

The Evolution of Consciousness and the Development of Pragmatism

I. General Description: The nature of consciousness (subjectivity, qualitative experience, what-it-is-likeness, etc) and the nature of agency (or control, will, volition, choice, decisions etc.) are the two most central issues in contemporary philosophy of mind. Though Pragmatism has come to be associated with anti-realist views of truth and reference, and coherence theories of meaning and justification, it in fact originated in the philosophy of mind and an approach to that subject grounded in developmental and evolutionary biology. Broadly speaking, pragmatists began to adopt a developmental approach to the will or our ability to control our behaviors and used this conception to define core components of consciousness and cognition: i.e. belief, doubt and those states of mind operative in the articulation and evaluation of philosophy itself. Indeed, James introduced the term “pragmatism” to name a philosophy that results from applying an account of belief grounded in evolutionary biology to debates over the nature of philosophy and its methods. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that pragmatism is experiencing a resurgence in the philosophy of mind as cognitive scientists have tried to integrate their work with what is known about the evolution of our nervous systems and have simultaneously come to recognize how much computation is devoted to action and how extensively action shapes perceptual experience. Our plan is to begin with this history and the intuitions that lead some philosophers to regard an organism’s consciousness as something that cannot be fully explained if we limit ourselves to the tools utilized by neurobiologists and other cognitive scientists: some philosophers, concluding from this that consciousness and/or agency are non-physical (dualism) and others concluding that consciousness is a fundamental force (panpsychism). We then turn to contemporary responses to these intuitions that have emerged from the close study of diversity in neural architectures, the likely evolution of these architectures and what this implies for consciousness. With this material on the table, we will turn to assessing the merits of treating pragmatism as the philosophical offshoot of evolutionary biology and evaluating the consequences of pragmatism, so understood, for philosophy and our theories of truth, knowledge, and the epistemic norms that define science and other reliable methods of belief fixation and revision.

II. Schedule of Readings

Topic 1: Cartesian Dualism: Intellectualism v. Epiphenomenalism

1. T. Huxley, “On The Hypothesis That Animals are Automata, and Its History” (1874)

Topic 2: Pragmatism as an Alternative to Intellectualism and Epiphenomenalism

2. A. Bain, *The Emotions and the Will*, 3rd Edition, Belief, pp. 505-38.
3. C.S. Peirce, “The Fixation of Belief” and “How to Make Our Ideas Clear”
4. W. James, “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results”

5. A. Zimmerman, "Bain's Theory of Belief and the Genesis of Pragmatism"

Topic 3: Inexplicable Qualia?

6. Nagel, "What is it like to be a bat?" *Mortal Questions*, pp. 165-80.

7. K. Akins, "What is it Like to be Boring and Myopic?" in B. Dahlbom (ed.), *Dennett and His Critics*, Oxford: Blackwell (1993), pp. 124-60.

8. F. Macpherson (2011) 'Taxonomising the Senses', *Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 153, No. 1, 123-142.

Recommended: J. Birch, A. Schnell and N.S. Clayton, "Dimensions of Animal Consciousness," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 24, 10 (2020), pp. 789-801.

Topic 4: The Evolution of Subjectivity

9. Nagel, "Pansychism," *Mortal Questions*, 181-95.

10. Godfrey-Smith, P. "Mind, Matter, and Metabolism." *Journal of Philosophy*, 113 (2016), pp. 481-506.

11. Peter Godfrey-Smith, "Evolving Across the Explanatory Gap," *Philosophy, Theory and Practice in Biology* (2019).

Recommended: Peter Godfrey-Smith, *Other Minds: The Octopus, the Sea and the Deep Origins of Consciousness*, (2016).

Topic 5: The Unity or Disunity of Consciousness

12. Nagel, "Brain Bisection and the Unity of Consciousness," *Mortal Questions*, pp. 147-64.

13. Bayne and Chalmers, "What is the Unity of Consciousness?" in A. Cleereman (ed.) *The Unity of Consciousness: Binding, Integration, Dissociation* 2003.

13. G.J. O'Brien and J. Opie, "The Disunity of Consciousness," *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 763, 3 (September 1998).

14. S. Zeki, "The Disunity of Consciousness," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 7, 5 (May 2003), pp. 214-8.

Recommended: M.S. Gazzaniga, "Cerebral specialization and interhemispheric communication: does the corpus callosum enable the human condition?" *Brain* (2000), pp. 1293-1326.

Topic 6: Control over Belief

15. W. James, "The Will to Believe"

16. M. S. McCormick, "Responding to Skepticism about Doxastic Agency," *Erkenntnis*, 83 (2018), pp. 627-645.

17. B. Roeber, "Evidence, Judgment and Belief at Will," *Mind*, 128 (July 2019), pp. 837-59.

18. R. Basu, "Can Beliefs Wrong?" *Philosophical Topics*, 46, 1 (Spring 2018),

Topic 7: Pragmatic Reasons for Belief

19. M.S. McCormick, "Can Beliefs be Based on Practical Reasons?" in J.A. Carter and P. Bondy (eds.), *Well-Founded Belief: New Essays on the Epistemic Basing Relation*, London: Routledge (2019), pp. 215-34.

20. B. Maguire and J. Woods, "The Game of Belief," *Philosophical Review*, 129, 2 (2020).

Recommended: S. Leary, "In Defense of Practical Reasons for Belief," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 95, 3 (2017), pp. 529-42.

Topic 8: Social Epistemology, Belief and Philosophical Methodology

22. Z. Barnett, "Philosophy Without Belief," *Mind*, 128 (January 2019), pp. 109-38.

III. Course requirements: One seminar paper 15-20 pages (80%), presentation (15%) and general participation (5%). Presentations will take approximately 1/3 of a given seminar period. *Outlines for presentations must be handed in one week prior to the presentation itself.*

Seminar Paper Due: 3/19/21