

Philosophy for Children and Pragmatism

Part I. The Uncanny History of Pragmatism

Agora Philosophical Forum

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1. A Brief Overview of the Pragmatism-P4C Relation:

- Pragmatism was born in 1867 in America
- P4C as a social movement was initiated in the early 1970's
- Pragmatism, as a philosophical position, manifests itself in the educational method advocated by the proponents of the P4C movement
- Hence, we shall start with an overview of pragmatism
- The methodological sensitivities to explore pragmatist philosophies
 - o Employing the intellectual biography approach to unfold the varieties of pragmatist notions

2. The Metaphysical Club:

- The American pragmatists were struggling to build the 'modern' America after the Civil war.
 - o A historical narrative of the club by Louis Menand (2001)
- The objective of the club: Bring metaphysics down to earth; start with human experience
- The Four Greats: Charles S. Peirce, William James, Oliver W. Holmes, and Chauncy Wright

2.1. Charles. S. Peirce (1839-1914):

- Peirce was "the greatest American thinker ever" (Russell 1959, p 276).
- Peirce invented pragmatism
 - o Along with semiotics, mathematical logic, statistical economics, game-theoretic semantics, economics of science, propensity interpretation of probability, indeterministic metaphysics, falsification, abductive reasoning, etc.
- Peirce's works to be discussed in this workshop
 - o On a New List of Categories (1867)
 - o The Fixation of Belief (1877)
 - o How to Make Our Ideas Clear (1878)

2.2. William James (1842-1910):

- A charming man with a popular philosophy
- He is known as the father of psychology in America.
 - o In his *Principles of Psychology* (1890), he demarcated psychology from philosophy.
- For some James scholars, he seems to put forward contradictory positions in his works
- James's works to be discussed in this workshop:
 - o *The Principles of Psychology* (1890)
 - o *The Will to Believe* (1896)
 - o *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (1902)
 - o *Pragmatism: A New Way for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (1907)

2.3. Peirce-James Correspondence:

- Two old friends in Cambridge
- James was not interested in the technicality of Peirce's pragmatism and his mathematical logic
- Peirce was not interested in James's psychological approach to pragmatism
- The 1903 Harvard Lectures Controversy
- Peirce clearly separates his way from James by naming his position pragmaticism which is 'ugly enough' not to be 'kidnapped' by James and his followers.
- Two pragmatists with two different accounts of *experience, inquiry, meaning, and truth*
 - o The pragmatist concepts to be later employed in the P4C movement

2.4. Chauncy Wright (1830-1875) and Oliver W. Holmes (1841-1935):

- Wright made a bridge between Peirce's pragmatism and Darwin's theory of evolution
 - o He applied Darwin's conception of the survival of the fittest to Peirce's account of belief
 - o Darwin found Wright's "The Genesis of Species" the most satisfying piece he had ever read
 - o Darwin asked Wright to write a book on how consciousness came to existence over the course of evolution. The book remained unfinished by Wright's death
 - o He was interested in Peirce's version of pragmatism
- Holmes made a bridge between Peirce's pragmatism and law
 - o He was one of the most famous American legal theorists and Supreme court justices
 - o There was some tension between Holmes and James. Holmes rejected James' version of pragmatism.
 - o For Holmes, legal inquiry is an on-going enterprise which will not cease to grow.
 - We shall see there are conceptual similarities between Holmes' legal theory and Peirce's accounts of inquiry and truth.

2.5. Later Pragmatists to be Mentioned in the Workshop:

- o John Dewey (1859-1952): inquiry and education
- o George Herbert Mead (1863-1931): social self
- o Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951): meaning
- o Richard Rorty (1931-2007): inquiry, relativism, and truth
- o Hilary Putnam (1926-2016): inquiry, truth, education, and democracy

3. Cambridge Apostles:

- A secretive society with an unusual rulebook
- Four ambitious philosophical programs of the Apostles:
 - o Bertrand Russell's Logicism: Reducing mathematics to logic
 - o G. E. Moore's Ethics: Solving out the maximization problem of the universal goodness
 - o John M. Keynes' Philosophy of Probability and Economics: A Logical Theory of Probability and Macroeconomic Theory
 - o Ludwig Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Language: Demarcating what Can be said from what cannot be said

3.1. Russell and Moore Attack Pragmatism (1908-1912):

- o Russell writes a critical piece on pragmatism every single year from 1908 to 1912

- He takes James' pragmatism as the whole pragmatism
- In 1911, Russell names his philosophy 'analytic realism' or 'logical atomism'. He keeps his distance from James's position with its idealist theme.
- Russell gets invited to Harvard to offer a course on logic and theory of knowledge in 1914. He learns more about Peirce then.
- James Woods asks Russell to come back in 1916 to offer a course on Peirce's logic
 - It never happens. Russell gets arrested in 1914.
- Moore joins Russell in his critiques of pragmatism; Moore-James debates get nasty!
- Pragmatism's reputation gets fatally wounded
 - The way seems to be clear for the emergence of a radical movement in Europe: Vienna Circle comes to existence. Pragmatism will fight back against it in the following years.

3.2. Wittgenstein in the Quest of the Meaning of Life:

- Wittgenstein arrives in Cambridge in 1911
- His philosophical system is to be built upon Russell's program
- In 1913, he decides to go to live in isolation in Norway, far from academic men
- Moore visits him in 1914. The two happens to have a nasty discussion afterwards. They will not meet each other until 1929.
- Despite having medical exemption, he signs up for the Austrian army in 1914
 - He and Russell will not meet again until 1919
- From 1918 to 1920, Wittgenstein gets arrested by Allied forces. He spends nine months in prison. His brother commits suicide (the third of his brothers). The publisher of his book refuses to publish it. His uncle dies, and his love, David Pinsent, dies in an accident.
- By this time, he has serious anxiety and depression. He decides to become a school-teacher.
 - His sister complains, but Ludwig thinks his sister doesn't understand him.

3.3. Wittgenstein as a School-Teacher (1920-1926):

- He publishes the *Dictionary for Elementary Schools* in 1926
 - This will be the last work to be published in his lifetime
- His corporal punishments get him into trouble which eventually makes him leave the school in 1926
- His dictionary shows that he began to think about the importance of ordinary language as the object of philosophical investigation in this time
- He gradually develops a philosophy for education or a pedagogical approach to philosophizing

3.4. An Undergraduate Student Meets Wittgenstein in Puchberg, it is 1923:

- His name is Frank P. Ramsey
- By this time, he is developing interest in Peirce's pragmatism
- Did Ramsey and Wittgenstein talk about Peirce's pragmatism in 1923? Was Wittgenstein's acquaintance with Peirce inspired his teaching style? Was that Ramsey's Peircean thoughts that pushed him to think about the ordinary language as the object of philosophical investigation?
 - Unfortunately, the topics of discussions between the two are mostly unknown
 - My surmise: Wittgenstein's interest in studying 'ordinary language' is fully in line with Ramsey's interest in what he called 'human logic'
- But, how did Ramsey know about Peirce's philosophy while Russell and Moore were still fighting against their internalized version of pragmatism which was of James?

3.5 Frank P. Ramsey's Acquaintance with Peirce's Pragmatism:

- Peirce's Correspondence with Lady Victoria Welby
- Welby's Correspondence with C. K. Ogden
- Ogden disseminates Peirce's thoughts in England
- Ogden puts Peirce's works in Ramsey's hands
- Ramsey eventually announces himself a 'fully-Peircean' philosopher in 1926

3.6. Frank P. Ramsey: A Precocious Mind in Cambridge:

- Among Ramsey's ideas in philosophy, mathematics, logic, and economics:
 - Ramsey solution to tax problem
 - Ramsey's growth model
 - Ramsey theory/numbers
 - Ramsey's intuitionism
 - Ramsey's subjective philosophy of probability
 - Ramsey's decision/game theory
 - Ramsey sentence
 - Ramseyan humility
 - Ramsey's pragmatism
- Ramsey Effect: refers to how a philosopher feels once he realizes what he thought to be his original work can be found in Ramsey's works written decades earlier
- Ramsey Against the Ambitious philosophical programs of the Apostles
 - Ramsey's critique of Russell's logicism and logical atomism
 - Ramsey's critique of Moore's account of goodness
 - Ramsey's critique of Keynes account of probability
 - Ramsey's critique of Wittgenstein's Tractatus
 - There are enough historical documents showing that the four greats of the Cambridge took Ramsey's objections seriously
- Ramsey's pragmatism undermined the ambitious program of the Vienna circle, as well

3.7. Ramsey in Vienna:

- Ramsey's mental break-down in the early 1920's
 - In 1924, Ramsey goes to Vienna to be psychoanalyzed by one of Freud's student
 - He meets Wittgenstein frequently
 - Ramsey's roommates during his time in Vienna:
 - Lionel Penrose
 - Adrian Bishop

3.8. The Spies in Cambridge:

- Ramsey's assistance in Cambridge: Alister Watson
 - Thanks to Ramsey, Watson gets into Cambridge Apostles and the Vienna circle
 - He will do the mathematics of Sraffa's economic book
 - He will also introduce Wittgenstein to Alan Turing
- The Pykes:
 - Ramsey's mental break-down was because of his feelings for Margaret Pyke
 - Geoff Pyke: a Russian spy or a German spy?
 - Pyke will run an experimental school in 1924
- The Cambridge Five in 1930's
 - They influence the philosophical discussions of the Apostles

3.9. Ramsey, Keynes, and Wittgenstein in 1924

- The 1924 gathering:

- Keynes is nervous. He is supposed to be the host
- Keynes and Ramsey's thoughts are distracted
- Lydia bursts to cry!
- Leonard and Virginia Woolf stopped by

3.10. Ramsey, Keynes, and Wittgenstein in 1929

- Keynes to Lydia in 1929: "God has arrived!"
- Russell and Moore's philosophies under the shadow of the 'Cambridge Left Wing'
 - Cambridge Left Wing: Ramsey's and Wittgenstein's pragmatist philosophies
 - Ramsey pushes Wittgenstein toward Peircean pragmatism
 - Nonetheless, Wittgenstein remains interested in some aspects of James' pragmatism

3.11. The Tragic Life of Frank P. Ramsey: To the Lighthouse!

- Ramsey died at the age of 26
- He will be remembered for his brilliant contributions to mathematics, logic, economics, and philosophy
- Had he lived longer, the Peircean branch of pragmatism could be the dominated version for the following decades
 - In his *On Truth*, he attempted to introduce an improved version of Peircean pragmatism
 - He never managed to finish the book
 - Majer and Rescher published Ramsey's notes provided for his book in 1990
- Virginia Woolf compared Ramsey to Darwin after the first time she met Frank in 1923 in Keynes's office
 - She pictured Ramsey's family in his *To the Lighthouse!* (1926)

4. Bloomsbury Group:

- The group against Victorian orthodoxy
 - Promoting homosexuality and non-monogamous marriage
 - The impact on the Apostles: the example of Russells and Ramseys
- Why so serious?!
 - 'When Beakus Came to Stay'
- The artistic Bloomsbury and the academic Apostles
 - Promoting the British feminist discourses:
 - Child-rearing, the central issue once the marriage system collapses

4.1. The Russells Run an Experimental School

- Dora Russell was a new feminist.
 - Dora's program is part of the progressive education movement in England.
 - John Dewey is contributing to the movement in America
- The Radical Ethical Proposals of the Bloomsbury motivated some pragmatists of the time to pay attention to the education, child-rearing, and feminism.
- The task was completed by the P4C movement in the early 1970's by Matthew Lipman

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