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Category: Publication

Title: Pragmatism and the Social Dimensions of Doubt: Fresh Perspectives

Description: Call for papers for a special issue of the *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*.

Guest editor: Mathias Girel (Ecole normale supérieure, Paris)

Debunking pathological doubts and sundry variants of skepticism has certainly been one of the most prominent features of Pragmatism since its inception in the early 1870s. Peirce's theory of inquiry, James's Will to Believe, and Dewey's Quest for Certainty, to mention only a few instances, to which Wittgenstein, as a non-standard pragmatist might be added, have offered several very different strategies to address this question. Extant scholarship has already devoted substantive accounts of this feature of pragmatism. Still, in addition to providing a rebuttal of the "paper-doubts" of the would-be skeptic, pragmatists have also been quite responsive to the social dimensions of doubt. As regards the causes: Peirce, when he claims that we cannot doubt at will, mentions repeatedly that one of the strongest factors of doubt is the doubt of other competent inquirers. As regards the consequences: doubt has consequences on epistemic trust, on the way we discuss truths, either about the sciences or about the "construction of good". Readers of Dewey's Quest for Certainty and of some of his most important political writings can easily see how practical uncertainty can degenerate into a practical and political skepticism, preventing the emergence of publics.

This social aspect of the question has received less attention than the general pragmatist strategy towards skepticism, for which we already have important papers and monographs. Fundamental contributions — whether conceptual or historical — on the social dimensions of doubt in a pragmatist perspective would greatly benefit extant scholarship.

Several contexts have made this inquiry more urgent still. Firstly, doubt about the sciences — about scientific certainty, scientific consensus and scientific normativity — has been increasingly enrolled within several strategies and used to promote public controversies: can pragmatism offer, for example, an account of reasonable doubt in the sciences that would dismiss pathological doubts about the sciences, in the same way as the classical pragmatists have dismissed cartesian unreasonable doubts? Secondly, the emergence of a new kind of pragmatism, inspired by Sellars and focusing on the social articulation of

the space of reasons, had prompted new developments and sometimes a reconstruction of the main notions of classical epistemology : what are the main insights of linguistic pragmatism about this central notion? Thirdly, the social sciences have made extensive use of pragmatist resources in the past decades and it is time to see if they can in return cast some light on one of the core notions of pragmatism.

This issue of the European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy wants to investigate the perspectives that pragmatisms, old and new, open up on the social articulation of doubt. We will welcome any contribution on this topic that will (i) clarify classic or neo pragmatists accounts of doubt in its social setting, or (ii) use pragmatist insights in other disciplines — sociology, anthropology, political science, HPS — to explore the social dimensions of doubt, or (iii) compare pragmatist views with authors and perspectives belonging to other philosophical streams, or (iv) propose new theories inspired by pragmatism. Contributions offering new insights on the theory of inquiry, or providing a new reading of classical pragmatism, will be considered of central interest.

Papers should be sent to mathias.girel@ens.fr before July 10, 2013. Papers should not exceed 12.000 words and must include an abstract of 200-400 words and a list of works cited. Papers will be selected on the basis of a process of blind review. Acceptance of papers will be determined before August, 20, 2013. Papers will be published in December 2013.

Link: European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy

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