Pragmatism and European Philosophy

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Abstract

EPC II

Panel Pragmata 1

Org. S. Madelrieux

Pragmatism and European Philosophy

Mathias Girel, ENS Ulm

" William James, Pure Experience and Erlebnis "

Abstract to come

Stéphane Madelrieux, Université Jean-Moulin - Lyon 3/Institut Universitaire de France

" What's the Use of Getting Back to 'Pure Experience'? "

Part of continental philosophy has taken for its program to get back to a kind of primary experience that could reveal a fundamental layer of reality that would come before any constituting subject and would be pure of any conceptual constructions. Such a program has sometimes be compared to the pragmatist's notion of "pure experience" that James used in his radical empiricism to overcome the dualistic conception of subject and object, mind and matter. Yet in such an ontological understanding, the notion seems particularly obscure: who, after all, has ever had such a pure experience, supposed to get us in touch with reality in itself beyond the veil of subject and concept? The new-born babe seems hardly

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[*]Speaker

a good candidate for the position of ultimate metaphysician. In this paper, I will argue for an understanding of the notion more in line with the spirit of pragmatism, by making it a methodological device that can be used to solve or dissolve long-standing conceptual problems. We should thus distinguish between the philosophical need to get back to pure experience in order to make our concepts clear and the forward movement of our experience as we live (to which the philosophical move should be subordinated). Indeed we do not need to get back to a relative purer past experience in order to relive it, as if it contained the secret of reality lost and buried under our concepts, as the purer an experience becomes, the poorer it is. As James wrote, pure experience is not "*always perfectly healthy*", with its "*tendency [...] to extinguish the experient himself*" (ERE, 47). The growth of our experience supposes that we move forward and away from these primitive stages, as the new-borne babe shows us plainly. And the only philosophical reason to get back to these earlier stages is when such a growth is blocked by supposed ontological dualisms that need to be overcome by pointing out their lack of experiential ground. The conclusion is that there is, or should be, no "neutral monism" in pragmatism.

Olivier Tinland, Université Paul Valéry – Montpellier

" The Ambivalence of Hegel's Pragmatism "

In this talk, I will provide an overview of the ambivalent relationship between Pragmatism (old and new) and Hegel's philosophy. Focusing on some core features (holism, dialectics, idealism), I will give an account of the various classical pragmatist readings of Hegel's thought (Peirce, James, Dewey). Then I will provide a critical assessment of contemporary pragmatist uses of Hegelian concepts and arguments.

Roberto Frega, CEMS-IMM (CNRS)

" Democracy Between John Dewey and Claude Lefort "
In this talk I will compare the theories of democracy of John Dewey and Claude Lefort, identifying some common themes in their otherwise radically different philosophical outlooks. In so doing, I will attempt to analyze the philosophical implications of a 'democracy first' approach to politics. I will then explain in what sense Dewey's idea of 'democracy as a way of life' and Claude Lefort's conception of 'democracy as a form of society' provide the cornerstone of an original and so far insufficiently explored approach to political philosophy, one which offers an alternative both to the classical-liberal and to the critical-radical projects which still dominate contemporary political philosophy. I will conclude by indicating some of the potential advantages of such a 'wide view' for contemporary debates in democratic theory.