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Pragmatist Resources for Experimental Philosophy: Inquiry in Place of Intuition

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ABSTRACT: Recent attention given to the upstart movement of experimental philosophy is much deserved. But now that experimental philosophy is beginning to enter a stage of maturity, it is time to consider its relation to other philosophical traditions that have issued similar assaults against ingrained and potentially misguided philosophical habits. Experimental philosophy is widely known for rejecting a philosophical reliance on intuitions as evidence in philosophical argument. In this it shares much with another branch of empiricist philosophy, namely, pragmatism. Taking Kwame Anthony Appiah's forthright and cautious endorsement of experimental philosophy as my model, I show that experimental philosophy and pragmatist philosophy share more than adherents of either philosophical method have yet to allow. I then use this comparison to show how the new experimentalisms could benefit from a rereading of century-old pragmatist insights about philosophical methodology.

Understanding Experimental Philosophy

The new upstart movement of experimental philosophy proposes to bring the rigor of the scientific experiment to the philosophical conjecture. Replacing the ever-popular but too-comfortable armchair with the clipboard,

the calculator, and the control group, experimental philosophy proposes to test much of what passes as premise in philosophy by submitting it to empirical inquiry. Much of this program as currently envisioned involves a rejection of the venerable philosophical instrumentality of “the intuition” in favor of the instrumentality of “the experiment” for the reason that experiment can finally confirm or disconfirm august but unreliable intuition. Making a mostly metaphilosophical move, the experimentalists envision a practice of philosophy that accords priority not to our most rationally unassailable intuitions but, rather, to our most empirically confirmed experiments.

In what follows, I will operate with the assumption here that the great amount of attention recently lavished on the upstart experimental movement is very much deserved. The experimentalist assault on certain too-comfortable assumptions that are deeply entrenched in contemporary philosophical practice cannot be ignored. Now that experimental philosophy is beginning to enter a stage of maturity and is widely taken as a quite serious proposal for philosophical methodology, certain problems and issues concerning its metaphilosophical status and philosophical implications need to be addressed. One such issue that deserves attention is the relation between experimental philosophy and other philosophical traditions that have issued similar assaults against some of our most ingrained and potentially misguided philosophical methods. Experimental philosophy clearly shares much with other recent empiricisms, including many positivisms and naturalisms that were put forward in the twentieth century. But in its rejection of reliance on intuitions as evidence in philosophical argument as well as in its embrace of an empirical method in philosophy itself, experimental philosophy perhaps shares more with philosophical pragmatism than any other recent philosophical tradition.¹ Indeed pragmatism in its day had already presented itself under the title of “experimentalism.”

To develop this comparison, I begin by turning to a favorable commentary on the upstart experimental philosophy movement in which I recognize the bright signal of a return of pragmatism to some of the most respected corners in professional philosophy: Kwame Anthony Appiah’s *Experiments in Ethics* (2008).² I will, for the purposes of introduction, take Appiah as a guide to what might be called the *new* experimentalism, noting that since pragmatism was in its day explicitly offered as an experimentalism it may perhaps today be deserving of the title of *old* (if not, perhaps, *first*) experimentalism.

Appiah is clearly intrigued by the nascent moment of the inchoate movement of experimentalism. He discerns in its design a considerable

promise. I wish to draw attention to the very noticeable fact that those particular aspects of experimental philosophy that Appiah favors evince a remarkable resonance with pragmatist philosophy. By considering Appiah's take on experimental philosophy we put ourselves in a good position to recognize how and where pragmatism contains resources that the experimental philosophers may wish to avail themselves of, especially in light of due warnings now being issued by critics of experimentalism far more skeptical than Appiah.³ Of course Appiah is more cautious about experimental philosophy than the experimental philosophers themselves. It follows that a connection between Appiah's experimentalism and pragmatism may not in fact yield that same connection when experimentalism is taken in a more general sense. What it does yield, however, is a considered view of the connections between pragmatist philosophy and what is best in the new experimental philosophy.

Appiah's book travels through many aspects of experimental philosophy, but it could just as well be read as a tour through many of the most familiar themes in pragmatist thinking. Each of the book's five chapters offers an argument, drawn up in the terms of contemporary moral philosophy, for an experimentalist approach to morality and ethics. Since the book is relatively new, a quick summary of its arguments might be helpful for the reader not yet acquainted—summary also gives me the opportunity to call attention to the relevance of pragmatism to each of Appiah's major themes. Chapter 1 is a brief against philosophy's venerable fact/value dichotomy (cf. Hilary Putnam's *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy* [2004] and Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* [1979]) and on behalf of a certain conception of naturalism (cf. Jaegwon Kim's "The American Origins of Philosophical Naturalism" [2003], putting pragmatism at the heart of naturalism). Chapter 2 argues against globalist or universalist theories of ethics in favor of moral situationism or contextualism (cf. John Dewey's "Context and Thought" [1931] and just about any of his writings on ethics). Chapter 3 makes the case for a combination of experimental philosophy and empirical psychology (cf. William James's *The Principles of Psychology* [1890], which was one of the very first books to actually present this combination) by way of taking up that central thread of argument in experimental philosophy against a philosophical reliance on intuition (cf. Charles Peirce's "Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man" [1868a] and "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities" [1868b]). Chapter 4 is about the (tentative) integration of nature and culture, or fact and value, from the perspective of reconciling the two Kantian standpoints of scientific and

moral thought (cf. John Dewey's *The Quest for Certainty* [1929]). Chapter 5 ties all these together by invoking pragmatist-sounding themes of fallibilism, pluralism, and naturalism so as to affirm the "messiness" and "heterogeneity" of ethics (cf. James's "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" [1891] or just about anything by Rorty on this subject).

It is easy to discern a healthy dose of pragmatism in Appiah when he writes the following of the greatest works in moral philosophy: "Every comprehensive account accommodates, in one idiom or another, notions of character, consequences, duties, maxims, reasonableness, fairness, consent" (2008, 202). He refers here explicitly to Aristotle's *Ethics*, Kant's *Groundwork*, Mill's *On Liberty*, and Rawls's *Theory*. There are no references to the pragmatists here, even though this is an argument that the pragmatists made more central to their work than any of the thinkers Appiah invokes. I am not suggesting that Appiah should be faulted for neglecting James's "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" (1891) or Dewey's "Three Independent Factors in Morals" (1930), two texts in which the classical pragmatists develop this very point by arguing that the moral life must be seen as an integration of consequences, intentions, and virtues. It is perhaps understandable that Appiah and others would want to emphasize what is new in experimental philosophy rather than casting it as an update of a familiar philosophical tradition. But if so, then it is strange, even though still not quite reproachable, that Appiah neglects to mention Rorty's more recent neopragmatist arguments to this effect. In a piece on his two favorite contemporary moral theorists (J. B. Schneewind and Annette Baier) published in the final volume of his collected papers under the auspicious title *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*, Rorty suggests that it is high time that we get over our "obsession with the opposition between consequentialism and non-consequentialism that still dominates Ethics 101" (2004, 191). Isn't this also what Appiah is aiming for in calling attention to the "deeply heterogeneous" character of the best work in moral philosophy (2008, 202)? My intention here, just to be clear, is not so much to chastise Appiah for wrongly neglecting neopragmatism (for he has in fact attended to it elsewhere) as it is to simply point out that Appiah does not consider neopragmatism in this context, such that we might now do so and indeed for reasons that I suspect Appiah would be prepared to support.⁴

Appiah motivates his own quasi-pragmatist argument for moral heterogeneity in part by appealing to the idea that many of our current philosophical dilemmas are not in fact crucial to the tasks of moral living: "From

the point of view of getting on with your life, though, [these philosophical problems are] really crucial only if you're a particularly devoted meta-ethicist" (2008, 182). He then goes on to offer a characteristically pragmatist point: "When we leave this set of problems behind, it will not be because a glorious knock-down argument has settled matters, but because, as regularly happens in the history of the moral sciences, philosophers have grown bored, for the moment, with the debate and so have moved on. And when we leave it—no doubt to return to it again in later decades or centuries—we will still be faced with the challenge of making our lives" (2008, 184). Rorty has made much of this kind of idea, for instance, in the introduction to *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* where he describes his philosophical heroes as "setting aside" rather than "arguing against" epistemology (1979, 6). Rorty noted that his view on this point is really only a gloss on a view expressed long ago by Dewey. That Rorty is right to trace his view back to Dewey is evidenced by this passage from 1909: "Intellectual progress usually occurs through sheer abandonment of questions together with both of the alternatives they assume—an abandonment that results from their decreasing vitality and a change of urgent interest. We do not solve them: we get over them" (1909, 19). The pragmatist point is that we are not likely to figure out the old high modern dilemma of teleology versus deontology. What is more likely is that we will come to see the dilemma as outworn and unnecessary. Perhaps the dilemma will come to seem outworn due to changed cultural conditions in which strict distinctions between intentions and outcomes no longer hold up to the scrutiny of our ethical practices. Perhaps it will come to seem like a bad question because of some new approach to the moral project of making our lives that emphasizes the importance of integrating consequences and intentions, pleasures and wills, welfare and will.

Appiah's recommendation of experimental philosophy abounds in pragmatist themes such as these. If pragmatism is characterized by (certain forms of) fallibilism, pluralism, naturalism, antiskepticism, and antifoundationalism, as well as by a practice of philosophy that is at once interdisciplinary and committed to its public relevance, then Appiah's philosophical position can be seen as a (certain form of) pragmatism. This is not to say that Appiah endorses all of the characteristic pragmatist theses or makes all the characteristic pragmatist arguments. It is to suggest, rather, that there is an obvious affinity of philosophical style and temperament linking Appiah to James, Dewey, and Rorty. Were we willing to be especially rigorous about

this point we might call attention to an overlap in method. This recalls James's point that pragmatism is in the first place a philosophical method. How any individual pragmatists employ this general method to generate their particular substantive results is an open question. If Appiah does not agree with the pragmatists on everything, he might still agree with them on enough to be a pragmatist of some kind or other. Indeed the pragmatists did not themselves agree on everything and yet, with the exception of the often dyspeptic Peirce, agreed that they were all close enough to fit into the same philosophical -ism.

This may serve fine as an account of pragmatism's resources for Appiah's idiosyncratic take on experimental philosophy, but what about the purported connection between pragmatism and experimental philosophy more generally? Is a particular connection between, say, Rorty on neopragmatism and Appiah on experimentalism really a useful proxy for a more general connection between Prag-Phi and X-Phi? These questions deserve attention because it may be the case that Appiah is not our best spokesperson for experimental philosophy. For it may be that Appiah is not nearly as committed to it as a research program as are its leading exponents variously gathering in Joshua Knobe and Shaun Nichols's recent collection *Experimental Philosophy*, on the X-Phi blog, or in various publications in the philosophy journals now offering themselves under the new experimental philosophy label. By attributing pragmatism to Appiah it does not follow that we can thereby attribute pragmatism to the wider project of experimental philosophy. That may be so. But such connections between pragmatism and Appiah do at least incline us to think that other experimental philosophers might stand to benefit from taking another (and for some perhaps even a first?) look at pragmatism.

Appiah's metacommentary on experimental philosophy serves as a preview of similar connections to the more rigorous practice of experimental philosophy. There are two reasons why such a preview is helpful. First, Appiah's endorsement of how experimental philosophy might change philosophy is rightly cautious where it needs to be. Philosophy itself is bound to find this endorsement more congenial than the outright exuberance more common among other experimentalists. Appiah does not think that we ought to go full in for experimental philosophy. He, rather, suggests that we philosophers ought to now take another look at what we have been doing and see if experimental philosophy offers us any good reasons for revising our practice of philosophy. Undoubtedly it will, Appiah points

out, even if it will not do so on every point. A second consideration that bears on these matters concerns the fact that Appiah embodies in his work a capacious vision of ethical and political philosophy that proves a particularly useful landmark on today's philosophical landscape. More rigorous versions of experimental philosophy, by contrast, often remain in keeping with the prevailing disciplinary norms in intentionally adopting a much narrower focus. Tapered professionalization has its place (especially at the outset of a career), but too often it leads to pernicious parochialism (that might look rather ridiculous a few decades later). However one chooses to evaluate the work of the experimental philosophers, parochialism certainly cannot be attributed to Appiah's philosophical vision. Surely his work represents one of the most ranging exemplars of philosophical cultural critique on the scene today. That is entirely to his credit. From a metaphilosophical perspective this project of philosophical cultural critique deserves at least as much attention as does the budding program of philosophical experimentation. All the better if the two might be combined, as they are in Appiah and as anticipated by our best pragmatists, from Ralph Waldo Emerson to Cornel West.

Pragmatism as a Resource for Experimental Philosophy

The foregoing suggests that it is at least plausible that experimental philosophers come off as something very much like pragmatists in some of their most central philosophical commitments and metaphilosophical methods. Still, it might fairly be asked, Even if experimentalists sound like pragmatists, what is the use in calling them by that name? That is a good pragmatist question, and it deserves our consideration. If Appiah or Knobe or any other experimentalist can make many of the points that James, Dewey, or Rorty made without relying on their words, then we should welcome them to do so. After all, there are some unpleasant aspects of these previous pragmatisms (e.g., Rorty's frequent zest for talk of linguistification that sometimes bordered on a kind of linguistic idealism or Dewey's incautious praise of science that sometimes bordered on a kind of positivistic scientism) from which experimental philosophers may rightly wish to distance themselves. And certainly there is much that experimental philosophy contributes that is simply not made available in the writings of James, Dewey, and Rorty. So aside from a label that many philosophers would

like to avoid, what could pragmatism positively contribute to experimental philosophy or at least to cautious versions of it resembling Appiah's experimental ethics?

To advance an answer, I shall discuss two contributions of pragmatist philosophy that experimental philosophers might do well to take note of at present. The first concerns the central issue of the experimental critique of the role played by intuitions in philosophy. The second concerns the seeming cross-disciplinary nature of inquiry as envisaged by the experimental philosophers. I shall take each in turn, pointing out first the centrality of this theme in present-day experimental philosophy and discussing second the depth of understanding of this theme evinced in century-old pragmatist philosophy. My point here is not to point out that the pragmatists were here first in such a way that would suggest that experimental philosophers are mere latecomers. That may be true, but it is also quite clear that the pragmatists and the experimentalists have arrived at similar places by quite different routes, and surely that matters. My point in pointing out these similarities is, then, to suggest that pragmatism furnishes some well-developed resources to experimentalism that the latter could profit from insofar as it remains relatively (and understandably, because so new) underdeveloped in comparison.

Philosophy as Inquisitive Rather than Intuitive

The first important contribution that pragmatism can make to experimental philosophy concerns the latter's assault on the privileged role assumed by intuitions in contemporary philosophy. I begin by noting the centrality of the critique of intuitions for the contemporary experimental philosophers. Indeed this might even be seen as the conceptual center of experimental philosophy. For the whole point of encouraging the use of empirical experiment in philosophy is to get away from a rationalistic reliance on intuition. One way of thinking about experiments is that they test our hunches and provide our intuitions with a little tuition. At the outset of their recent "manifesto" for experimental philosophy, Joshua Knobe and Shaun Nichols tell their readers (i.e., would-be experimenters) that "experimental philosophers proceed by conducting experimental investigations of the psychological processes underlying people's intuitions about central philosophical intuitions" (2008, 3).⁵ Experiments put intuitions to the test. This can be used negatively to show how "what our intuitions tell us

(according to the philosopher)” may be more manifold in content (intuition divergence) and more complex in character (framing effects) than is otherwise suggested. Or it can be used more positively to form conjectures about how people arrive, and what corollary commitments are entailed when they so arrive, at “what their intuitions tell them (according to the philosopher).” In both its positive and negative uses, then, experimental inquiry turns the philosopher’s reliance on vague references to what our intuitions supposedly would be into solid references to substantiated evidence.⁶ Both strategies, in other words, serve to dig into our intuitions such that intuitions come to some less and less like conversation-stopping first axioms that have no upstream origins but lots of downstream relevance. This is replaced with an improved image of inquiry always leading us farther upstream—even springwaters come from somewhere, even if some sources are buried far away in the tiny crevices of massive rocks harboring centuries-old rainwater.

This assault on intuitions, experimentalists should note, has an earlier history in Charles Sanders Peirce’s critique of the faculty of intuition. Like our present-day experimental philosophers, Peirce detected a persistence of unquestioned rationalism in his philosophical contemporaries. In his important 1868 essay, “Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man,” Peirce launched his career by launching an assault on some central tenets of this rationalism. At the heart of his assault is a critique of the claimed faculty of intuition, which Peirce defines as “premise not itself a conclusion” (1868a, 12).⁷ An intuition, for Peirce, is a belief with evidential or inferential status that is not itself grounded in evidence or inference. To put this differently, an intuition is whatever logically functions as both having no upstream source and yet having downstream relevance. In Peirce’s vocabulary, intuition is properly contrasted to inquiry, which produces belief through chains of inference. Part of what made Peirce’s pragmatism so revolutionary, and still makes it so, is that for Peirce these chains of inference are not grounded in anything ultimate, neither rationalist intuitions nor empiricist sense data. Peirce’s cryptic way of putting this was to say that “cognition arises by a *process* of beginning” (1868a, 27; cf. Peirce 1892). For the pragmatist, our beliefs are holistic and fallibilistic, such that every belief we confront is itself the product of previous inference: “It is not true that there must be a first” (Peirce 1868a, 27). Peirce’s argument for this is rather complex, and he spent an entire career elaborating and revising it. There is no need to rehearse those arguments in full detail here. The point worth

noting in the present context is just that the pragmatist philosopher like the experimental philosopher insists that we cannot merely take a belief on credit if it is claimed as intuitive, for intuitions are often little better than unquestioned results of prior inquiry or, worse yet, prior inculcation. Here is the core of Peirce's point: "It is not self-evident that we have such an intuitive faculty, for it has just been shown that we have no intuitive power of distinguishing an intuition from a cognition determined by others" (1868a, 12). We ought to be willing to put *all* of our beliefs to the test, Peirce insisted, and in so doing we will better enjoy their fruits and better insulate ourselves against their abuses. Peirce thus provides ample philosophical support for the experimentalist claim that we ought to empirically test those beliefs that are put forth as intuitively obvious by certain philosophers of an implicitly rationalistic persuasion.

Once one accepts Peirce's critique of intuition, then one ought to go on to say something about the conception of inquiry that is offered as a replacement for intuition in the context of philosophical methodology. Peirce himself outlined his own conception of inquiry in his 1877 essay "The Fixation of Belief," where inquiry is described as the process of resolving doubts. In that essay Peirce favors what he calls the "scientific" method of inquiry. At the core of Peirce's conception of science is a commitment to fixing belief "by some external permanency—by something upon which our thinking has no effect" (1877, 120). One way to interpret this is as a strong commitment to a realist philosophy of science and epistemology. A weaker interpretation, however, might construe it as a commitment to a philosophical methodology that requires of us that we put our conjectures, hypotheses, and intuitions to some test that is external to that of our own thought. For these purposes, the external test to which we submit our beliefs need not be a mind-independent reality (with all the famous problems enjoined by that notion) but could just as well be a sociolinguistic community with which we share practices of concept use. On this view, inquiry might be construed as a mutual practice of reasoning and reason-taking with fellow members of our sociolinguistic community in a way that would enable us to submit our intuitions to tests that would make explicit whether the claims to which we are committed are also claims to which we are entitled.⁸

The pragmatism theory of inquiry, at least in its sociolinguistic strains as against its strongly realist strains, in many ways anticipates the core methodological commitment of experimental philosophy, which consists

in putting philosophical intuitions to the test by checking them against the broader beliefs of the community of believers to which the intuitions are ascribed. The turn to inquiry, of course, does not answer all the questions. It remains an open question, for example, whether we should take linguistic communities to be relatively bounded or relatively unbounded—that is, it is an open question whether a certain class of experiments might be the relevant class of competent co-inquirers.⁹ It also needs to be asked how, among the many available methods, we might undertake this process of testing hunches by submitting them to the rational consideration of communities of inquiry. Experimental philosophy tends to favor quantitative research methods. Pragmatist philosophy suggests that quantitative methods often need supplementation at times by qualitative methods. I cannot pretend to resolve this issue here, but I do wish to flag it, if only because it seems to me that much experimental philosophy pursues a quantitative research track rather unselfconsciously, as if there were not long-running debates internal to social science research concerning the relative merits of quantitative versus qualitative research.¹⁰ Of course, it should be admitted that qualitative research is often more expensive than quantitative databasing—but this seems to me more like the basis for an X-Phi funding proposal than a defense of current X-Phi research orthodoxy. In any event, my point is just that the benefits of a fuller engagement with methodological and substantive issues central to other disciplines such as sociology point us toward a second way in which pragmatism furnishes resources that experimental philosophy might find useful.

Philosophy as Interdisciplinary Rather than Insulated

A second important contribution that pragmatism can make to the experimental program concerns the widespread call for an integration of philosophy with other disciplines in exploring the questions it takes as its purview. The point of the idea of “experiments in ethics” is not just that philosophers should start performing experiments of their own but also that we should start drawing on the experimental inquiries into moral living, moral psychology, moral sociology, and moral history conducted by our colleagues in other branches of the humanities and social sciences. Appiah opens with a strong brief on behalf of interdisciplinary, or what we might call cross-disciplinary or perhaps even counterdisciplinary, thought: “This

little book is an attempt to relate the business of philosophical ethics, which is my professional bailiwick, to the work of scholars in a number of other fields and to the concerns of the ordinary, thoughtful person, trying to live a decent life. . . . It is my argument that we should be free to avail ourselves of the resources of many disciplines to define that vision; and that in bringing them together we are being faithful to a long tradition” (2008, 1). Philosophy, Appiah urges, ought to engage itself with and integrate its own inquiries into work being conducted by our colleagues in psychology, history, sociology, and anthropology. Appiah’s call here sits especially well with experimental philosophy in general as suggested by Knobe and Nichols, whose “manifesto” for experimental philosophy opens with a call for “a return” to a “traditional vision” of philosophy according to which “it wasn’t particularly important to keep philosophy clearly distinct from psychology, history, or political science” (2008, 3). Appiah follows up on this widespread theme in experimental philosophy when he writes, “The commonplace I want to challenge is that philosophy, in having relinquished those inquiries that now belong to the physical and social sciences, has somehow become more purely itself” (2008, 2). This is the commonplace that delivered us to that purified state of philosophy to which Rorty so vehemently objected on pragmatist grounds a few decades ago.

Appiah’s point is in fact really Rorty’s point, but seen from the other side: philosophy ought to involve itself in the work of other disciplines in order to do its work. (This was also, it might be noted in passing, Bernard Williams’s point in his wonderful essay “Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline” [2000].) Rorty thought that philosophy was not in a position to achieve this, at least not in his lifetime (he was unfortunately mostly right). Appiah thinks that philosophy might just be able to recall a more interdisciplinary vocation that would reconnect our inquiries with the best work in the philosophical tradition (let us hope that he, too, will be right). He offers a brief disciplinary “genealogy” in his first chapter to show just how central an interdisciplinary vision has been to much of the best work in philosophy in the modern period. He references Descartes, Hume, Kant, and Mill all in this regard and with excellent effect. In this short history of the interdisciplinary roots of much of our philosophical canon, Appiah does not mention the pragmatists once. But he would have been good to do so. For here is where pragmatism can offer at least one distinctive contribution to the experimental project. This is no small matter given that both Appiah and the leading practitioners of experimental philosophy stand together

in recognizing this call for the integration of philosophical inquiry with inquiries undertaken elsewhere in the academy as at the very core of experimental philosophy.

How can pragmatism enrich and sustain experimental philosophy as an interdisciplinary project? At first blush we might think that Rorty offers a potentially useful model of this in his successful combination of philosophy with literature. But one problem this strategy would confront would be Rorty's apparent doubts about a renewal of "professional philosophy." I think that these doubts can be shown to be mere appearance, but doing so would require an extended discussion that would take us too far afield at present.¹¹ Thus, it is perhaps advisable to focus for present purposes on the classical pragmatists who share with Appiah, Knobe, and Nichols a generous confidence in the possibilities of philosophy. Here is a quick and provisional taxonomy: James and Dewey will likely prove the most useful for the sort of philosophical practice that the experimental philosophers encourage. Peirce will often prove a hindrance in his extreme technicality, but experimental philosophers will at least find useful and accessible his arguments, anticipating theirs by well over a hundred years, against a faculty of intuition. Other more marginal pragmatists including Jane Addams, W. E. B. DuBois, Randolph Bourne, and George Herbert Mead will certainly prove helpful from time to time, particularly as concerns certain issues and themes over which James and Dewey sometimes stumbled. In looking primarily to James and Dewey as offering the best guidance in taking up the experimental philosophers' recommendations for a traditional practice of interdisciplinary philosophy, we would do good to see them as follows: we should look to James as providing an inspiring and motivating lead and to Dewey as following up the rear with the details and the rigor.

If experimental philosophy is meant to encourage philosophers to become a more interdisciplinary bunch, then it would be wrong to ignore the inspiring force of James's example. James in the first place provides a useful model of how an experimental philosophy might better integrate itself with experimental work in psychology, which is the particular discipline to which most of the experimental philosophers seem contingently committed. Indeed for James philosophy and psychology were hardly separable, even if he did think that there are some questions that cannot be answered in the lab and other questions that can only be answered in the lab. James in his work also amply demonstrated how philosophers can draw on a wealth of insights from all manner of intellectual traditions

in making our point. Not only is James still one of the most literary writers in the philosophical canon, but he practically invented the modern discipline of religious studies, and his influence on certain branches of social science and what would later come to be called cultural studies remains unmistakable.

It is in Dewey where pragmatism really features its best resources for a more expansive version of experimental philosophy. For Dewey offers a quite detailed example of how an experimental philosophy might integrate itself with work in psychology, sociology, history, and education. One way of understanding Dewey's work in ethics and epistemology is to see it as growing out of his work in education undertaken at his University of Chicago Laboratory Schools, which was an environment for experiment in education. At the Laboratory Schools not only a whole generation of progressive education but also a whole generation of pragmatist epistemology and ethics got their start. For Dewey's pragmatist views of morality and knowledge were directly informed by work undertaken in this experimental environment and other such environments including Jane Addams's Hull House. When Dewey wrote *How We Think* (1910) and *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938a), his characterization of the epistemological situation in terms of problems occasioning reconstructive responses was grounded in careful experimental inquiry. Those might not be exactly the same kinds of laboratory experiments involving magnetic resonance imaging scans and control groups to which the typical experimental philosopher appeals, but there is no reason why we philosophers ought to exclude the kinds of inquiries conducted by modern-day Laboratory Schools and Hull Houses.

While we may continue to disagree with some of Dewey's conclusions in ethics and epistemology, it is undeniable that his work offers a useful and enriching model of how philosophical inquiry might proceed hand in hand with experimental inquiry conducted under the auspices of other disciplinary matrices. (Dewey's misleading references to "scientific method" are, it turns out, not so much expressions of an offensive positivistic scientism as they are invocations of the "experimental" approach of the natural and human sciences.) Dewey's philosophy does a remarkable job of showing how philosophy can proceed by taking as its material for reflection the results of inquiries conducted elsewhere in the social sciences and humanities. Dewey's epistemology was not constructed out of abstracted conceptions of knowers and propositions but, rather, out of the materials furnished by actual experiments in knowing. In like manner his

moral and political philosophy was not built up as a search for timeless principles of justice or right but, rather, was developed in conversation with the actual historical and sociological material furnished by diverse collaborators and colleagues. His book *The Public and Its Problems* (1927), for example, is not a search for an ideal theory of justice but an inquiry into how political and moral order questions were changing in the face of the industrialization of work, the commercialization of the economy, and the increasing influence of huge-scale broadcast intermediaries on politics in early twentieth-century America. This sort of framing is one that only detailed social scientific inquiry can show the contours of. The material of that book exhibits an experimental engagement with political and moral realities that can stand as a valuable example for a more engaged practice of political philosophy today—Dewey wrote there of the radio, the automobile, and the corporation, not only of justice, right, and state. I take it that this is, at least in part, what experimental philosophers are calling for in calling philosophers back to a less rarefied practice of thought that collaborates effectively with work afoot in other disciplines. If this is not what they do have in mind, then perhaps it is what they should have in mind.

I have discussed only two contributions that pragmatist philosophy might make to experimental philosophy. This in no way rules out the possibility of other themes of pragmatism informing the nascent experimental program. I mentioned above in connection to Appiah's book pragmatist discussions of the fact/value dichotomy, ethical contextualism, and epistemic and moral naturalism. One other possible resource worth mentioning in conclusion is Dewey's writings on what he called "scientific method," which are often misleadingly interpreted as a call for scientism when in fact they are a careful inquiry into the variety of styles and techniques that make the sciences (in the plural) work as well as they do.¹² Pragmatism, in short, could help provide experimental philosophy with a little guidance in that precarious subfield of the philosophy of science that might be called the philosophy of experiment.¹³

Metaphilosophical Divergences

This brings me to a point of possible divergence between pragmatist and experimental philosophy that is worth airing in conclusion. It is notable that experimental philosophy thus far seems to have been conceived as an attempt to bring experimental or empirical inquiry to bear on specifically

philosophical problems. This seems particularly true of our leading new experimental philosophers. Knobe and Nichols suggest that they are “proposing another method (on top of all the ones that already exist) for pursuing certain philosophical inquiries” (2008, 10). The suggestion seems to be that experimentation helps philosophy better *realize* its predefined aims, not that it helps philosophy better *redefine* those aims. According to this view of experimental philosophy there is a distinct set of problems that are “philosophical” in nature and which we philosophers ought to devote ourselves to addressing. Experimenting is meant to better help us pursue questions that “seem to lie at the core of what is ordinarily regarded as philosophy” (Knobe and Nichols 2008, 13). Appiah also seems inclined to this sort of view, though in his case it is not quite as apparent and certainly not nearly as forceful. Whether or not this is in fact an indication of hesitation on his part over these matters, it is sensible to assume that hesitation on this score does exist among at least some experimental philosophers. But by and far the currently prevailing model of experimental philosophy is to offer a proposal about how we philosophers can best go about addressing the specifically philosophical problems that are the appropriate subject matter of our discipline.

The pragmatists developed an importantly different view regarding experiment in the sense of *inquiry* that is *interdisciplinary*. Their view is that the idea of a distinctive set of problems that are the special purview of philosophy is the phantom of a pernicious professional parochialization. Hence the distance separating Rorty’s deep doubts about the future of the discipline from Appiah’s inspired confidence in that same future. A more positive way of bringing these pragmatist doubts to bear is to employ them as the motivation for reviving philosophy along different lines than those engendered by professional hyperspecialization. There is no doubting, for instance, that Dewey wisely sought to recall philosophy to what he regarded as its true vocation: “Philosophy records itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men” (1917, 42).¹⁴ It was Dewey’s view that though there may be no isolated pasture in which only philosophical flowers bloom, there are yet pastures wide and far that we philosophers can graze in and with definite benefit. In urging us to graze widely, it is a rigid fencing-off of our thought that Dewey above all protested. He did not protest against the very idea of philosophy but only against the unsustainable idea that philosophy might be able to grow its

own flowers for itself without a care as to whether anyone else finds them beautiful. Dewey worried that such a vision of philosophy would be reduced to “chewing a historic cud long since reduced to woody fibre” (1917, 47).

This Deweyan view has recently been revived in an insightful, if not also incite-ful, article by Philip Kitcher that explicitly takes its cues from Dewey’s call for a reconstruction *in* and *of* philosophy. Kitcher’s contemporary spin on Dewey involves the idea of turning philosophy “inside out” (2011, 259). This means that areas that have long been core to the discipline, so called “M&E” (metaphysics and epistemology), can be shunted to the margins in an effort to centralize those areas where philosophy does its most important cultural work. Kitcher (2011, 258) here references normative ethics, political philosophy, philosophy of science, aesthetics, and social epistemology. The key idea, as I interpret Kitcher, is that philosophical work ought to be able to do more than promise broader cultural relevance: “Yet unless one can show that the more abstract questions do contribute to the solution of problems of more general concern, that they are not simply exercises in virtuosity, they should be seen as preludes to philosophy rather than the substance of it” (2011, 259).

I understand Kitcher, and Dewey before him, and indeed every pragmatist, as saying (at least) the following about philosophy. If philosophy really does matter (and every self-respecting philosopher should be able to proudly claim that it does), then we ought to be able to *show* how and why it matters. Showing why philosophy matters cannot be accomplished by making the vague sort of promises that we have been making for decades, largely because those promises have gone unfulfilled for decades. Showing philosophy’s relevance involves, rather, charting the path from philosophical inquiry to definite results, insights, and effects on contemporary cultural practices, understandings, and concepts. For the pragmatist, what matters about philosophy is what it does, not what it promises to do. Promises are cheap. Work is a challenge—and therefore a space of possible achievement. *Showing*, to sum up, requires *tracing* and *charting* rather than *gesturing* and *promising*.

This sort of Deweyan conception of the distinction of philosophy might be met with some trepidation within the philosophical community, as evidenced by the reception of Kitcher’s piece in popular online discussion forums. Many of the most standard concerns are, however, misplaced. Allow me to conclude by discussing just some of the most prominent criticisms.

In the first place, it might be worried by some philosophers that the Deweyan conception of interdisciplinarity will put philosophers out of a job—the serious version of this worry involving the view that we philosophers have an important job to do. But neither I nor Dewey (and probably not Rorty or Kitcher either, though I cannot defend that here) disagrees with the thinking that motivates this worry. In order that inquiry might proceed at a quick pace, we ought to rely on some division of cognitive labor. Dewey's claim does not betray a desire that philosophy melt away as a distinctive style of reflective practice; it only suggests an improved set of terms according to which we will divide cognitive labor into separable disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, psychology, biology, and so on. According to one traditional conception of disciplinary distinction, philosophy should be pared off from other disciplines in virtue of a special set of problems or topics that are the isolated purview of each discipline. On this view, philosophy has its own set of problems to work on, such as the free will problem or the realism/idealism debate in its various iterations. This view does not lend itself well to interdisciplinary inquiry. It also tends toward scholasticism, which was what Dewey was warning against with his metaphor of cud-chewing academics. There is, fortunately, another way of conceptualizing the distinctiveness of philosophy as a discipline. This alternative better fits with a self-conscious interdisciplinary mission on the part of philosophy. On this alternative proposal, philosophy is distinguished by a loose family of methods (e.g., conceptual analysis, conceptual inventiveness, historical synthesis, dedicated reflective practice, rigorous argumentation). Sociology is likewise distinguished by its methods, as is psychology, and so on. On this view, philosophers and other practitioners in other disciplines can and should collaborate by bringing their distinctive methodological perspectives to bear on shared problems. Dewey's claim was simply that problems should come from practice rather than from pure theory, such that once we have a problem in view we can deploy a rich array of different disciplinary instrumentalities to address it. On this pragmatist view, philosophy retains its integrity in its instrumentalities, not in its insistence that there is a special set of problems that only philosophers are equipped to address. Any one, after all, can engage with problems of freedom, the meaning of life, or the nature of reality. What makes philosophers useful is not that we have some special insight into these topics but, rather, our skill in deploying certain instrumentalities we have fashioned in our work on these topics as well as our (unfortunately

atrophied) ability to apply these instrumentalities to other problems that we share with sociologists, literary critics, biologists, and the so-called average person on the street.

Now, it might be further protested that this Deweyan view implies that just about anybody can be a philosopher if he or she just takes up the philosophical methods of conceptual analysis, conceptual creativity, and so on. On one level this is obviously not a serious objection, for the practice of our pedagogy positively depends upon our commitment to the thought that anyone might become a philosopher. But there is indeed a serious objection along these lines motivated by the worry, for example, that some plumber who happens to be particularly reflective about his or her plumbing practices might be mistaken for a philosopher on the view I am urging. This is a mistake, so the objection goes, and it can be prevented only by recognizing that we philosophers point our reflective practice to a distinctively philosophical set of problems that the plumber, in all his or her seriousness about fluid dynamics and pipe engineering and the moral standings of the public water works, does not often consider. My Deweyan reply to this objection is, to put it shortly, that I do not find the scenario of the plumber as philosopher at all objectionable. I am happy to allow that there may in actual fact be some plumbers, not employed as professional philosophers, who count just as much as philosophers as some of us who are employed as philosophers. And to make the matter clear, there are certainly many historians and biologists who are philosophical about their work in a way that is on the level with we professional philosophers. The pragmatist wants to suggest that we philosophers ought to welcome these reflective inquirers as potential collaborators rather than guarding ourselves against them by insisting on increasing our disciplinary guild requirements. The distinguishing qualities of the philosopher should be thought of as matters of reflective practice, intellectual curiosity, argumentative rigor, visionary creativity, and perhaps also openheartedness. The plumber who partakes in these activities should be as much of a model to us as are our familiar heroes with whom we kibitz across the ages. It is in this sense that we philosophers have much to learn from our more particularly reflective colleagues across campus, even if we do not always direct our own reflective capacities toward fluid dynamics, macroeconomic modeling, the history of colonialism, *Moby-Dick*, or the taxonomical classification of species.

To return from these objections against pragmatism back to the potential pragmatist objection against experimental philosophy I have been

considering, I wish to note a potential ambiguity in the experimental methodology that this pragmatist objection may enable the experimentalists to clarify. My suspicion is that many experimental philosophers are presently unsure about their metaphilosophical reasons for urging interdisciplinarity and experimentation as against insulated intuition. On the one hand, they may see these as sources of professional legitimation that will enable them to better perform a set of philosophical tasks that only philosophers have a say in constructing. On the other hand, they may see these as intellectual instrumentalities that might yet enable them to widen the constituency of philosophy by constructing a philosophical practice that is more worthy of the attention of the culture in which philosophy finds itself, noting of course that this culture is riddled with all sorts of problems, dangers, and difficulties. It is not clear yet which path experimental philosophy will pursue. It is clear that pragmatist philosophy offers ample resources to experimental philosophy along just one of these paths.

The point of pointing out the potential pragmatism in experimental philosophy is not to insist that pragmatism has been right all along. Had it been right all along, pragmatism would have worked better than it did, to offer a spin on the famous joke about pragmatism often attributed to Sidney Morgenbesser. The point of pointing out the pragmatism in experimental philosophy is to suggest ways in which pragmatism might strengthen the work the experimentalists are proposing, work that the pragmatists themselves clearly did not carry out to full completion even if they anticipated many aspects of it. The point, then, is to see how experimental philosophy and pragmatist philosophy may yet both work better than they thus far have. This, at least on a pragmatist gauge, would be a measure of the truth of each.

NOTES

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1. For another recent discussion of pragmatist and experimental philosophy, see Wahman 2011.
2. For an outline of the experimentalist program here, see Knobe 2007. Another good introduction to this movement can be found in the collection edited by Joshua Knobe and Shaun Nichols (2008) as well as on the X-Phi blog at <http://experimentalphilosophy.typepad.com/>.
3. For skeptical assessments of the experimental case against intuitions as evidence, see Kauppinen 2007; Liao 2008; Sosa 2007. For a response to some of these criticisms, see Nadelhoffer and Nahmias 2007.
4. On Appiah's own take on the neopragmatists, see his reviews of the landmark 1989 books on pragmatism by Richard Rorty (1989) and Cornel West (1989) in Appiah 1989, 1990.
5. See also Weinberg et al. 2008.
6. See Hacking for a different way of invoking inquiry against intuition: "The philosopher's question, 'What would (or should) we say if?' is often trumped by, 'What did we say, when?'" (2007, 269).
7. It might be noted that Peirce's argument is framed as a critique of intuition as a *faculty* whereas X-Phi is framed as a critique of the *argumentative strength* of intuitions in the context of certain philosophical arguments. The difference might seem wider than it is, for Peirce's argument is ultimately an epistemological one that concerns the evidential or justificatory status that intuitions might claim within our processes of reasoning.
8. The best-developed version of this conception of inquiry in the pragmatist tradition can be found in the work of Robert Brandom (1994).
9. See Sosa 2007 for expression of doubts about experimental philosophy on this score.
10. For one classic overview of these debates, see Bryman 1984.
11. See Koopman forthcoming for details.
12. See Dewey 1938b, 276.
13. See Hacking 1983 for some useful thoughts on the importance of the philosophy of experiment.
14. I believe that Rorty, too, was prepared to accept this picture of philosophy whenever he allowed himself to think of philosophy less as a name for a particular academic specialization and more as a name for a capacious tradition of intellectual commitment. See, for instance, the introduction to Rorty's (2007) final volume of collected papers and Rorty's (1986) introduction to a volume of Dewey's collected works.

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