**Yet Another Consequence of Pragmatism**

Philosophy in general and metaphysics in particular seem always to be in crisis, always seeking to become something other, something more rational, for example, or more relevant, something more scientific, or more edifying—even, at times, seeking to become nothing at all. And so it is today, with some neo-pragmatists in particular calling for the end of philosophy at least in any traditional sense. Even within more traditional bounds, we find, on the one hand, hyper-rationalist analytic metaphysics alongside experimental philosophy and cognitive science. The path forward for philosophy, and perhaps especially metaphysics, is far from clear. Nevertheless, I will suggest, there are signs of forward movement—though to recognize them we need to pay closer attention than analytic philosophers generally do to the long history of Western philosophy in the context of Western intellectual culture in general. For only in light of this history, we will see, can we adequately understand developments in the past century or so, in particular the rise of neo-pragmatism.

There have been two revolutionary periods in the intellectual history of the West. The first is well known: beginning with Descartes’ transformation of the practice of mathematics and of our most fundamental view of reality, followed by Newton’s revolution in the practice of fundamental physics, and culminating in Kant’s radically new conception of what it is to practice philosophy. The second was begun in the nineteenth century with developments in mathematical practice, developments that enabled in turn both Einstein’s revolution in the practice of fundamental physics and the emergence of quantum mechanics. For our purposes, what matters about this second revolution is its implications for the practice of philosophy, how it paves the way for neo-pragmatism, that is, for a new and essentially post-Kantian, non-representational conception both of our being in the world and of our capacity to know it.

And there is another implication as well. As we have come better to understand the nature and place of the natural sciences in our understanding of reality, we have come to be able, for the first time in history, adequately to understand the nature and role of our *everyday* engagements in the world. Our everyday involvements in the world—limited and perspectival as they are—have been problematic since the very beginnings of Western philosophy. And after the rise of modern science, they were devalued even further. We today, in the wake of developments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, are in a position fruitfully to revisit the nature and epistemic status of these everyday involvements in the world. I will argue in particular that we need to recognize what I call *natural truths*, truths that are neither “the same for all rational beings”, as (arguably) the truths of contemporary mathematics and fundamental physics are, nor merely what this or that human culture holds to be true. Natural truths are truths that are available to and valid for all *human* beings, that is, all rational beings with our biological form of life. The notion of natural truth, as I mean it (as modeled on the idea of natural goodness in ethics), has not as far as I know been recognized. Nevertheless it is, I will argue, a very natural and philosophically significant consequence of the neo-pragmatist movement in philosophy as it arose in the wake of developments in the sciences in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.