

## Why Pragmatists Cannot be Pluralists

Contemporary pragmatists often maintain that their doctrine is intrinsically allied with pluralism.<sup>1</sup> This claim has become so common that it has taken on the lively hue of self-evidence. We contend that pragmatism and pluralism are in fact not compatible, that pragmatists cannot be pluralists. Our demonstration of this thesis will proceed in an ordinary way: We shall first identify three distinct types of pluralism.<sup>2</sup> We shall then identify two general styles of pragmatism.<sup>3</sup> Then we shall demonstrate that although certain varieties of pluralism are logically *consistent* with pragmatism, no pluralism is *compatible* with pragmatism; that is, we will argue that in cases where pragmatism and pluralism are consistent there are good pragmatic reasons to reject pluralism. Thus the lively hue of self-evidence that once attended the thought that the two are deeply connected should turn to a sickly pall of implausibility.

Our mission is not simply negative or polemical. We do not seek merely to refute a self-conception popular among pragmatists. Rather, we aim to further the positive agenda of encouraging pragmatists to make more explicit the nature of their commitments in a way that better enables them to engage critically and fruitfully in a broader set of philosophical conversations concerning pluralism. As we shall indicate in the closing section of this essay, we see this kind of cross-traditional engagement as essential to the health of any philosophical tradition, and absolutely essential in the case of the American pragmatist tradition, which has always upheld the importance of critical exchange. In this way, we see the following essay as a positive contribution to pragmatist philosophy and a decisive step forward in advancing American philosophy.

### *Pluralism: Three Distinct Types*

Although pluralism comes in many forms, every variety of pluralism begins with a purportedly undeniable fact of moral experience,<sup>4</sup> namely, the persistence of disagreement even among well-intentioned and sincere persons at the level of what Bruce Ackerman has fittingly called "Big Questions" (1989, p. 361).<sup>5</sup> According to the pluralist, experience teaches that the moral universe contains a rich fund of values, not all of which can be synthesized into a single system.

Among goods, many appear incompatible, impossible, and incommensurable with other goods. Choice among competing but incommensurable goods is inevitable, and such choices form, as Isaiah Berlin claimed in an almost existentialist mode, “an inescapable characteristic of the human condition” (1969, p. 169). However, as the goods among which we must choose are incommensurable, there is no decision procedure that we can appeal to and no *summum bonum* by means of which the competing options can be ranked. Thus it is no surprise that we find among persons deep differences at the most fundamental moral, religious, and philosophical levels. Moreover, because it is unclear how these differences can be rationally adjudicated, the expectation that we might soon reach widespread moral consensus seems misplaced.<sup>6</sup>

At the most fundamental level, then, all pluralisms are committed to the claim that the persistence of deep moral disagreement is not due entirely to human frailty, ignorance, stupidity, or wickedness. Stated positively, all pluralisms agree that there are some value conflicts in which every party to the dispute holds a position that fully accords with the best possible reasons and evidence. Hence moral conflict persists because of some facts about the ontology or epistemology of values, not because of some failing of human reason, intellect, or psychology. According to the pluralist, such disagreement is, as Rawls has claimed, a “permanent condition” of human life (1996, p. 129).<sup>7</sup> This is the *sine qua non* of pluralism.

Pluralists divide on the issues of how best to *explain* this feature of the human moral predicament, and how to *respond* to it. We identify below the three prescriptive programs that form the basis of our taxonomy of pluralism, but let us first sketch two general explanatory strategies adopted by pluralists.

Some pluralists offer an *epistemic* account of the persistence of moral dispute. The exemplar of this approach is John Rawls.<sup>8</sup> Appealing to what he calls the “the burdens of judgment” (1996, p. 56), Rawls contends that wide moral consensus is unattainable because human rationality, even at its best, cannot decide questions that admit of the kinds of complexity characteristic of fundamental moral questions. Were we a different kind of creature, with different cognitive abilities, we might be able to reach consensus; but as we are, we cannot.

Another style of pluralism offers an *ontological* account of the persistence of moral dispute. According to the ontological account, the moral facts are *themselves* in conflict; consequently there is a number of true moral propositions that nonetheless do not form a consistent set. Hence even a cognitively perfect being, one not subject to Rawls’s burdens of judgment, must confront moral conflict.<sup>9</sup> Given this, to expect moral consensus among mere humans is unreasonable.

There are of course subtle differences of nuance within each explanatory style, and the two are not mutually exclusive; one can, of course, see the epistemic obstacles to moral consensus as following from the ontological fact of

value conflict. The important point here is that these different explanatory approaches give rise to different prescriptive programs; these in turn form the basis of our taxonomy of pluralism into three types: (1) *shallow pluralism*, (2) *deep pluralism*, and (3) *modus vivendi pluralism*.

Shallow pluralism typically arises out of a strictly epistemic approach to value conflict. It is, most fundamentally, the norm and procedure of tolerating difference. Holding that certain conflicts simply cannot be rationally adjudicated, the shallow pluralist recommends the epistemically modest position that tolerance should prevail. In some cases, the prescribed tolerance proceeds from contextualization. We can understand why physicists, painters, Native Americans, rock-climbers, and mystics all view the Grand Canyon differently. Insofar as these competing visions are placed in context, their inconsistency can be tolerated. They sometimes, perhaps, can come into dialogue, criticize each other, and inform each other.

Deep pluralism, by contrast, is generally the prescriptive outcome of a strong ontological account of value conflict. Given that conflict is interminable and built into the very fabric of moral reality, one must adopt a kind of agonistic attitude toward all values, where there could be no moral reason to adopt any view over another.<sup>10</sup> That is, the deep pluralist lives in a world where conflicts among goods are arational and consequently often violent, and the only prescription could be to secure or protect one's own values. Hence Levinas (1961) takes power to be the only condition for decisions, not reason or rational persuasion. Further, he denies that such a situation is ever avoidable; there can never be anything such as a moral reason, only power.<sup>11</sup> In a similar vein, Carl Schmitt argues that the outcome of deep pluralism is that, when confronted with a value conflict,

Each has to decide for himself whether in the concrete situation the otherness of the stranger signifies the negation of his own way of life so that he has to be fended off and fought in order to preserve the way of life that is existentially important. (1976, p. 27)

Schmitt sees no problem with the implication that value conflict involves "the real possibility of physical killing, existential negation of the enemy" (1976, p. 33).<sup>12</sup>

*Modus vivendi* pluralism is the more liberal response to an ontological explanation of value conflict. Unlike deep pluralism, the *modus vivendi* prescription is not agonism, but tolerance. Unlike the shallow pluralist, who also prescribes tolerance, the *modus vivendi* pluralist does not see tolerance as a kind of epistemic modesty in the face of different answers to Big Questions, but rather as a Hobbesian truce. The agenda for *modus vivendi* pluralism is to shape the political and intellectual terrain so that individuals and groups can co-exist in common institutions they accept as legitimate (Gray 2000, p. 122). This is a

“live-and-let-live politics”; but it can be achieved by way of only two means: either (a) ignoring and remaining indifferent toward competing values, or (b) recognizing and respecting the competing values.

The indifferentist perspective is driven by the idea that since there is no rational basis for holding one conception of the good rather than another, none has any greater normative weight than any other. Recognizing that the agonist prescription that one should seek to eliminate opposing value structures itself implies a value judgment regarding one’s opponents, the indifferentist recommends that we simply ignore those with whom we disagree (Rescher 1993, p. 103). Hence indifferentist *modus vivendi* pluralism requires the *institutional* and *cultural space* by which proponents of opposing goods can be kept out of each other’s way; the confrontation of different ways of life hinders indifference.

Recognitionist *modus vivendi* pluralism is precisely the flip side of the indifferentist outlook — on this view, all competing values are equally rational, so they must be treated as such. Instead of being indifferent to them, one must respect them all as instantiations of their own unique brand of goodness. As a consequence, what is necessary for the recognitionist program is not just *space* for those goods to avoid confrontation, but *reciprocity* between those who espouse conflicting goods. Not only must advocates of competing goods agree to disagree, but they must also agree to disagree in a respectful and non-interfering way. They must make space *for each other* and positively recognize the *value* of each other’s existence (Gray 2000, 138).

### *Pragmatism: Two Varieties*

We turn now to a taxonomy of pragmatisms. Pragmatism, at least in its classical expressions, comes in roughly two forms: *inquiry* pragmatism and *meaning* pragmatism.<sup>13</sup> To help fix the distinction, note that some key exponents of meaning pragmatism are James (1909), the Peirce of “How to Make our Ideas Clear,” Quine (1969), John Stuhr (1997), Richard Rorty (1979; 1998), Robert Brandom (1994; 2000), and Joseph Margolis (2002). Among the inquiry pragmatists are Dewey (1938), the Peirce of “The Fixation of Belief,” Sidney Hook (1940), Susan Haack (1993; 2003), Nicholas Rescher (1993), and Cheryl Misak (2000).

*Meaning Pragmatism* is first and foremost a method of clarification. William James’s famous solution to the campsite quibble concerning the squirrel is the touchstone. The dissolution of the dispute, James claims, is achieved by an application of the “pragmatic method of interpreting each notion by tracing its practical consequences” (1977, p. 377). He identifies the requirement for difference in meaning as follows:

If no practical difference (between alternatives) can be traced, then the alternatives mean practically the same thing, and all dispute is idle. Whenever a dispute is

serious, we ought to be able to show some practical difference that must follow from one side or the other's being right. (1977, p. 377)

On James's view, since differences in meaning *are* differences in practice, there could be no difference in meaning without difference in practice.

The consequence of the meaning pragmatist program, according to James, is that disputes that otherwise would be "interminable" are settled peacefully (1977, p. 377). In fact, on James's view, the very function of pragmatist philosophy is to trace definite practical differences for interested subjects were one metaphysical system true or false (1977, p. 379). The primary objective of Jamesian pragmatism is to "smooth misunderstandings and to bring in peace" (1977, p. 349). Hence the two sides in the squirrel debate get contextualized and are rendered compatible. Similarly, the tension between materialism and theism is decided by James in terms of their hopes for the persistence of value, and is contextualized in the form of how the opposing viewpoints fit our respective temperaments. Insofar as we see the meaning of these commitments as practical (and temperamental), they are not in contradiction since they are not incompatible plans for action. What theoretically seemed contradictory becomes consistent when interpreted pragmatically.

The crucial thought is that theoretical tensions can be tolerated and perhaps even ignored insofar as they have no practical corollaries of conflict. In turn, it is easy to see how such a theory of meaning would seem amenable to a pluralism. James explicitly endorses metaphysical pluralism as pragmatism's doctrine, as the theory of meaning cannot accommodate an absolute monism in light of the diversity of experience. The world is not yet complete, and as such, it is "imperfectly unified" and perhaps destined to remain so (1977, p. 477).

Peirce's application of his criterion of meaning has similar consequences. If our ideas of objects are our ideas of their sensible effects (5.401),<sup>14</sup> many debates in metaphysics can be resolved easily. The tension between free will determinism, for example, can be resolved because, once the positions are interpreted pragmatically, they are not in contradiction — they do not differ on some fact or other, but on *some arrangement of facts* (5.403). Though he does not go so far as to say that both sides are right, Peirce does suggest that this method allows us to resolve controversies into livable pluralities (5.403).

The bottom line for meaning pragmatism as a philosophical method, then, is to translate cases of theoretical disagreement into a tractable practical vocabulary. Some cases are ones where the translation yields a clear winner — as in, for example, Peirce's dismissal of transubstantiation as "senseless jargon" (5.401) — whereas other cases are ones where the tension is not resolved by choosing one side of the debate over another but by creating a space for peaceful co-existence of the competing conceptions. In this respect, meaning pragmatism seems consistent with *modus vivendi* pluralism. The prescriptive project for the *modus*

*vivendi* pluralist is to create a series of institutions for peaceful coexistence of competing conceptions of the good, and meaning pragmatism is the policy of resolving those competing differences into co-habitational practices.

It is unclear whether or not the Jamesian or Peircian meaning pragmatism require either recognition or indifference to drive their policies, and perhaps the decision between them may depend on the circumstances. However, for Peirce, it often seems more a matter of indifference between competing camps, once their tension has been resolved, since the differences that survive the analysis are ones more curious than useful (5.410). For James, recognition seems more likely, since the perspectives behind tensions serve as a source of enrichment for inquirers and they demand attention.<sup>15</sup>

For the inquiry pragmatist, however, it is not the meaning of terms or theories that drives the tension between competing conceptions of the good, but rather our current situation of not having an adequate criterion for judgment. What is required for inquiry pragmatism, then, is not a dissolution of the conflict, but a research program designed to arrive at positive resolution. Disagreements for inquiry pragmatists are not semantic puzzles arising from inept or unfortunate vocabularies (as they are for meaning pragmatists), but real problems to which we must respond. The search for solutions requires *experimentation* — we must cast about for answers and put them to the test.

The Peirce of “The Fixation of Belief” is an inquiry pragmatist *par excellence*. On this kind of view, inquiry is the project of settling beliefs and pursuing truth (Haack 2003, pp. 135ff.). We are agitated by some doubt, arising from a crisis, in Dewey’s terms, an “indeterminate situation” (1989, p. 109). In the face of such conflict, inquiry is the response of producing and refining beliefs and policies that coincide with reality. Truth is our tool for conflict resolution (5.387).

A community of inquiry is not committed to any particular set of beliefs, but rather to the policy of pursuing the *integrity* of belief (5.387). Some communities may be committed to saving some special subset of their beliefs, but a community of inquiry is willing to sacrifice any belief for one that captures what is. Proper inquiry, then, is not a method of belief *preservation*, but of belief *revision* and *correction* (Talisse 2001, pp. 564-567). This prerequisite for inquiry is *fallibilism*. For Peirce, it is a constitutive feature of genuine inquiry.

As a consequence, only beliefs and policies that survive inquiry are worth holding. The process of winnowing current beliefs down is that of *experimentation*. If, as meaning pragmatism contends, the content of a belief is its practical consequences, then we can test our beliefs in terms of their consequences actually obtaining or not. Dewey characterizes the features of the experimental component as (i) locating the sources of knowledge in practical consequences, (ii) self-corrective inquiry, and (iii) hypothesizing solutions with the hope of undertaking further inquiry (1988, p. 336). Experiment comes out of the territory of current solutions and problems, but it also opens the ground for new solutions and problems. We arrange our materials and theories in a way

that new information can come to us in the experiment's outcome, but that information must always be held conditionally — as a consequence of that arrangement of theories and materials. That information cannot stand alone, as it has its force and (if the meaning pragmatist is right) its content insofar as it is derived from that arrangement.

In this hypothetical feature of experimentalism we find an additional determinative component of inquiry pragmatism: *holism*. Holists reject the standard verificationist line according to which propositions can be tested apart from the theories of which they are a part. According to the holist, theories and beliefs are tested together. When an experiment is run, one does not just set the stage for the production of a new belief or the rejection of an old one. Experiments test the coherence and cogency of theories as a whole; as Quine would have it, "our statements about the external world face the tribunal of sense experience not individually but as a corporate body" (1953, p. 41).

Inquiry pragmatism hence is marked by three features: fallibilism, experimentalism, and holism. These features seem to make this form of pragmatism amenable to shallow pluralism, since it would be hasty for any inquirer to rule a form of the good out or infer it can be trumped by another form of the good unqualifiedly, since all experiments occur holistically. They can be judged only against a fallible background. Given this holist-fallibilist requirement, competing goods and those that espouse them can more fruitfully be seen as alternative experimental programs and researchers. And so, just as scientists do not (or ought not) interfere with the experiments of their peers and competitors, those of us pursuing the good life ought not interfere with the experiments in living others perform.

### *Pragmatism and Pluralism: Incompatible Doctrines*

So far, we have discussed three kinds of pluralism (shallow, deep, and *modus vivendi*) and two kinds of pragmatism (meaning and inquiry). Meaning pragmatism, we have shown, seems a good fit with *modus vivendi* pluralism, and inquiry pragmatism seems allied with shallow pluralism. Yet all is not well. In this section we will argue for three theses: (I) neither pragmatism is consistent with deep pluralism, (II) *modus vivendi* pluralism is practically unstable and thus is a pragmatically ineffective prescriptive response to value conflict, and (III) shallow pluralism is pluralism in name only. So, despite the fact that meaning pragmatism is *consistent* with *modus vivendi* pluralism and inquiry pragmatism is *consistent* with shallow pluralism, neither can be wedded to pluralism for long. That is to say, pragmatism and pluralism, even when strictly *consistent* are not *compatible* doctrines. Divorce between them is inevitable, and that is a good thing, too.

#### *I. That Pragmatists Cannot be Deep Pluralists*

The deep pluralist is committed to a strong ontological thesis regarding value. The deep pluralist is not only an unabashed moral realist, but also holds

that practical value conflict is the product of a deep fact about the ontology of value. As we have argued above, the prescriptive consequence is agonism — since there could be no rational relations between opposing goods, only power counts, and one should exercise power in order to eliminate opposition.

Meaning pragmatism is inconsistent with deep pluralism for two reasons. First, the plurality of values and world-views allowed by the meaning pluralist program are those translatable into either identical or coherent practical consequences. So, the Peircian and Jamesian pluralisms of free will and determinism, or optimism and pessimism, are possible *only insofar as the two competing programs can be translated into a set of consistent practices or temperaments*. Peirce's meaning pragmatism tolerates *no inconsistency on the level of practical content*; thus when the issue of transubstantiation comes to a head, Peirce dismisses one of the competing outlooks:

We can consequently mean nothing by wine but what has certain effects, direct or indirect, upon the sense; and to talk of something as having the sensible characters of wine, yet being in reality blood is senseless jargon. (5.401)

If the Catholic side of the transubstantiation debate is dropped in this way, Peirce's meaning pragmatism must first require that meaning come in a singular form and second require that all conditions for adjudicating debates refer only to that form. In this respect, Peirce's meaning pragmatism is at bottom descriptively inconsistent with deep pluralism, since Peirce holds that there is but one criterion for meaning. Further, his prescriptive program is one that legitimates the variety of values according to that singular standard. Such judgments, for the deep pluralist, are impossible.

The ontological feature of deep pluralism generates a second point of conflict with meaning pragmatism. If, as meaning pragmatism runs, content must be translatable into practical consequences, how are the metaphysical claims of the deep pluralist to be understood? How could the strong ontological claims about the incommensurability of moral entities be rendered in practical consequences? Surely Peirce's Occamite attitude toward non-practical entities and "make believes" would strip such a theory of its weight (5.416). That is to say, any account of the incomparability of values that explains that incomparability in terms of features beyond our practices of comparison will be of no more content than the useless verbiage of transubstantiation theories. And as a consequence, meaning pluralism cannot accommodate the deep pluralist's strong ontological commitments.

Inquiry pragmatism is inconsistent with deep pluralism for similar reasons. First, inquiry pragmatism's fallibilist component is inconsistent with the strong modal aspect of deep pluralism, according to which certain value conflicts are *of*

*necessity* inevitable, interminable, and unadjudicable. Such an attitude, the inquiry pragmatist will object, is simply a block on the road of inquiry. The deep pluralist prescription against even *trying* theories that promise to overcome or adjudicate conflicts is a positive hindrance to inquiry. Any theory that impedes or discourages further inquiry barricades the advance toward truth and is an unpardonable offense in reasoning (1.135). Given the kind of prescriptive weight of the deep pluralist account of adjudication, any theory that runs afoul of the prescription is *a priori* known to be totalizing, imperialist, or worse. For the inquiry pragmatist, such a position cannot be adopted by a genuine inquirer.

Second, deep pluralism fails to take any of the competing conceptions of the good as experiments or incomplete or open to revision and correction. Instead, each conflicting viewpoint gets treated as static and perfect.<sup>16</sup> But such an attitude is anti-fallibilist and anti-experimentalist. If we take both sides of a conflict to be perfectly right in a valuational conflict, there is no room for adjudication between them (which was the first objection) or *inquiry within* either side. That is, just as the parties in a conflict cannot enter into corrective dialogue with each other, *they cannot even do so with themselves*. To the inquiry pragmatist, such an attitude not only obstructs the road of inquiry, but it renders inquiry altogether impossible.

## II. That *Modus Vivendi* Pluralism is Pragmatically Ineffective

Meaning pragmatism is consistent with *modus vivendi* pluralism. However, meaning pragmatists ought not be *modus vivendi* pluralists because such a prescriptive program is not a pragmatically viable response to value conflict. Recall that *modus vivendi* pluralism contends that each side of a conflict must be given the space for its own projects and that one maintains that space either by *recognition* or by *indifference*. But, as Rawls has argued in a different context, *modus vivendi* arrangements are unstable and likely to collapse into agonism (1996, pp. 133ff.). When *modus vivendi* policies are in place, all parties to a conflict will take the current arrangement as less than ideal, since all parties accept the order as a *compromise*. There is still an order that is much better for the partisans, namely, that of totally holding sway, and there is one that is much worse, namely, that of total disenfranchisement. But such a balance of power is a reasonable compromise only if the two competing sides already have equal power. If one side has or comes to have more power than its competitors, such a society will not remain *modus vivendi* for long, but will quickly devolve into a agonistic war among the competing factions.

One way for a *modus vivendi* arrangement to remain stable, even in contexts where the power relation is asymmetric, is for it to be in place against a background of *recognition* between competing lifestyles. Parties may be in competition, but they nevertheless recognize the internal legitimacy of each other's programs (Gray 2000, p. 20). But such a background policy of recognition is one that is itself *inconsistent* with pluralism, *since it requires that the*

*duties of recognition and reciprocity override the values driving the conflicts.* The only way for such a policy to have a hold on a population of competing partisanships is for those partisanships to already agree on the value of cross-partisan recognition. But no population of partisans has such a valuational structure — those who espouse values in competition with the partisanship are invariably seen as morally *deficient, ignorant, or immoral*. The recognitionist version of *modus vivendi* pluralism is internally incoherent (Talisse 2000, p. 454).

Another way to maintain *modus vivendi* policies in the face of instability is to promote *indifference* between differing camps. Instead of getting the partisans to accept each other, the indifferentist pushes the competing groups to develop an attitude of apathy toward one another. This is accomplished by way of skeptical arguments that challenge the justification one has for a certain world view or value or policy. Compelling versions may go: From the perspective of the universe as a whole, does it matter who gets to vote and who doesn't? Whether some people have whiskey on Sundays? From such an extreme perspective, the conflicts seem miniscule and arbitrary, certainly not the kind of thing to fight over. Once we've achieved this perspective, we can co-exist with those with whom we disagree. It is the "don't sweat the small stuff" attitude from the perspective where everything looks small (Rescher 1993, p. 104).

But such a solution is theoretically unappealing to the pragmatist, since it addresses valuational conflict by deflating the values; it thus betrays moral experience. Surely this price is too high. Nor does such a deflated set of values actually reduce the conflict — values conflict, deflated or not. Moreover, the solution is psychologically unstable, because the perspective of eternity is difficult for most people to maintain. In fact, it may be positively harmful and detrimental. From the perspective of the universe as a whole, does it matter if I go to work, or feed my dog, or pay rent, or even breathe? And as a consequence, we see that we naturally return to the perspective of interested subjects. And with that return, the conflicts will flare up again. So, it seems the indifferentist solution to instability is itself perhaps more unstable. Moreover, it is difficult to imagine such a solution supporting the pragmatist's meliorist program. Though meaning pragmatism is consistent with *modus vivendi* pluralism, no pragmatist could be such a pluralist.

### *III. That Shallow Pluralism is Pluralism in Name Only*

Shallow pluralism is consistent with inquiry pragmatism. Shallow pluralism's commitment to tolerance in its contextualist form meshes well with the inquiry pragmatist's experimentalism fallibilism. If we view those who pursue different lifestyles as co-inquirers, experiments must be given their space to come to fruition.

But we must remember that shallow pluralism's prescription is derived from a philosophically modest account of the moral universe. First, shallow pluralism is a weakly epistemic pluralism. On the shallow view, although there may be no

current criterion for judgment, there is also no reason to hold that this is a permanent condition. The shallow pluralist acknowledges that further inquiry, some discovery or other, or the application of good judgment, may provide that criterion for use. As a consequence, the prescriptive force of shallow pluralism is that those criteria should be pursued. *The shallow pluralist, then, must not only tolerate moral inquiry but actively do it.* This is precisely the aim of inquiry pragmatism. The inquiry pragmatist is duty-bound to subject disagreement to critical examination, and the principal direction of that research must be that of rational adjudication. Shallow pluralism and inquiry pragmatism, then, are a good match.

The second modest feature of shallow pluralism is its lack of any strong ontological commitments. On the shallow view, conflicts among goods are not taken to be clashes between existentially incommensurable entities, but rather procedural puzzles and occasions for inquiry. Even if there are no certainly overriding goods or failsafe decision-procedures, there are, nevertheless, decision procedures that are on the whole better, more reliable and rational, than others. Our obligation is to find and make the best ones we can.

We must ask whether such an outlook is really *pluralist* at all. Because shallow pluralism's commitments are modest, it bears only a faint resemblance to the stronger versions. Its only real similarities to stronger pluralisms are in (a) recognizing and tolerating the prevalence of disagreement, and (b) in acknowledging that we do not currently have the criteria for adjudicating those disagreements. But neither of these commitments is distinctly *pluralist*! Consider that Plato's dialectic proceeds from both concessions, but is recognized as a paradigmatic *monism*. Similarly, Descartes' invitation to take up the meditative method evokes the same commitments, but the method is one of *unifying* the sciences. Acknowledging the persistence of moral disagreement and the epistemic difficulty of the situation does not yet make one a pluralist, yet it seems shallow pluralism commits to little more than that. Thus *shallow pluralism is pluralism in name only.*

Further, shallow pluralism's prescriptive component of contextualism requires a deeper monism that explains the seeming variety. For example, Rescher's contextualism proceeds from the intuition that human variety is what drives disagreement and the lack of unanimity with most objects of inquiry, but that does not mean that the objects themselves are plural. There may be (and often is) still a singular object, but multiple perspectives. "Nature is to some extent a mirror: what looks out depends on who looks in" (Rescher 1993, pp. 75-6). But the important thing for Rescher's contextualism is that these different *conceptions* of the world are all *responses to the same world*, and they are to be understood and explained, and even adjudicated in terms of how this variety springs from one world. We may not strive to bring that plurality of voices to speak as one; however, we do, when the voices come together as a cacophony, evoke a criterion based on the unity of the world to bring such anarchy to a

close.

In fact, this thought of the unity of the world giving rise to a plurality of perspectives is the flip side of the very fact of conflict. If the forest for an environmental activist and the forest for a logger were not the same forest, then the two perspectives would not have the conflict they do. If they were two separate objects, then the loggers could turn their trees into planks and sawdust, and the activists could hug theirs as much as they like. But it is because these are different conceptions of *the same thing* that there is enmity between two camps. To go any further ontologically is to make the very fact of conflict unintelligible.

*Conclusion: Pragmatists as Anti-Pluralists*

We've here set out a taxonomy according to which pluralism comes in three forms and pragmatism comes in two forms. We first argued that neither form of pragmatism is consistent with deep pluralism, due to the latter's strong ontological commitments. We then acknowledged that meaning pragmatism is consistent with *modus vivendi* pluralism, and inquiry pragmatism is consistent with shallow pluralism. However, we have argued that *modus vivendi* pluralism is not a pragmatically acceptable response to value conflict, and shallow pluralism is pluralism in name only. Therefore pragmatism and pluralism are incompatible doctrines; pragmatists cannot be pluralists.

We expect that this result will strike many pragmatists as unacceptable. We should like, therefore, to conclude by preempting a likely line of response. In the course of this preemption, we shall come to the even bolder conclusion that pragmatists must be anti-pluralists.

Pragmatists may retort that 'pluralism' as *pragmatists employ the term* does not fit in our proposed taxonomy. They may then argue that there is a type of pluralism that is fully a piece with pragmatism. That is, the pragmatist might object to our argument by claiming that *of course* pragmatists cannot be pluralists if by 'pluralism' one means what non-pragmatist philosophers mean by the term. They may say that the conclusion that pragmatists cannot be pluralists certainly follows, but is merely verbal and trivial. The pragmatist may additionally contend that a non-trivial argument would have to show that pragmatists cannot be pluralists in *the sense of 'pluralism' that they intend*. Short of such a demonstration, we have cast no shadow over the claim that pragmatism and pluralism are closely allied.

It is clear to us that when pragmatists speak of pluralism they mean to indicate a *prima facie* dedication to habits of inclusiveness, non-repressive toleration, openness, experimentalism, anti-dogmatism, and other admirable moral and political commitments. Surely, these commitments are not necessarily incompatible with pragmatism. However, our project in the present essay has not been that of showing that that the pragmatist conception of pluralism is incompatible with other elements of pragmatism; rather, we have tried to show that the pragmatist conception of pluralism is incompatible with *those conceptions*

of pluralism that are in currency in the present philosophical debate. That is, we have demonstrated that the term 'pluralism' operates in the more general philosophical arena to denote a series of positions that are not in agreement with pragmatism. The suggestion is that, if pragmatists want to join the current debate, they must at the very least take careful notice of this fact of vocabulary.

Here we imagine our interlocutor objecting to the very idea that pragmatists should try to engage in philosophical discussion with those who employ a philosophical vocabulary that is foreign to pragmatism. This reply is understandable. Pragmatism has always been in part a commitment to subjecting philosophical terminology to careful philosophical scrutiny; in fact, one may say that one of the distinctive features of pragmatist philosophy is its insight into how philosophical vocabularies are never neutral, but actually play a role in generating philosophical problems. This sensitivity to the power of terms is entirely appropriate. However, the pragmatist *virtue* of seeing the need to reconstruct philosophical terminology has a corresponding *vice* in a semantic insularity that insists that an antecedent pragmatist vocabulary is the *only* intellectually responsible way of talking. That pragmatism should *itself* become a stolid, specialized vocabulary that on *a priori* grounds excludes non-pragmatist options from philosophical relevance is a troubling development. That pragmatist philosophers should spend so much time talking about themselves to each other constitutes an ironic betrayal of the pragmatist tradition, and is anti-pluralist in even the pragmatist's sense of the term.

Pragmatists may at this point concede that the term 'pluralism' has come to denote commitments they cannot accept. They might then conclude that the term is not worth fighting for, resolving to abandon the term and instead talk about those commitments for which 'pluralism' was a blanket term: experimentalism, toleration, inclusion, openness, and contextualism. Hence they will be less likely to be misunderstood by the broader philosophical community.

We endorse this tactical move, for nothing is lost by jettisoning the term. Yet the issue we have raised is not simply one of turf and vocabulary. Even if they elect to desert the term, pragmatists should confront the more general debates concerning pluralism because if pluralism is *true*, then pragmatism is a bankrupt philosophical program. Pragmatists are hence implicitly committed to the *falsity* of pluralism. Pragmatists should, then, attend to pluralist arguments and devise criticisms of them. Proper criticism must address the view to be criticized in terms that proponents of that view can recognize as, at the very least, not question-begging. Hence, it will not do to recite chapter and verse of one's favorite pragmatist text; one must rather *engage* directly the arguments advanced in favor of pluralist theses and *demonstrate* their flaws. Unless there is a critique of pluralism that is consistent with pragmatism, pragmatism is jeopardized. In this way, our argument has not only shown that pragmatists cannot be pluralists; we have also demonstrated the stronger claim that pragmatists must be actively anti-pluralist.

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NOTES

1. Hence Stuhr, "Pragmatism's Universe is pluralistic" (2003, p. 184) and "To make philosophy pragmatic, it is necessary to take pluralism seriously" (1999, p. 41); Shook, "Pragmatic realism ... offers a pluralistic ontological alternative to the stark extremes of global relativistic phenomenism and global realism" (2002, p. 115); Parker, "James's radical empiricism thus implies a radical pluralism, and this pluralism is manifest in all areas of his thought" (1999, p. 212); and Gouinlock, "Dewey is properly regarded as a moral pluralist" (1999, p. 236). The classical source of this idea is William James (1996); on James and pluralism, see O'Shea 2000. For additional instances of the claim that pragmatism is closely allied with pluralism, see Burke 2002, p. 127; Capps 2002; Keith 2001, p. 126; Caspary 2000, p. 15; Hoy 1998, p. 42; Seigfried 1998, pp. 197-88; Posnock 1997, p. 335; Carlson 1997, p. 382; Wilshire 1997, p. 104; Alexander 1995, pp. 132-138; Colapietro 1995, p. 28; Rosenthal 1994, p. 126.

2. There will be significant room for variation within each type; our taxonomy does not attempt to accurately describe in full detail every pluralism in currency.

3. There are many forms of pragmatism in currency these days. "Ironist," "anti-theory," and "prophetic" versions of pragmatism will not be directly engaged here. By "pragmatism" we mean principally the so-called "classical" versions of pragmatism and their current incarnations.

4. Hence Galston: "moral pluralism offers the best account of the moral universe we inhabit" (2002, p. 30); "concrete experience ... provides the most compelling reasons for accepting some form of value pluralism" (2002, p. 33).

5. See also Rawls 1996, p. 13. Note also that we are using "pluralism" to denote what would be more properly called "moral pluralism" or "value pluralism". One can be a pluralist about things other than value, but since contemporary pragmatists most often use "pluralism" to refer to a commitment about value, we restrict the extension similarly.

6. Rawls refers to the "absolute depth" of the "irreconcilable latent conflict" among different comprehensive views (1996, p. xxxvi); he argues that a consensus on a single doctrine "can be maintained only by the oppressive use of state power" (1996, p. 37). See also Mouffe 2000; Honig 1997; and Hampshire 2000. For a criticism of Rawlsian pluralism, see Talisse 2003.

7. For more comprehensive articulations of pluralism, see Berlin 1969, Galston 2002, Gray 2000, Keekes 2000, Crowder 2002, Talisse 2004, and the essays collected in Baghrarian and Ingram (eds.), and Dworkin, Lila and Silvers (eds.).

8. Rawls is followed by Joshua Cohen (1993), Thomas Nagel (1987), Bruce Ackerman (1989), Charles Larmore (1987), and Daniel Dombrowski (2001), among many others.

9. Dworkin expresses the point well, "values conflict even if we get all the breaks" (2001, p. 78).

10. Brian Barry has argued that pluralism is simply another name for relativism (2001, p. 133).

11. Hence Levinas's distinction between politics and ethics: "The art of foreseeing war and winning it by every means — politics — is henceforth enjoined as the very exercise of reason. Politics is opposed to morality, as philosophy to naivete" (1961, p. 21).

12. Schmitt goes on to claim that "When a people no longer has the power or the will to maintain itself in the political sphere, so politics does not disappear from the world. All that disappears is a weak people" (1976, p. 53).

13. We are of course not claiming that this difference is a strict disjunction. Many contemporary pragmatists working in the classical idiom will insist that pragmatism is at once a claim about inquiry and a claim about meaning. We are simply pointing to a difference of *emphasis* among classical pragmatists, one that we think has clear textual support in the literature, not to mention in the responses Peirce, James, and Dewey had to each other's work.

14. We follow the convention in citing Peirce's *Collected Papers*: (volume number.paragraph number).

15. See especially James's "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings" (1977).

16. We say "perfect" because it seems to run afoul of deep pluralism to say of one side of a dispute that it could have made its case better.

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