**Panel Proposition: Second European Pragmatism Conference**

**Paris September 9-11, 2015**

**Panel Title**

Value Theories in Classical Pragmatism: Insights and Difficulties

**Section**

Ethics and politics

**General Abstract**

The issue of *value* is found at every juncture in the intellectual history of classical pragmatism. Peirce’s restraint in addressing the issue of value, and Dewey’s obsessive concern with *valuation* and *evaluation,* conspicuously reveal the tenacity of *value* as a hallmark of classical pragmatism. Notwithstanding, a number of contemporary scholars exhort the need for a better understanding of the complexities that underlie these theories in classical pragmatism. The aim of this panel is to respond to their appeal by examining and comparing the theories of value in the work of Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, Clarence Irving Lewis and John Dewey. Each participant on the panel will present a careful analysis of each of these theorists by discussing some aspects of their respective theory of value and the use of the latter in contemporary philosophy.

**Participants (in alphabetical order)**

* Pierre-Luc Dostie Proulx, PhD Student, Université de Louvain (Belgium)

Title: “Dewey and Santayana on Value: a Critical Criterion?”

* Diana Heney, Post-Doc, Fordham University (USA)

Title: “Conceptual Pragmatism and the Moral Life”

* Neil Williams, PhD Student, University of Sheffield (UK)

Title: “William James and Alain Locke on Value Pluralism”

* Jessica Wright, PhD Student, University of Toronto (Canada)

Title: “Peirce on Value as Peirce on Virtue: Connections between Pragmatism and Virtue Ethics”

**Talk no. 1**

**Participant**

Pierre-Luc Dostie Proulx, PhD Student, Université de Louvain (Belgium)

**Title**

Dewey and Santayana on Value: a Critical Criterion?

John Dewey’s theory of value is often accused of having a problematic relation with the notions of objectivity and knowledge. In his autobiography, C. I. Lewis argues that Dewey “subtly belittles the human cognitive enterprise and its unchanging goal” (Lewis 1968: 11). According to Lewis and many others, the problem seems to rest in a lack of correlation between the scientific aim of inquiry and moral objectivity. In this paper, I will analyze in depth this criticism and propose a possible solution to a persistent tension in Dewey’s moral philosophy.

The first task is to present the main characteristics of Dewey’s theory of value. The philosopher from Vermont famously claimed that value judgments can be experimented and empirically verified. He asserts that evaluations state “a rule for *determination of an act to be performed*, its reference being to the future and not tosomething already accomplished or done” (Dewey 1939: 210). For him, the fact that evaluations are some kind of *anticipation of future action* shows that they have a “means to ends” form (Dewey 1939: 212). I will argue that such a characterization has brought many criticisms (and some misunderstandings). As early as 1918, Wendell T. Bush accused Dewey of defending a form of “instrumentalism” (Bush 1918: 95-96). A few years later, C. I. Lewis accused Dewey of being too focused on particular “situations” and lacking a more substantial view of value; in brief, he asserted that Dewey is unable to give an adequate theory of ends (Lewis 1930: 74).

In order to understand Dewey’s response to these objections, I will address his view of verification and criticism. I will show that for him, it is the *polarity* that exists between our evaluations and the evaluations of their practical upshots that allow us to talk of an “experimental” verification of value judgments. Thus, the “scientific” or “experimental” character of evaluations in Dewey’s consists in the *fitness* between *what our evaluations are aimed at* and their *practical upshots* (hence the idea, in Dewey’s, that the validity of value judgments can only be taken into account *a posteriori*).

It is with this thesis in mind that Dewey addresses Bush and Lewis’ objections. According to him, both accusations are guilty of a similar mistake: they bluntly separate *means* from *ends*. I will explain how Dewey, in response, developed “the means-ends continuity thesis” (Dewey 1939: section 6). The heart of this thesis can be found in the following excerpt: “the *value* ofenjoyment of an object *as* an attained end is a value of something which in being an end – an outcome – *stands in relation to the means of which it is the consequence*” (Dewey 1939: 228). At the end of the day, Dewey rejects the accusation of instrumentalism *because he refuses any kind of clear distinction between means and ends*; he refuses to treat them separately. The continuity thesis also allows him to give a subtle theory of ends (that lies in a distinction between “nominal” and “definite” ends) that clashes with Lewis’ objection.

All things considered, some important questions still remain: What is the deweyan conception of moral objectivity? Where lies the connection between value and reality? The objection introduced previously is thus renewed: Dewey seems to offer very little help when it comes to confronting the notion of moral objectivity. I will argue that Dewey seems constantly entangled in a tension between a first-person and a more detached perspective on value judgments.

To overcome this difficulty, I will need to step out of Dewey’s work and introduce a precious reference to George Santayana made in his paper “Value, Objective Reference and Criticism” published in *The Philosophical Review* (Dewey 1925). Confronted to the question of the “foundation” of value, Dewey “amplifies” a principle proposed by Santayana. This principle – qualified by Dewey as both “physical” and “dialectical” – states that “to esteem a thing good is toexpress certain affinities between that thing and the speaker; and if this is done with self-knowledge and with knowledge of the thing, so that the felt affinity is a real one, the judgment isinvulnerable and cannot be asked to rescind itself” (Santayana 1918-1919: 368)

It is precisely this *complex criterion of judgment* that I will analyze in the last section of this paper. I will argue that Dewey and Santayana propose what I call a “realistic-hermeneutical” criterion of judgment. As I will show, they offer a criterion that insists on both the importance of *facts* and *self-knowledge* for the act of judging. More precisely, my argument will be that the “realistic-hermeneutical” criterion carries a *dual conception of objectivity*. On the “realistic” side of the criterion, we have an epistemological conception of objectivity. Such a view materializes our belief in an external and independent world. According to this meaning of “objectivity”, we do not have a complete control over facts; they are independents of our preferences. Such a realist view is crucial for value judgments since, as I will try to demonstrate, it plays a key role in argumentation. To support such a view, I will rely on Charles Sanders Peirce’s late theory of perception. On the other side of the criterion, we have a “hermeneutical” conception of objectivity (an intuition that was never systematically developed by these two authors). Yet, contemporary philosophers have often referred to a similar intuition in their moral theories. To conclude, I will use Mark Hunyadi’s contextual morality to explain how inertia in our moral identity can give us objective beacons for value judgments.

**Talk no. 2**

**Participant**

Diana Heney, Post-Doc, Fordham University (USA)

**Title**

Conceptual Pragmatism and the Moral Life

**Abstract**

*I hope you will not object that there is no general answer to any question of the goodness of a good life. I am not talking about the recipe for a good life, what ingredients to put in, in what proportions and how to mix them; I am talking of the inescapably found quality of it. How to cook up a good life, out of whatever ingredients, or of the ingredients to be found in the cupboard, is indeed the practical problem of every man. But it would be an utterly hopeless problem if he did not know what manner of thing he was wishing to achieve; if he had no touchstone of success or failure of this most final of final aims.*

Clarence Irving Lewis, ‘The Empirical Basis of Value Judgments’

C.I. Lewis referred to his view as ‘conceptual pragmatism’, and the title is apt: Lewis’ philosophy has a remarkable systematicity rarely found in such a voluminous body of work, and the thread which unites it all is resolutely pragmatist methodology. Much of the later part of Lewis’ philosophical career was devoted to applying the resources he developed in logic and epistemology to the construction of value theory, which he consistently understands as an empiricist project. The development of that theory spans decades, from at least the preliminary papers of the thirties, such as ‘Judgments of Value and Judgments of Fact’, to the last short volume he published, the 1957 ‘*Our Social Inheritance’.*

The centerpiece of this period is the 1946 book *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation*, a work expressly dedicated to giving an account of how value judgments can be both empirical and truth-apt. Lewis spent a good deal of time deeply entrenched in the analysis and development of metaethics, always with the end of a positive, pragmatist position in normative ethics in view: ‘From the early years of my teaching’, he says, ‘I had thought of ethics as the most important branch of philosophy’ (1968 [1960]: 11).

What kept Lewis from following through on his commitment to ethics earlier was the need to deal with epistemological considerations germane to the construction of a framework for moral inquiry: ‘I…came to recognize that the ethical conceptions of which I was convinced required the premise that objective and valid valuations represent a species of empirical knowledge’ (1968 [1960]: 20). It was the need to develop the premise in question – that valuation is a form of empirical knowledge, meaning that value judgments are valid/invalid, empirically testable, and true/false – that motivated Lewis to write *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation,* and informed much of the work that followed.

In my portion of our panel, I take up Lewis’ argument that objective value judgments are the ‘touchstone of success or failure’ for our moral lives, and provide the basis for the beginnings of a pragmatist metaethics.

**Talk no. 3**

**Participant**

Neil Williams, PhD Student, University of Sheffield (UK)

**Title**

William James and Alain Locke on Value Pluralism

**Abstract**

William James once said that the dichotomy between monism and pluralism was the most pregnant in philosophy. He spent his career arguing against dogmatism, absolutism, and monism in the philosophical tradition, and it was testament to his efforts that pluralism looked like an attractive and sensible position to the thinkers following him. Alain Locke was one such thinker. He worked in philosophy at a time in which pluralism was not merely a potential philosophical position, but a necessary reality. Multiculturalism was struggling to emerge within his society, and totalitarianism was flourishing outside of it. To refute the latter and support the former, Locke needed an axiological model which supported a real pluralism about value, whilst also providing objective standard for the assessment of conflicting values. This paper will analyse the two thinker's positions on pluralism, bring them into dialogue, and assess their relative strengths.

The first part of the paper will analyse Locke's position on pluralism. Locke calls his model 'objective relativism'. The model allows for reasonable tolerance between multiple values, by recognising the commonalities in function those values possess. Once we realise, thinks Locke, that our differences are different ways of expressing and exploring common functional needs, then we have no grounds for the kind of dogmatism which asserts one culture or value system as superior to another. Further, recognising this functional similarity means that we can assess different values and beliefs on how well they perform this function. The functional base line, then is supposed to provide both the standard of assessment and the reasonable pluralism which Locke requires. He contrasts his ‘value relativism’ with what he calls James's 'value anarchism', which lacks any such standard of assessment, and is more like what is currently referred to as ‘relativism’. Thus Locke has a picture which mediates between the monism about value which he abhorred, and the irresponsible value anarchism which he attributed to James.

The second part of the paper will assess William James's position in light of Locke's criticism. There are, indeed, places where Locke's criticism appears to be accurate. For instance, James asserts that ‘the good’ is merely to satisfy demand, and that every demand *prima facie* deserves to be met. This seems to present a kind of 'everything goes' approach to value which might be fairly described as value anarchism. However, I suggest that in James's later work we can find a much more nuanced model of pluralism. I take as my primary example James's work on religion. In his religious thought James, like Locke, offers a function which all religions are attempting to meet. Despite their differences, religions are unified in attempting to present a picture of the cosmos in which humans are not alienated from reality, but find that their interests and values are supported, and in which they can lead meaningful lives. But *unlike* Locke, James does not treat meeting this functional aim as the sole standard of assessment of the various religions. James adds to this a form of realism: religious beliefs, and values in general, are to be taken as hypotheses which can be confirmed or denied in future experience. I argue that this gives us a much more objective picture than is usually attributed to James.

On the analysis I have offered, and despite Locke's criticisms, we can see that *both* thinkers attempt to find a mid-ground between what has been called value anarchism and value monism. Both thinkers aim to offer a real value pluralism, along with an objective standard of assessment. The third and final part of the paper will assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of the two similar models. I will argue that in fact, James's model achieves a more satisfying model of value pluralism, whilst maintaining the objectivity Locke accuses him of losing. Though Locke seems to offer us a value pluralism, I suggest that by placing so much weight on the functional roles these values play, Locke actually eclipses the concrete difference between competing views. James, on the other hand, recognises that the functional baseline is required for reasonable discussion and comparison between competing values, but does not make the fulfilling of this function the sole standard of assessment. James allows for much more diversity in the competing values, and an additional standard in the experience of valuing individuals and communities as a whole. A claim that something is valuable can be assessed and evaluated by individuals within their life-times, through conversations between holders of different beliefs, and by the human race as a whole. With his more realist conception of value, James allows both for a more pluralist account of value, as well as a more objective method of assessment, whilst being able to account for genuine moral progress.

**Talk no. 4**

**Participant**

Jessica Wright, PhD Student, University of Toronto (Canada)

**Title**

Peirce on Value as Peirce on Virtue: Connections between Pragmatism and Virtue Ethics

**Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to discuss and defend a version of Peirce’s cognitivist theory of value, as seen particularly in his doctrine of the normative sciences and his paper “The Fixation of Belief.” I will discuss a problem for Peirce’s theory of value, and suggest a way to interpret him on these matters that draws on insights from virtue ethics. I will then discuss connections and convergences between Peirce and contemporary Aristotelian neo-naturalist accounts of value, and what Peirce’s insights could add to these contemporary debates.

Peirce sometimes held that ethical action is based on human sentiment or feelings, which in turn depend on instinct or habit (1.662). Peirce called this his “sentimentalism”. Here Peirce says explicitly that philosophical reasoning will ultimately have no influence on one’s ethical conduct, and so a distinction between theory and practice is called for (1.661). Thus Peirce’s sentimentalism is a non-cognitivist theory that holds that ethical truths refer to habits of action or human emotion, and are not justified by reference to reality or by reasoning.

However, it seems that Peirce’s sentimentalism and theory-practice distinction are untenable, given his theory of inquiry. This is partially because Peirce’s theory of inquiry includes a dispositional account of belief, according to which to believe *x* is to be disposed to behave in a certain way. This means that one’s conduct (and by extension one’s ethical conduct) is at least partially dependent on one’s beliefs, which are sensitive to philosophical reasoning. Further, Peirce’s theory of inquiry, explicitly discussed in his paper “The Fixation of Belief,” holds that there are rights ways (the method of science) and wrong ways (the methods of tenacity, authority, and a priority) to fix our beliefs. In short, belief-fixation is subject to norms of inquiry. If an inquirer follows these norms then she is a good epistemic agent; if she does not, then she is not. Reading Peirce in this way has him hold that value judgments are subject to the same kind of norms of inquiry as other kinds of judgments. But how do we establish the norms of inquiry? Peirce has an account of this in his doctrine of the normative sciences.

Peirce held that logic, ethics and esthetics are normative sciences. To call a science normative, on Peirce’s account, is to say that it has the means to determine good from bad (5.37). Thus, logic determines good from bad arguments or reasonings, ethics good from bad conduct, and esthetics good from bad in general (5.36). Furthermore, these sciences are interconnected; reasoning is a species of action, which means that to reason well is to act well, and to act well is determined by what we think is good (notice that this is explicitly *contra* Peirce’s sentimentalism). Thus what is good must be determined before we can determine what good reasoning is, which makes logic ultimately dependent on esthetics.

Esthetics, for Peirce, is the theory of the good or the admirable, rather than the beautiful. The esthetic ideal serves as the standard to which one’s conduct ought to conform, the standard by which one gages the rightness or wrongness of an action (which, as we have seen, includes a habit of reasoning) (5.130). But how do we determine what the esthetic ideal—what Peirce sometimes called the “ultimate good”—is? In the first place, the so-called ultimate good cannot be determined by the individual alone. Taking this route would lead us back to Peirce’s sentimentalism, where what is good is just what “seems” good to the individual. However, it also can’t be completely external to the individual’s will, because then the good would lack the sense of “good for me” and the sense that one is responsible for achieving that good that we also want to encompass. So is Peirce’s theory of value to be understood as an objective notion of the admirable in itself, or it is to be understood as a subjective notion of what we find admirable, depending on our habits?

And so we are left with two pictures of Peirce: one non-cognitivist and untenable, and one cognitivist and unsatisfactory. I will argue that to resolve this dilemma, we ought to read Peirce as a kind of virtue theorist about value. That is, we ought to read Peirce’s doctrine of the normative sciences and his theory of the norms of inquiry as a kind of theory of virtue, where what is of value in experience is deliberate agential action in accordance with the norms of inquiry—which say that an agent ought to be a *virtuous* inquirer. Reading Peirce in this way will allow us to encompass his dispositional account of belief and his theory of inquiry, and may pave the way to a charitable understanding of his sentimentalism (with a discussion of the role that the agent has in the formation of his own habits). Thus Peirce’s theory of value provides a powerful alternative to modern forms of cognitivism, one that modern theorists would do well to attend to.

**A Note on Citations**

All references are from *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce.*, cited in the format n.m; where n is the volume number and m is the paragraph number.

**References**

Peirce, C.S. (1958-1966). *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce.* Vols. 1-6 edited by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss; vols. 7-8 edited by A. W. Burks. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.