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I wish to express my gratitude to all and each of you for being here and contributing to this conference which, in fact, seems very promising for the advancement of philosophical research. Thanks in particular to the President of Università Roma Tre, professor Guido Fabiani, for encouraging the organization of this event.

A special thank to Sami Pihlström for his scientific engagement to this conference but also for the very essential financial support he could provide for making it possible. And thanks to the other members of the scientific committee of the conference, first of all to Henrik Rydenfelt, who first suggested the opportunity of organizing this conference, as well as to Giovanni Maddalena and Roberto Frega, for their precious, highly-responsible work; and last but not the list, a very sincere thank to Michela Bella for her restless and very accurate support for the logistic organization of the conference that she offered us, together with Guido Baggio and a number of PhD students of Roma Tre.

As President of the Associazione Pragma, please let me say a few words about that. The Associazione was founded in 2006, and I feel particularly grateful to Susanna Marietti, at the time a scholar of Peirce's theory of mathematics, who suggested the idea of creating this kind of philosophical network. Since then the Associazione has grown up in a very effective and scholarly prestigious way and many national and international workshops, conferences and publications have been organized by its members. We also made up the online *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, which apparently is increasingly appreciated by the international community of pragmatism scholars. And finally, in 2010 we set up an Inter-university research center, named *Pragmatismo, Costruzione dei saperi e formazione*, that involves six Italian Universities: Cagliari, Milano Statale, Molise, Napoli Federico II, Perugia, Roma Tre.

The Dynamic Unity of Pragmatism

The movement of re-evaluation of pragmatism, promoted since the 1960s by prominent figures in the philosophical culture of both Europe and the United States, has now settled into a historiographic and theoretical interest which is significantly widespread. Several papers presented for this conference contribute to showing that this also concerns our country, where in the past a general neglect of pragmatist philosophy was prevalent or, one could say, it was mostly considered with a suspicious mind.

After the influential actions of restoration offered by such authors as Quine, Apel, Habermas, Putnam, Margolis, Bernstein, and Rorty, recent years have, in fact, seen a careful attention to the relationships among the representatives of classical pragmatism and other currents of thought, both previous and contemporary. Nonetheless, it is possible to detect a specific commitment to giving importance to the current relevance of aspects of the pragmatist movement which had previously not been studied very thoroughly. In particular, it is increasingly evident that the term 'pragmatism' designates a style of thought made up of precise theoretical-methodological objectives, which have had a more or less direct influence on the twentieth century transformations of traditional conceptual paradigms and, principally, that it is still a promising resource for advancing philosophical research.

It is opportune to insist on the unity of purpose of the pragmatist philosophers, that is, as I have long maintained, in contrast with the most prevailing interpretations, on the common project that they put forward, because, in an overall view, their works actually exhibit differentiated yet complementary ways to perform philosophical activity. It is a complementarity that deserves to be appreciated, unless one wants to continue to endorse that whole series of conceptual and operational dichotomies which the classical pragmatists, instead, urged should be overcome. We are speaking about the well-known oppositions of subject/object, perception/concept, logical/psychological, normative/descriptive, theory/practice, facts/values.

These are oppositions, especially in the light of many other currents of twentieth-century thought, which now appear as “false antitheses”, to use John Dewey’s expression. Like Peirce, James, Mead, and Lewis, Dewey was in fact committed to replacing these antitheses with a continuist, anti-dichotomous treatment of the differences they represent, and this certainly does not mean invalidating the work of differentiation that is inevitably incumbent on philosophical research. Moreover, Pierce’s paradigmatic expression comes to mind, regarding the pragmatist image of doing philosophy:

“ Philosophy ought to imitate the successful sciences in their methods, so far as to proceed only from tangible premises which can be subjected to careful scrutiny, and to trust rather to the multitude and variety of its arguments than to the conclusiveness of any one. Its reasoning should not form a chain which is no stronger than its weakest link, but a cable whose fibres may be ever so slender, provided they are sufficiently numerous and intimately connected” .¹

This point of view makes rather questionable the reading of the pragmatist movement according to which it was marked from the outset by irremediable theoretical divergences – that is to say, the underlying heterogeneity between the “logical pragmatism” of Peirce and the “radical empiricism” of James.

In order to make full use of the pluralistic and yet coherentist image of philosophical work, which Peirce claimed as the working model of pragmatism, it is necessary to be willing to cause the works of the classics of this current of thought to interact with the proposals from traditions and fields of research that are different or even at first glance irreconcilable with its essential lines. In a few words, in order for this line of thought to be able to continue to be fertile, it is necessary to nourish a constructive dialogue with philosophical projects and cultural movements as they come forward. This also involves a willingness to perhaps abandon certain segments of the classical pragmatist philosophies. However, there are some fixed points that

¹ Ch. S. Peirce, *Some Consequences of Four Incapacities*, in *The Essential Peirce*, ed. by N. Houser and C. Kloesel vol. 1, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1992, p. 29 .

certainly no hybridization with other philosophical movements could ignore without running into clear interpretative difficulties or true misunderstandings of the spirit that animated the work of Peirce, James and their closest followers. I am referring to the features on the basis of which pragmatism is properly characterized as an alternative to the foundationalism that is a trait of both the empiricist and the rationalist side of modern philosophy: first of all, the exhibition of the interpretative, and for this reason *fallible*, nature of our cognitive and ethical practices.

This aspect is actually the main factor of the classical pragmatist philosophies, that is, the element for which a central position should definitely be reserved within their common project. To be more precise, fallibilism, a term coined by Peirce, is the most original factor of their opposition to modern foundationalism, to which many other philosophical currents of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century were addressing criticism that was just as powerful, and which was imposed, in large measure, by developments in the physical-natural sciences. The pragmatists certainly referred to these sciences with great favor, especially in appreciating the empirical-experimental methodology and the anti-dogmatic but at the same time constructive potentiality that they entailed. And it is precisely in this context that the epistemic principle of fallibilism came to be tied to a conception of rationality as a process. This conception turns on the criterion of action as a tool but also as a testing ground for our cognitive and ethical propositions.

The term fallibilism – it is useful to continue to emphasize this – does not at all mean skepticism or absolute relativism, but simply indicates that philosophical knowledge, like scientific knowledge, cannot aspire to certainties that are acquired once and for all, but rather requires a constant and acute attention to the human practices within which our questions regarding knowledge and values unfold. In other words, it is necessary to use the criterion of action both in the area of logic and the theory of knowledge and in the area of ethics, thus assuming an anti-intellectualist attitude that imposes an insistence on the dynamic nature of cognitive propositions, of ethical-moral criteria, and of the very concepts of truth and reality. Indeed, in the

view of pragmatist fallibilism, truth and reality are no longer metaphysical or logical presuppositions given once and for all, but are rather the results or points of arrival, which are in principle always revisable, of a progressive activity of construction and interpretation of human experiences. Therefore, the anti-intellectualism of the pragmatists is quite different from a mere devaluation of the abilities or functions that are usually involved in the term rationality. In spite of some old readings of the work of James, the polemical objective of the pragmatists is not the operativeness of human reason, but rather the inadequacy of the essentialist images of rationality, the insufficiency of the criteria used by traditional philosophies, which are abstract and not attentive enough to the complexity of human experiences.

The contribution to this attitude is evident on the part of the other basic elements around which the common project of pragmatist philosophy is organized: (i) consequentialism, that is to say, the setting aside of the search for ultimate foundations of our cognitive and ethical beliefs, in favor of the analysis of the consequences they produce in terms of action, and, more generally, in favor of concrete experiences; (ii) holism, that is, the organic vision of human beings and their relations with the physical-natural world, because of which the dynamism and the continuous interference of multiple factors are placed in the foreground – logical, empirical, biological, cultural, individual, and social factors– which qualify the exercise of rationality; and, finally, (iii) anti-subjectivism, or the criticism of the philosophies centered on subjectivity.

It is not difficult to see that the common thread of all these elements is the invitation to replace the dichotomous thinking that has long governed western thought with a continuist view, which, as has already been mentioned, covers both the methodological and the ontological planes. And to pursue this aspect is a task that is still open for those who at least appreciate the anti-dogmatic position that guides pragmatist continuism. It is true that much of the philosophy of the twentieth century has provided tools and important perspectives for overcoming many theoretical and methodological dichotomies, just as it is true that our philosophical tradition has

various continuist ontologies. However, it is also evident that our cultural landscape contains a fairly numerous tendencies to gather the complexity of human reality under a single principle, that is, to embrace both ontological and methodological reductionisms, which gradually turn into more or less subtle forms of dogmatism. And I wish that, at least, pragmatism will continue to be a significant voice in “the human conversation” – to use Rorty’s expression –, a voice that could help us in getting free from offences or humiliations of human possibility of constructing more and more rich perspectives on our own individual and social world, on our own present and future reality.