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Two Types of Pragmatism

Any fair accounting of the early history of pragmatism needs to be broader than the standard stories one hears today. Of the many varieties of pragmatic theories of knowledge that were proposed between 1890 and 1920, the two dominant American pragmatic theories of knowledge can be classified as «radical empirical», defended by William James and John Dewey, and «idealistic», defended by Charles Sanders Peirce and Josiah Royce. In this paper, I argue that for both stands: (1) there is a commitment to the primacy of *experience* as both the source and the final test of the value of philosophical reflection; (2) that philosophical reflection is a kind of critical problem-solving activity that needs to take its impetus from genuine (as opposed to hyperbolic) doubt; (3) that truth is understood in light of the way it addresses actual problems and genuine doubt in practice; and (4) that practice and practical consequences are the measure of the value of philosophy, not vice-versa. I also argue that the idealistic strand of pragmatism has a better answer for many of the problems pragmatic theories of knowledge face today, especially Rorty's nominalism.