of the special sciences, and by the analysis of certain features of sign processes (which as themselves real could be used as the basis for hypothetical generalizations about the cosmos as a whole). In regard to the latter point, Peirce argued that analysis disclosed three, and only three, forms of propositions, and these served to express the three characteristics of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness.

While other pragmatists do not use Peirce's terminology nor his particular method of analysis, I think it can be argued that the cosmological views of all the pragmatists find a place for possibilities, existences, and laws (or habits). Insofar as this could be maintained, it could be held that a fifth unifying doctrine of the pragmatic movement is *the cosmological doctrine of the reality of possibility, existence, and law (or habit)*.

Rather than support this position by reference to the various pragmatists I will show that the reality of possibilities, existences, and laws (or habits) is revealed in the analysis of reflective intelligence upon which all the pragmatists focus their attention. Since other philosophers might well hold the cosmological doctrine in question, this particular approach will link the pragmatic version of this doctrine with the pragmatic views of action and reflection.

If action occurs within a world which facilitates or blocks the course of action, this is a clear case of Peirce's Secondness. If reflective behavior or inquiry serves to advance blocked action by a consideration of alternatives for the continuation of such action, then we have an instance of Peirce's Firstness—an instance of the reality of possibilities. And if signs essential to the conduct of inquiry involve dispositions to action as their interpretants, this is a case of Peirce's Thirdness—the reality of laws or habits. Since all the pragmatists hold a similar view of human reflection and an actional theory of signs, they could accept this analysis as support for the cosmology under consideration.

It may of course be asked about the justification of applying to the cosmos at large traits revealed in an analysis of human reflective action. The only answer open to the pragmatists would be to admit (as did Peirce) that this is indeed a hypothesis, subject to control by further inquiry.

This cosmological model is based upon a consideration of what is involved in human reflective action. If this basis is to be generalized, then terms such as "action in a world" must be generalized so that human action becomes only one form of action. Mead attempts to do this in

his generalized usage of such terms as "perspective," "system," "sociality," and "emergence." In his cosmology human reflective intelligence becomes one complex emergent level of processes which in a generalized form appear in nonhuman organisms and in the inorganic world. There are problems as to how far Mead succeeds in this ambitious attempt, the detailed elaboration of which was prevented by his unexpected death. Whatever may be thought of Mead's success, it is of great theoretical interest to attempt to construct a cosmological theory on a biosocial basis, in contrast to the basis in physics which has been the starting point of most modern cosmological models.

One point may be added. Peirce called his cosmology an "objective idealism," while Dewey's (and Mead's) cosmology is a form of "naturalism." The ground for this difference is worth noting. Peirce's idealism is supported by his interpretation of all forms of Thirdness as essentially semiosical. Since he applied the term "mind" to all sign processes, mind became a general cosmological category; and since he thought cosmic evolution moved by Thirdness converting Firstness into determinate forms of Secondness, mind became for him the dominant form of reality. But for Mead (and for Dewey) "mind" is restricted to certain high-level sign processes, and has no such dominant cosmological position that it had in Peirce. Hence an "idealistic" cosmology is supplanted by a "naturalistic" one. The issues here depend on the interpretation of the doctrine of continuity. Peirce at times calls continuity a methodological doctrine, but in general he converts it into a cosmological doctrine. Mead's acceptance of emergence permits discontinuities to be as basic (as "real") as continuities, and certain symbolic processes (and hence mind) are attributed to man alone, even though these sign processes emerge in evolution from animal sign processes of a simpler, nonlinguistic sort. Hence for Mead no cosmological idealism results.

VII

Such in outline is the argument of this essay that the pragmatic movement has an underlying unity. It reveals a number of common themes in its doctrines of epistemology as the theory of inquiry, axiology as the study of preferential behavior, and cosmology as the doctrine of the reality of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness. The doctrine of the semiosical nature of mind may be included within cosmology. It was further argued that all of these doctrines were linked with a behavioral semiotic, elaborated in the context of inquiry into the nature of human reflection. Except in one instance, attention has not been paid to the differences among pragmatists, nor the reasons for these differences. But this would be another study.