4-30-2020

Hegel's Pragmatism

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Comments

This is a pre-print of a book chapter published by Springer in The Palgrave Hegel Handbook in 2020, available online:
https://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-26597-7_27

Recommended Citation

de Vries W. (2020) Hegel's Pragmatism. In: Bykova M., Westphal K. (eds) The Palgrave Hegel Handbook. Palgrave Handbooks in German Idealism. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-26597-7_27

Layout: T1 Standard | Book ID: 417974_1_En | Book ISBN: 978-3-030-26597-7
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Chapter 27
Hegel's Pragmatism

Willem deVries

It would not be terribly difficult to construct a case that Hegel and pragmatism have very little in common, especially if one employs some of the more cartoonish characterizations of the protagonists. "Hegel was a metaphysician on a grand scale who claimed to be able to think God's thoughts as they were before creation and thereby have a priori insight into the design of the world, which he then recorded in a fair amount of obscure detail in his system." "The pragmatists were naturalistic anti-metaphysicians who worshiped the empirical sciences, which they took as the model for all rational activity, and whose highest goals aimed at finding workable solutions to particular real-life problems." What could be more different?

Those cartoons are absurdly inaccurate, although there is some truth to recognizing the sometimes stark differences between Hegel and the pragmatists. Much greater illumination, however, is cast by looking at the similarities among them and tracing out the common threads that unite them. It is this author's personal conviction that the line of great Western philosophers runs from Kant through Hegel to Peirce (though I am not so sure where it goes after that). This is a *line* rather than a mere list, because each of these thinkers was writing in response to difficulties felt to beset his predecessors.[1] Each broke with while also extending elements of his forebears' philosophies in markedly novel and creative ways. The line does not constitute a steadily increasing, cumulative record of philosophical achievement, but it does constitute a conversation that creatively broadened our horizons and deepened our appreciation of the world around us and our place in it.

Hegel's philosophy is profound and insightful in numerous ways, particularly in its comprehension of the internal relations among philosophical concepts and the structure of philosophical disagreement, but it shows its age in a way pragmatism does not: it is pre-Darwinian and bears the marks of Hegel's early training in a seminary. High rhetoric and claims about the Absolute and the necessity of his results abound in Hegel's philosophy. Stylistically, it seems deeply metaphysical

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M. F. Bykova and K. R. Westphal (eds.), *The Palgrave Hegel Handbook*,
Palgrave Handbooks in German Idealism, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-26597-7_27

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and dogmatic, although I think that is not its substance. Pragmatism tends to sound like a much more modest, down-to-earth philosophy, although Peirce, for one, did not lack philosophical ambition. Ours has become a scientific age in a way that Hegel's was not: well-defined, mature scientific disciplines have proliferated well beyond their number in the early nineteenth century, and our lives are much more deeply structured by the growth and development of the sciences, together with the technologies spawned thereby. Hegel was well-informed about the empirical sciences of his day, but the pragmatists were themselves practicing scientists. Peirce earned his living for years as a scientist for the Coast and Geodetic Survey; James was one of the inventors of psychology as a science in its own right; Dewey published in experimental and social science, as did George Herbert Mead. This level of involvement in empirical science left an indelible mark on pragmatism. Because of it, pragmatism was in many regards ahead of its time and well suited to a modern, secular, industrial and even post-industrial age. Rorty has arguably washed away some of the pragmatist orientation towards the sciences, but certainly not across the board.

Despite these differences, there is much common ground shared between Hegel and the pragmatists. This essay will focus on several of these points of agreement, but it cannot, in the space allotted, pretend to be exhaustive. After a mid-twentieth century lull, interest in pragmatism has increased recently, thanks in part to the work of Richard Rorty, but also of others, such as Richard J. Bernstein, Hilary Putnam, Joseph Margolis, John McDermott, Larry Hickman, and others. There has been a corresponding increase of interest in the connections between the pragmatists and their greatest immediate predecessor, Hegel. There is, therefore, a good and growing literature in which the interested reader can pursue the subject further.

A number of excellent publications deserve some mention in which one can further explore the issues. Robert Stern and Christopher Hookway headed up a project titled "Idealism & Pragmatism: Convergence or Contestation?" It did not focus solely on Hegel, but among the useful resources developed is a bibliography.[2] The *British Journal of the History of Philosophy* (vol. 23, № 4) contains papers from the project, notably Steven Levine (2015), "Hegel, Dewey, and Habits" and especially Dina Emundts (2015), "Hegel as a Pragmatist." Emundts emphasizes two characteristics of pragmatism shared by Hegel: (1) a rejection of the apriori, and (2) the claim that knowledge has a lot to do with *testing* and that concepts are given in our practice. In a separate paper, Emundts (2013) argues that the notion of experience both conjoins and separates Hegel and Pragmatism. This is a theme I will touch on, but from a different angle. Stern (2004, 2007a, b) has written several notable articles on the relation between Idealism, Hegel in particular, and Pragmatism, especially Peirce; these are collected in his book *Hegelian Metaphysics* (Stern 2009). One set of those essays works out in scholarly detail the relation between Peirce and Hegel, particularly with respect to their treatment of categories. His later essay "Hegel and Pragmatism" (2011) is a masterful argument that Hegel shared with the pragmatists a thorough rejection of several central epistemological principles of Cartesianism: The abstract, methodological

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doubt of Cartesian philosophy is empty; inquiry is indeed motivated by doubts, but they must be real doubts that arise from experience. Even the supposed presuppositionlessness of Hegel's logic can be given an interpretation compatible with pragmatic thought. Paul Redding (2015) also has a piece titled "Hegel and Pragmatism." His emphasis is on the social theory of mind and normativity that the pragmatists shared with Hegel, although he notes, with Pinkard, that it has Fichtean roots. Terry Pinkard's (2007) article, "Was Pragmatism the Successor to Idealism?" is concerned explicitly with Robert Brandom's neo-pragmatism, which he argues is actually more Fichtean in structure than Hegelian. Pinkard's (2006) essay is a fascinating study of how much post-Kantianism shows up in the philosophy of the twentieth century American Wilfrid Sellars. Kenneth Westphal (2004, 2015a, b, c) has also written extensively about the threads that tie Hegel and Pragmatism together, arguing that Hegel espouses a form of realism that is also found in the pragmatists. Rorty wrote little directly on Hegel, but his student and fellow neo-Pragmatist Robert Brandom (1999, 2001, 2002, 2019) has, emphasizing Hegel's coherence (or "inferentialist") theory of concepts and content as well as the social nature of norms.

1 Mind and Knowledge in the Cartesian Tradition

The take on the relation between Hegel and pragmatism explained and defended here will reiterate some of the themes to be found in the articles cited. I hope to put them into different combinations and look at them from a different angle or two in order to reveal other aspects of a fascinating relationship. My central theme, like one of Stern's essays, will be the shared rejection of the Cartesian heritage so dominant in Western philosophy. Whereas Stern emphasizes the difference between the Cartesians and their critics concerning the methodological role of doubt, I will, instead, focus on the differences in their conceptions of mind, consciousness, and the structure of knowledge.

In the Cartesian tradition, minds are conceived of as self-contained entities, indeed, substances—independent existences—in their own right, that are (1) transparent to themselves, (2) thus, known directly or immediately to themselves, and (3) prior to and independently of any knowledge of the external world, that is, any knowledge of any other created substance. Because of this, the Cartesian thinks that our knowledge always proceeds from the inside out. We know our own mental states "first and best,"[3] and any knowledge we may have of things different from us must be built on and justified by reference to the knowledge we have of our own mental states.

Thought of this way, the Cartesian tradition covers both classical rationalism and classical empiricism, which otherwise seem to be odds with each other. Berkeley and Hume are as much Cartesians in this sense as Descartes. While Descartes thought he could show that, and the extent to which, we are justified in believing in an external material world, Berkeley, for example, thinks we

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cannot make good sense of the concept of a material object, so we are left with a world in which all that can be known, all that exists, are minds and their modifications. Kant begins to break out of this Cartesian ideology, particularly with his "Refutation of Idealism," but arguably never shakes it entirely, hanging on to the thing-in-itself as a last outpost of Cartesianism.

Hegel and, subsequently, the pragmatists discard this Cartesian picture of mind and its epistemic relation to the world. There is, of course, both a negative and a positive aspect to this change. They have to show what is wrong with the Cartesian picture, and then they have to provide a viable alternative. In neither case do Hegel and the pragmatists make *identical* moves, but the moves they make are often similar and made with similar motivations. Let us look more closely.[4]

2 Problems with Cartesianism, 1: The Case of "Experience"

Emundts points out that the pragmatists criticized Hegel for not paying enough attention to *experience*. The main idea in this regard is that Hegel seems to think too much can be done in one's armchair and does not accord sufficient stature to the empirical sciences. But she also recognizes that pragmatism "seems to be heavily influenced by Hegel's specific conception of experience" (Emundts 2013, 350). Spelling this out helps reveal the deep relations between Hegel and the pragmatists.

"Experience" is an accordion word: its meaning expands and contracts, depending on the context, and it is always difficult to pin down with any precision.[5] But "experience" usually connotes the presence of a *sensory* element. One way to distinguish the Rationalists from the Empiricists is in terms of the role they give the sensory element in experience. The Rationalists tend to think of the sensory as confused conception. Consequently, they give it little role in our knowledge; it can motivate action, but is too confused to justify significant knowledge. For the Empiricists, however, sensation is crucial: it is the *fons et origo* of all conception and knowledge. This is crystalized, for instance, in Hume's principle that understanding any idea means tracing it back to the impression(s) (either of sense or of reflection) from which derives. The Rationalists see no point in carefully articulating the structure of experience: it is inevitably confused, in any case. But for the Empiricists a proper analysis of the structure of sensory (and also reflective) experience is imperative; it delimits the bounds of sense. The hard-nosed empiricist takes it for granted that there is some minimal set of basic sense-impressions, more or less equivalent to the set of Aristotelian proper and common sensibles, that provide the material out of which all our ideas can be constructed. Causation is a problematic notion for Hume, because there is no clear sensory basis for our common sense conception of causation as a form of necessary connection between objects.

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For both Rationalists and Empiricists, then, experience becomes a "veil of ideas" that stands between and cuts us off from any external reality. For the Rationalist, sensory experience is confusion, a fog through which external reality cannot be well or properly perceived. For the Empiricist, experience is equated to having non- or pre-conceptual sensory episodes that stand between the mind proper (that is, our cognitive faculties) and its world, and effectively determine the content available for thought. (Jumping ahead a few hundred years, we can see a similar conception operating in the phenomenalism of the logical empiricists, who attempt to solve the problem of the external world by insisting that everything is logically constructed from elementary sense data.)

Such a conception of experience is, ultimately, disastrous. Rationalism is simply dogmatic, and bald empiricism escapes skepticism only by discovering a mythical given. Kant began the critique of such a view of experience, arguing that perception or, as he called it, intuition, must always be a *conceptual* as well as a *sensory* response to the objects of experience.[6] A line of philosophers from Hegel through the pragmatists and on to Sellars and McDowell defend such a richer conception of experience. On their conception, experience is richer in several dimensions: (1) It is never *merely* sensory, but always possesses conceptual content. (2) The conceptual content of experience is not limited to a minimal and impoverished set, say, just the proper and common sensibles. (3) It does not stand as a third thing between the mind and the world. It is no "veil of ideas"; it is the way minds connect to the world; it reveals the world to us. In experience, mind and world cooperate (though not always successfully) to constitute each other.

Even though William James called himself a "radical empiricist," he had no difficulty titling one of his books *The Varieties of Religious Experience.* For an empiricist of Humean stripe, it is not clear what such an "experience" could be: it is hard to imagine an arrangement of bare sensory states, of proper and common sensibles that would qualify as a *religious* experience. But Hegel, along with James, is willing to recognize the possibility of religious experience, aesthetic experience, moral experience, precisely because experience is never merely sensual, it always has a conceptual dimension, and that conceptual dimension need not be limited to some minimal, Procrustean set of observation concepts.

> [P]hilosophy should be quite clear about the fact that its content is nothing other than the basic import that is originally produced and produces itself in the domain of the living spirit, the content that is made into the *world*, the outer and inner world of consciousness, in other words, the content of philosophy is *actuality*. The first consciousness of this content is called *experience*. (*Enc*. 1 §6)

Such a conception is not only the common possession of Hegel and the pragmatists; the pragmatists knew that Hegel shared this with them. Consider the following passage from a lecture John Dewey gave in 1897 on Hegel's philosophy. Dewey speaks of "the main point in [Hegel's] philosophic methods," namely that,

> all thought is objective, that relations of thought are forms of the objective world; that the process of thinking is simply following the movement of the subject matter itself. This is often interpreted as exactly the reverse of what Hegel meant. It is often considered to mean that thought as a special faculty of the mind has the power of evolving truth out of

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> itself; that subjective ideas, by some magic, transform themselves into objective facts. But his real meaning is that there is no such thing as a faculty of thought separate from things: that thinking is simply the translation of fact into its real meaning; it is subjection of reality subjecting. (Dewey 2010, 96)

Dewey clearly rejects the idea that the absolute idealism Hegel espouses is at all a subjective idealism or involves a magical ability to create or constitute objective reality from the subjective ideas individuals possess. Hegel's idealism is rather a thesis about how the world is structured and what kinds of concepts are required to be able to understand such a world. The world is such that concepts regularly applied to our thought processes in fact can also be applied to processes in the world: e.g., *contradiction, consequence*, and *purpose* (inter alia) are relations of thought that are also forms of the objective world. Of course, such concepts cannot be applied in a slapdash or arbitrary way; one of the jobs of good philosophy is to reveal where and how such concepts properly capture aspects of the objective world.

There is, thus, a perfectly good sense in which Hegel is a realist. He neither denies nor reduces away the existence of the material world, nor does he deny us knowledge of it. He does insist that the material world needs to be understood in a still broader context, namely, that of the self-realization of the Absolute. But that no more denies reality to the material world than insisting that an organ like the heart needs to be understood in the context of the organism denies the reality of hearts.

Pragmatism has been criticized for entailing a form of idealism because of its so-called "epistemological" conception of truth. If truth is tied to knowability and there is no particular mention of correspondence in one's characterization of truth, then, some think, the independence of reality has been besmirched and realism abandoned. Yet, the pragmatists look at the way the concept of truth actually functions in our practices of inquiry. The proper description of that function makes no reference to correspondence, since there is no way to step outside our practices to check independently on any claimed correspondence. But the presence of a concept with the function of our truth concept makes sense only in the context of a thinking organism that is trying to make sense of and "get the world right," so that it can continue to act effectively in the world. An epistemological conception of truth makes sense only in the context of a deep commitment to realism, a commitment to seeing truth and knowledge as normative ideals used to assess the activity of real agents in a real world. Thus, in my view, trying to describe either Hegel or pragmatism in terms of the classical distinction between realism and idealism is bound to distort their views. For both of them, the idealism/realism distinction is just too simple to capture the complex relations between the ideal and the real.

For both Hegel and the pragmatists, thinking of experience as something static, congealed into a particular mental state at a particular time, drastically falsifies the notion. Experience must be conceived of as a process that plays out over time in which the mind and the world are adjusted to each in cognition and action. Because of this, it is also misleading to characterize experience as the revealing of the world, insofar as revelation is often thought of as a one-way relationship in

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which the one to whom the world is revealed plays only a passive, receptive role. Experience is a give-and-take affair, regardless of whether it is a cognitive experience or an experience of one's agency.

3 Problems with Cartesianism, 2: Agency and Externality

I now want to bring out a different dimension of the rejection of Cartesianism shared by Hegel with the pragmatists. Pragmatism is so-called because one of its main principles is the primacy of practice. This is variously interpreted among the pragmatists. Peirce's pragmatic maxim directs us to look at the consequences of our concepts *that have practical bearing*, if we want to clarify those concepts.[7] Dewey often called his doctrine "instrumentalism," because he thought of concepts, indeed, thoughts in general, as *tools* that we utilize to formulate and achieve our goals.[8] The overall message is clear, however: conception and thought are to be understood in terms of their contribution to agency: The point of conception and belief is the better modulation of behavior. In fact, conception and thought are themselves forms that our agency can take, even though in their normal, first-order occurrence, thinking and conception are *acts*, but not *actions*.

Emphasizing the primacy of practice is another way pragmatism is anti-Cartesian. The Cartesian conception of mind is a peculiar thing: it is defined by its activity, namely as a *thinking thing*, but this activity is entirely self-contained. It need never affect the rest of the world—there need not even *be* a "rest of the world." The Cartesian mind must be able not only to *have ideas*, it must be able to *reason*, that is, to judge and to infer. But it does not need to (or even be *able* to) act outside its own confines. The Cartesian mind is a purely *inner* reality.[9]

For the pragmatist, this simply makes no sense. Post-Darwinians that they all are, the pragmatists understand that the complex set of capacities in virtue of which we can describe ourselves as having minds are products of evolution and have come to exist and sustain themselves within our species precisely because they contribute to a better and more flexible capacity to survive and reproduce. Minds cannot in principle be shut off from the real, material world in which they exercise agency.[10] Indeed, any mind divorced from external, material reality as Cartesianism envisions would be empty of determinate content. In its self-enclosed reality, there would be no real practical consequences to the ideas in such a mind; they would be tools without a task. More deeply, both Hegel and the pragmatists have thought more thoroughly than their early modern predecessors about the structure and presuppositions of representation or intentionality. Intentionality, directedness at an object, is not a simple property that mental states by their very nature just have. It requires a complex structure of rule-governed interactions among many mental states and (importantly) the world in which the organism lives.[11]

The Cartesian may balk, arguing that all kinds of questions are begged here by assuming that organisms exist within and have knowledge of a material world

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without first justifying that claim. We might anticipate a substantial game of burden tennis between the Cartesian and the pragmatist, but I think the pragmatist stands on firmer ground with his critique of Cartesian doubt (a point shared with Hegel) and insistence that we must begin philosophy *in medias res*. This latter point, that philosophy must begin from where we in fact are, is also common ground with Hegel, though one might be misled to think otherwise by the opening section of his *Science of Logic*, "With What must the Science Begin?" There Hegel argues that science, that is, philosophy, must begin with the thought of pure being and without any presuppositions. Since Robert Stern works this out in detail in his article "Hegel and Pragmatism" (Stern 2011), I will not dwell on it here.

We have seen the Cartesian idea that minds are self-contained worlds unto themselves, entirely *inner*, at best only contingently related to anything outer, anything material. The Cartesian's view is that it is precisely this inner being or inwardness that is the essential element in a person. Now I want to argue that the pragmatist's utter rejection of such a view is shared by Hegel. Indeed, I think there are several different paths one can take through Hegel's thought that lead one to see that the Cartesian conception of the mind is radically mistaken, and to agree with the pragmatists that human being is unintelligible unless one effectively recognizes the primacy of practice and agency in an external world.

One such path is through Hegel's dialectic of the inner and outer.

> [W]hat is inner and what is outer are also *opposed* to each other as determinations of the form; and as abstractions of identity with self and of mere manifoldness or reality they are radically opposed. … The usual error of reflection is to take *essence* as what is merely *inner*. If it is taken only in this way, then this view of it is also a quite *external* one and that "essence" is the empty external abstraction. (*Enc*. 1 §140 & R)

Hegel's thought is almost always worried about distinctions. He recognizes the absolute need for distinctions—without them, there is no thought—but he is also conscious of the fact that people too often freeze distinctions and do not recognize their limitations or conditions. This is a major characteristic of the attitude of understanding: some (set of) distinction(s) is taken as simply *given*, as a fixed feature of the universe, and no thought is given to the larger context in which the items so distinguished are, in fact, unified. True, rational thought seeks to *overcome* such distinctions, to see the larger unifying context in which the distinctions, now properly limited, make sense. Inner/Outer is just such a distinction that needs to be overcome. It is overcome by recognizing the mutual interdependence of the inner and outer.

> The way a man is externally, i.e., in his actions (not of course just in his merely corporeal externality), that is how he is internally: and if he is *only* internally virtuous or moral, etc., i.e., *only* in his intentions, and dispositions, and his outward [behavior] is not identical with those, then the former is as hollow and empty as the latter. (*Enc*. 1 §140R)

> [F]or as long as understanding holds inward and outward fast in their separation from one another, they are a pair of empty forms, and the one is as null as the other.

> Both in the study of nature and in that of the spiritual world, it is of great importance to keep the special character of the relationship between inward and outward properly in

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> view, and to guard against the error of thinking that only what is *inward* is essential, that it is the heart of the matter, whilst the *outward* side, on the contrary, is what is inessential and indifferent. We first meet this error when, as often happens, the distinction between nature and spirit is traced back to the abstract distinction between outward and inward. (*Enc*. 1 §140Z)

The Cartesian picture of an inner, fully determinate soul thinking fully determinate thoughts that are, in principle, entirely independent of the outer world (which, note, includes *other* souls as well) can, in Hegel's view, be only an abstraction from a fuller picture of humans engaged in rational activities in a material world they did not make. The dialectic of inner and outer does not itself bring us explicitly to see the primacy of practice—it is still too abstract a distinction to reveal that point. But when Hegel tries to illustrate his point with real world examples, he cannot avoid illustrations in which the primacy of practice shines forth. For example, he emphasizes, again and again, that "We are … justified in saying that a man is what he does" (*Enc*. 1 §140Z), where it is clear that what someone *does* concerns activity in a shared, public, material world.

> Thus a child, for instance, [considered] as human in a general sense, is of course a rational essence; but the child's reason as such is present at first only as something inward, i.e., as a disposition or vocation, and this, which is merely internal, has for it equally the form of what is merely external, namely the will of its parents, the learning of its teachers, and in general the rational world that surrounds it. The education and formation of the child consists therefore in the process by which it becomes *for-itself* also what it is initially only *in-itself* and hence for others (the adults). Reason, which is at first present in the child only as an inner possibility, is made actual by education, and conversely, the child becomes in like manner conscious that the ethics, religion, and science which it regarded initially as external authority are things that belong to its own and inner nature. (*Enc*. 1 §140Z)

Such passages from the lesser logic point beyond the idea that spirit or mind is a self-contained, independent inwardness that stands in contrast to and is only contingently related to an external, material world. Inevitably, they point also to the significance of human agency and sociality. In the Zusatz just quoted, Hegel is trying to make his conceptual point about the relation of inner and outer palpable for his audience, and it is no accident that the illustration he gives concerns the need for children to connect to their external social world in order to become the rational agents they ought to be. The human spirit or mind is a social achievement that is not possible absent a community that can create, impart, and sustain the norms constitutive of proper thought and proper conduct.

4 Problems with Cartesianism, 3: Rational Being as Social Achievement

The recognition of the essential sociality of mind is one of the greatest achievements of Post-Kantian German Idealism. Arguably, Fichte, or maybe even Kant, was the source of the original insight, but it was Hegel who made it a permanent

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possession of the tradition. In the context of this essay, think of it this way. We have already discussed the idea that the subjective mind can be made sense of only by locating it within a larger context, by seeing it as something *inner* essentially connected to an *outer* reality, a material world in which it makes its way and in response to which it first gains its content. This is the fundamental structure of conscious being.

But human being is not merely conscious being, it is *self-conscious* being. Making one's way in an external, material world is not yet enough to ground such a higher, reflective form of consciousness. Such a self-consciousness requires a confrontation with other self-consciousnesses. Hegel embodies this recognition in his account of the master-slave dialectic, which has inspired so many thinkers. This dialectic reveals two more ways in which the Cartesian conception of mind is faulty: (1) The master/slave dialectic portrays minds (or selves) as products of *development*. A mind is not something that simply comes into being fully formed; it must be developed. (2) It also portrays minds as essentially social, dependent for their development and sustenance on interaction with other such selves or minds.

I will assume general familiarity with Hegel's description of the Master-Slave dialectic. Two consciousnesses, each self-contained and convinced of its independence, meet. Each wants recognition from the other, but is unwilling to give it. They battle until one gives in and accepts the dominance of the other. The apparent "winner" is, however, recognized by someone whose opinion does not count, since the bondsman has not been recognized. The "master" is a dead end. The bondsman, in contrast, begins to regain his self-assurance by transforming the world around him, overcoming his own submissiveness by learning to make the world his own. The dialectic leads towards the development of a conception of *mutual recognition* in which interacting consciousnesses no longer seek one-sided dominance; they become at home with granting each other equal stature.

That Hegel portrays the initial encounter of two (mere) consciousnesses as a *battle* is not supposed to imply that consciousnesses are necessarily and permanently at odds with each other. Quite the contrary, for, even as portrayed by Hegel, progress is made, truth is achieved, only as the consciousnesses come to *recognize* each other. "Recognition" here is a loaded term, for it does not, in this context, reduce to simple object recognition, say, the ability to tell a hawk from a handsaw. Recognizing another consciousness, another person, includes taking an evaluative or normative stance towards that person, acknowledging that person's autonomy and value. Such an acknowledgment itself has practical consequences: One thereby also recognizes the other as able to make claims upon one, as subject to certain entitlements over against one's own claims and entitlements. In becoming *self-conscious*, humans thereby also begin to make explicit to themselves the *normative* nature of human being.

The idea that the master/slave dialectic reveals essential dimensions of human self-consciousness is distinctly un-Cartesian, for the selves involved need to develop, and they need to develop by interaction both with a material world and with other consciousnesses. They are able to achieve themselves fully only in a context in which other, separate, and independent selves also achieve themselves.

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Perhaps even more important, the development a self undergoes is not a straight line incremental growth; it is fundamentally transformational. The social interactions by which a consciousness learns how to engage in relations of mutual recognition transform it from something merely living and organic into a *rational* being. This is a radical break with the Cartesian conception of a self-enclosed, thinking (and rational) substance with a fixed and immutable nature.

The self one achieves in this process is not simply the de facto assemblage of what happens to one, but, as we have seen, a matter of what one *does*. Thus, we see the primacy of practice re-asserted in this context as well. But we need to be clear about the nature of what one *does*. What one *does* is not a mere de facto assemblage of movements, but the set of one's *actions*, undertaken usually with intention and expressive of one's values. Actions have meaning; they can be right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate, rational or irrational. Understanding human being, thus, is not simply a matter of understanding what there is; it essentially involves understanding the relation between what we are and what we ought to be, what we value and how those values are expressed (or not) in our actions. Thus, since actions are essentially susceptible to normative assessment, understanding normativity becomes essential to understanding ourselves. In all of these matters, Hegel and the pragmatists agree.

They also agree on the general strategy to be employed in understanding normativity. The "old school" answers, which either took norms and values to be simply built into the world (à la Plato's forms) or dictated by some external and ultimate authority (God), no longer satisfied enlightened Westerners after the development of the new sciences, which gave us a disenchanted clock-work world, and the reformation, which made it impossible to assume universal agreement concerning God's plans for the world. The new approach to normativity that arose in the Enlightenment treated it as an upshot of the structure of human practices. Robert Brandom, a contemporary pragmatist who claims strong ties to Hegel, states the idea well:

> Enlightenment conceptions of the normative are distinguished by the essential role they take to be played by normative *attitudes* in instituting normative *statuses*. Commitment and responsibilities are seen as coming into a disenchanted natural world hitherto void of them, as products of human attitudes of acknowledging, endorsing, undertaking, or attributing them. (Brandom 2002, 218)

In particular, there is a line of thought, developed by Rousseau and Kant, according to which the difference between a merely coercive and alien *force* that would dictate one's behavior and a legitimate *authority* that imposes a normative constraint on one is precisely one's *endorsement* or *acknowledgment* of the authority as binding on one. No one has authority by nature, except over herself—*power* is natural, but the question of its *legitimacy* is always germane. The only thing that can bind one normatively is oneself via one's acknowledgment, endorsement, or acceptance of some rule or standard. It is, ultimately, the recognition of an external authority as authoritative that constitutes its authority.

Sociality becomes crucial in such a view; otherwise, the structures of normativity shatter into individualistic centers of authority, each infallible to itself, but

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irrelevant to others. In the end, the normativity itself evaporates. If only I can bind myself to norms, then, it seems, the norms can be whatever I want them to be. But if I can decree my thoughts and actions to be correct simply by deciding that they are, the notion of correctness has lost its meaning. Normativity evaporates if there is no standard beyond one's mere wish.[12] Again, Brandom: "If whatever I acknowledge *as* correct—as fulfilling the obligations I have undertaken—*is* correct, then in what sense is what I did in the first place intelligible as *binding* myself?" (Brandom 2002, 219). Authority is, in fact, objectively present only to the extent that it can be made determinate and non-arbitrary. But one cannot make one's authority determinate and non-arbitrary all by oneself. That is why the recognition that is constitutive of the self must be reciprocal.

> It is up to the individual whom to recognize. But it is not up to the individual whether those individuals then in turn recognize the original recognizer. Only when this "movement" is completed is a self constituted. (Brandom 2002, 217)

The idea is that my commitments are *real* and not mere subjective fantasy only to the extent that there are others independent of me who will hold me to those commitments; my entitlements are real only to the extent that others recognize them and act accordingly. Acknowledging each person's autonomy while tempering it with a simultaneous acknowledgment that the autonomy of others imposes responsibilities on all is essential to constructing an environment in which truly *mutual* recognition is possible.

Thus, Hegel's notion of mutual recognition gives us a very different notion of selves from the Cartesian, for a self—something with a distinctive normative status—exists only insofar as it is one self among many selves, each recognizing the others has having authority in two dimensions: the authority to make its own commitments, and the authority to hold others to theirs. Furthermore, the determinacy of one's commitments can be made sense of only within this structure.

This general structure shows up in pragmatism in different ways in different authors. I have already noted that all the pragmatists are consciously post-Darwinian. They have drawn the conclusion that minds develop and that persons must become themselves. The developmental nature of mind is recognized to be both a phylogenetic and an ontogenetic feature. The human species is a product of evolution; individual minds are products of growth and learning.

Peirce heavily emphasized the fact that inquiry—*all* inquiry, not just what we now think of as science—can occur only in a *community* of inquirers, each simultaneously amanuensis to and critic of the others. At a still deeper level, Peirce proposes a semeiotic conception of the self; that is, selves are essentially interpreters, but precisely to that extent also need to be interpreted. Peirce's semeiotics or theory of signs is too complex to review here, but it entails that minds must be elements of complex interpretive interrelations. This is clearly incompatible with the Cartesian conception of the atomistic soul sufficient unto itself in glorious isolation.

Dewey equally recognized the essential sociality of human being.[13] The great emphasis he laid on the significance of education is as much grounded in his

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understanding of the metaphysics of personhood as it is in the belief that fostering education is simply efficient, sound social policy. Dewey was throughout his life also a strong partisan for democracy, and, again, the value he placed on it is deeply grounded in his metaphysics of personhood: only democracy adequately expresses and accounts for the sociality constitutive of human being.

5 Yet Hegel Was Not a Pragmatist

Hegel and the pragmatists share a deeper and richer conception of experience than the Cartesians. They all insist that minds cannot be made sense of independently of their situation in an external, material world, in which they have developed, grown into themselves, through interactions with both material and social reality. We can add further shared characteristics examined in some of the other articles mentioned above: a shared belief that philosophy must begin *in medias res*, and cannot pretend to doubt everything from the very beginning; a shared rejection of straightforwardly aprioristic conceptions of knowledge; a strong belief that *testing*—holding our beliefs accountable to experience—is the key to epistemological method; a shared belief in the reality of the material and the social worlds we inhabit; a coherence theory of concepts; and a belief that norms must grounded in practice.

These are deep commonalities between Hegel's Absolute Idealism and Pragmatism. It is clear that both are resolutely anti-Cartesian, rejecting virtually everything in the Cartesian conception of humanity's place in the world. Arguably, Kant began the movement away from Cartesian conceptions of mind and knowledge, but the truly radical nature of the break with Cartesian tradition becomes fully clear only with Hegel and, perhaps even more so, with the pragmatists.

Does this wealth of shared positions entail that Hegel was a pragmatist? No, things are never so simple. There are countervailing aspects of Hegel's philosophy that push him away from the pragmatist movement despite their many commonalities. One is that Hegel thinks that human beings have a natural tendency to rely heavily on sensory experience, and to achieve philosophical insight they need to free themselves from sensory experience at least in the sense of rising above that form of experience. In this regard, Hegel is perfectly at home with the rationalist strand of Cartesian thinking. But that is not the attitude of a pragmatist; they believe that good philosophy does not require *freeing* us from sensory experience, but a better *use* and *orchestration* of such experience. The pragmatist would agree that there is a sense in which we rise above sensory experience in theory construction, but this is no denigration of sensory experience.

Another way in which Hegel does not fit well within pragmatism concerns his understanding of regulative ideals. Regulative ideals are important to the pragmatists. They are especially significant in Peirce; in his view the related concepts of truth and reality are both regulative. He famously characterized truth as "the opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate, is what we

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mean by the truth" (Peirce 1931, 5:407). It is also clear, however, that he does not think that this agreement must actually be reached: "Inquiry properly carried on will reach some definite and fixed result or approximate indefinitely toward that limit" (Peirce 1931, 1:485). Furthermore, "The opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate, is what we mean by the truth, and the object represented in this opinion is the real" (Peirce 1931, 5:407). The concepts of truth and reality are for Peirce regulative ideals: they direct action—in this case, epistemic action and investigation—rather than describe something given. Our notions of truth and reality drive us ever onwards towards further discovery and still more investigation. That we, finite and limited beings, may never (will never) reach a final and conclusive science that leaves nothing more to investigate is not something that troubles Peirce or the pragmatists. This, however, does bother Hegel.

Regulative principles are maxims for action; they are prescriptions, oughts. They are not constitutive, and they represent ideals that can never be fulfilled, maxims that prescribe an impossible task. Yet, as Kant pointed out, ought implies can. Why should we strive for an unattainable ideal, then? Hegel thought Kant is stuck with a dilemma, an internal inconsistency, one that he escapes by saying that what is commanded is *striving* for the ideal, not achieving it. This seems hollow to Hegel, like telling a midget to strive for a professional basketball career. According to Hegel such infinite striving is simply empty; an end without end is no end at all. Hegel's proposed solution is clear: ought does imply can, and the Ideas of reason (which Hegel unifies in his own one Idea) as the in-principle achievable task or object of rational thought are not merely regulative, they are what is in and for itself, what is real.

I complained earlier that the idealism/realism contrast is simply too inarticulate to be useful in describing Hegel and the pragmatists, and we see here yet another respect in which this is the case. For Hegel, the ideal *is* the real; for the pragmatists, the real is an ideal. For Hegel, who thought of his project as, in one sense, the reconciliation of humanity with the world, it was vital that the reconciliation striven for not be a mere pipe dream. It must be possible for us to be reconciled in the here-and-now. The pragmatists did not share that conviction, or, rather, they had a different view of how humanity is to be reconciled to the world. It is the striving itself, the on-going project of transforming ourselves via knowledge and the world through our actions in which we reconcile ourselves with the world by participating in it fully.

That Hegel, despite his deep similarities to the pragmatists, and despite the great influence he exercised on several of the classic pragmatists, is not properly called a pragmatist himself can also be seen (perhaps more quickly) by pointing out that Josiah Royce, another great American philosopher, and one of Hegel's strongest American adherents, is not grouped with the pragmatists. Royce was deeply influenced by Peirce and took up the study of logic because of Peirce's inspiration. It was Royce who procured Peirce's papers for Harvard. Royce was hired by William James and spent years as his colleague. Some of Royce's students, for instance, W. E. B. Dubois and C. I. Lewis, were counted major

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pragmatists. Yet, though one will occasionally see Royce called a pragmatist, he is much more often called an Idealist, and he did not consider himself a pragmatist. If Royce, with deep ties of mutual influence with pragmatism, does not qualify, it seems unlikely one could, in good faith, simply call Hegel a pragmatist.

Without Hegel's transformation of Kant's project, however, it is certain that pragmatism would have looked very different, if it came into existence at all. Peirce claimed that "My philosophy resuscitates Hegel, though in a strange costume" (Peirce 1931, 1:42), and we have seen no reason to think that he was far off the mark.[14]

Notes

1. Of course, they were not responding solely to the linear ancestor, but to complex historical and social circumstances as well.
2. This bibliography is accessible at: http://idealismandpragmatism.org/bibliography.
3. This is one conclusion of Descartes's wax example at the end of the Second Meditation.
4. A highly readable account of the relation between early modern philosophy and pragmatism that is consistent with the story I tell here can be found in Bruce Aune (1970).
5. Indeed, there are two different words in German for the one English word. "*Erlebnis*" is used to refer to something one lives through: "That roller coaster ride was quite an experience." "*Erfahrung*" (the word Kant uses) has a more cognitive connotation; it implies something is learned or grasped: "I want a highly experienced surgeon."
6. This is the point of his Transcendental Deduction of the Categories.
7. "Consider what effects, that 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 1931, 5:402).
8. One might wonder how one could make Dewey's characterization of thought as a tool compatible with Hegel's stinging critique of that very metaphor in the "Introduction" to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Notice that there is a difference between thinking of cognition as "the instrument with which one takes possession of the absolute" and thinking of it as a tool that enables us better to achieve our worldly goals. I leave spelling this difference out as an exercise for the reader.
9. Leibniz hits this nail on the head with his conception of a monad.
10. Of course, pragmatists have to recognize that there are pathological cases in which someone's ability to act has been stolen away by some disease or severe brain damage, but these are (1) precisely *pathologies* where things have gone terribly wrong, and (2) presuppose a prior high level of engagement with the material world in which the subject's mental powers were cultivated, just like the rest of us.
11. That Hegel recognizes all this is argued in detail in deVries (1988).
12. As Ken Westphal has pointed out (in personal correspondence), this is exactly Hegel's point, in a deliberate literary parallel to Hobbes' state of nature, in "Der geistige Tierreich" (the spiritual animalistic realm).
13. Dewey "knows that an individual is nothing fixed, given ready-made. It is something achieved, and achieved not in isolation, but the aid and support of conditions, cultural and physical, including in "cultural" economic, legal, and political institutions as well as science and art" (Dewey 1935, 227).
14. Thanks to Paul Giladi for tracking down some useful references. Thanks also to Ken Westphal for useful comments and suggestions.

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