§1: A Big Challenge Facing Political Philosophy Today

Much of political life in the twentieth century was dominated by a complex ensemble of political conditions that can be adequately characterized in terms of a quintessential liberal distinction between public and private spheres. While this traditional distinction between two separate and unmixable spheres remains enormously influential amongst theorists and philosophers across the political spectrum, we are now beginning to witness the emergence of important new cultural conditions which simply cannot be dealt with according to the terms of a strict division between public and private. These emerging new conditions are in part a function of four interrelated sea-changes that we have been witness to over the past half-century or so: increasing economic and cultural globalization, widespread deployment of dramatically new
technological infrastructures based on networked architectures, the ascendance of a consumerist phase of corporate capitalism, and the effectiveness of new social movements in politicizing everyday categories of culture and identity. When we consider the intersection of these four changes in our political realities, the force of a new ensemble of conditions cannot but be felt. This raises an important challenge for political philosophy today: How can our best liberal democratic practices and institutions survive the deep shift involved in our newly-emerging political condition that is taking us beyond the split between public and private?

My way of bringing this challenge into focus is in terms of the increasing fragility of the quintessential liberal distinction between public and private. But for reasons of time, I shall not here offer a rigorous diagnosis that demonstrates the imperilment of this classical liberal divide. If I were to present such a diagnosis, I would employ a methodology for inquiry that is broadly genealogical in orientation after the model of Michel Foucault. But today I shall be peering forward into the future rather than gazing backward into the past. And for the purposes of looking forward, Foucaultian genealogy is hardly our best guide. Forward-looking political philosophy with a normative intent requires a reconstructive orientation such as that featured in the tradition of American pragmatist social critique. Now, my view is that pragmatism and genealogy go hand in hand. We use genealogy to develop a historically-oriented diagnosis of contemporary problematizations. And we use pragmatism understood as a reconstructive project in

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\(^1\) This Foucaultian genealogy would take the form of a history of the present (cf. Foucault [1975, 1976]) plus an anthropologypathology of the contemporary (cf. Rabinow [2003, 2008]).

xxxFoucault 1975, 1976
xxxRabinow, 2003, 2008
order to go about the task of meliorating contemporary problems, dangers, and
difficulties.

My focus today will be on a pragmatist response to the problematization of the
liberal split between public and private. To set the stage for such a response, I do need to
begin by saying something about the problem or problems to which I am responding.
And since I cannot here lay out a rigorous genealogical diagnosis of the problem, I shall
instead just offer a small emblem of this problem that I hope will shed some light on what
I take to be a primary challenge for us today.

My emblem will focus on a humble little entity that I take to be representative of
the increasing imperilment of the public/private divide. My representative humble little
entity is Hello Kitty. I am looking at Hello Kitty in part through the lens offered by a
recent presentation here at the University of Oregon by Christine Yano, a Professor of
Anthropology at the University of Hawaii. Yano presented her talk “Kitty on the Go” a
few weeks ago as the keynote address at the “Modern Girls on the Go” conference
organized by Alisa Freedman of the East Asian Languages and Literatures department.²

Yano’s anthropology of globalization through the lens of Hello Kitty offers a
view of just how quotidian our new political condition of being beyond public and private
has become for us. Hello Kitty is one of those exceedingly ordinary ubiquitous little
objects populating our contemporary world. An innocent consumer item with a branded
identity. A proliferating piece of fetishized plastic. A caricature of a mouthless kitten
with a bow in her hair and a promise of purity in her unblinking eyes. As a philosopher, I

am not concerned with Hello Kitty herself so much as with what makes her possible. For here is where Kitty is emblematic of our new political condition. Kitty is made possible by, among other things, the four vectors of our contemporary political condition I noted above. Kitty is a globalizing and globalized reality, she is transmitted and distributed (both as thing and as idea) by network technologies like the internet, she is a consumer fetish object, and she has been taken up and appropriated in all sorts of ways by actors looking to entrench or overturn inherited identity categories of gender, sexuality, and hybrid transnationality. Hello Kitty is a fine little emblem of our newly-emerging political condition insofar as she circulates through our new four-vectored condition without calling all that much attention to these very features of her condition that make her possible. She is innocently and humbly at home in our world of consumerism, globalism, networks, and cultural politics. She softly strolls onto the scene of our new political conditions in a way that suggests just how obvious we all take this condition to be.

What interests me most is the status of little entities like Hello Kitty vis-à-vis the traditional liberal categories of publicity and privacy. Liberalism as it has traditionally been conceived requires us to ask a seemingly simple question: Is Kitty and the practices she is a part of public or private? Consider the first option. Practices of Kitty consumption, Kitty appropriation, and Kitty fetishization do not really seem public in the traditional sense of that term. But then again for many actors she clearly functions as a sign for a political reworking of the self—for instance, with respect to inherited gender norms as exampled by the presence of Hello Kitty in certain feminist subcultures such as

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3 The four vectors, once again, are: 1) globalization, 2) networked technologies, 3) consumer capitalism, and 4) the cultural-identity politics.
Riot Grrrl D-I-Y punk culture or the Asian lesbian collective who take Hello Kitty as their mascot and call themselves Yellow Kitty, or the news event from a few years ago when the Thailand police force decided to start instituting an internal sanction against disobedient officers in the form of making bad cops wear pink Kitty armbands in order to institute a threat of deterrence premised on their masculine disidentification with Kitty.⁴ So Kitty is quasi-public after all, or so it seems. But in some ways she seems private in that she really just seems to be nothing more than a private consumer fetish object: it’s up to me to buy her or not, love her or not, identify with her or not. But we should also note how Kitty can be interpreted as a paradigmatic sign of the relay of crucial aspects of our political lives today including not only the performance of gender and ethnic identities, but also the transmission of consumer capital on a global scale and the flow of what international relations theorist Robert Nye calls “soft power”.⁵ If Kitty is private, she is at best quasi-private.

My point in all of this is simply how difficult it is to classify Kitty as either public or private if we follow her on her humble traversals across the globe as she saunters innocently with little lunchbox in tow from Tokyo to New York to Japantown to the brightly-lit shelves of your local big box retailer. Hello Kitty poses a challenge to our received categories of public and private because she helps us see that these categories may no longer be up to the task of descriptively interpreting and normatively theorizing our newly-emerging political condition. And let me remind you at this point that Hello Kitty is, after all, nothing special. She is simply like so much of what we find in our world today: she is neither public nor private, but both, and if she is both, she is both in a

⁴ The first two examples are discussed in Yano (forthcoming) and the latter in Yano (2009, 681).
way that is different from how we have taught ourselves to theorize and practice publicity and privacy.

So Hello Kitty as an emblem of the increasing disutility of the categories of public and private is worth our attention just insofar as much contemporary liberal political philosophy proceeds as if the distinction between public and private were still fully intact. I will not offer you an argument for this point, but I think it can be shown that twentieth-century liberal political theory across the spectrum from the Leftism of Rawls to the Rightism of Hayek is premised upon a strong split between the public and the private. In other words, this distinction remains heavily entrenched in the context of contemporary political theory even though it is becoming increasingly unmoored in the context of contemporary political practice. So my thought is just that it would benefit liberal political philosophers to begin thinking about broad-based alternatives to the old premise according to which publicity and privacy are importantly and rightly opposed.

I here present one such broad-based alternative. I shall refer to it as pragmatist public pluralism. My conception of pragmatist public pluralism is rooted in the pragmatist liberal democratic perspectives of William James and John Dewey, though in many ways it goes beyond their work to take up concerns more central for contemporary political philosophy.6

6 Two prefatory remarks may be in order. First: although the larger project from which this presentation is drawn makes ample use of the work of both James and Dewey, I shall focus almost exclusively on James today. This is because it is not yet widely accepted that James makes an important contribution to political and social philosophy. I find this standard assessment misguided and much of my work aims to correct this misperception. In what follows I first explicate pragmatist public pluralism and then explicate a conception of justice suitably oriented to such conditions of public pluralism. In explicating each, I first offer a theoretical account in my own terms, and second turn to James’s work to flesh out my own view.

Second: some of you here know that a good portion of my work is devoted to showing that Richard Rorty is as much a pragmatist as are James and Dewey. In my recently-published book Pragmatism as Transition (2009) I argue this from a metaphilosophical angle. But the metaphilosophical
§2: Pragmatist Public Pluralism: An Overview

The conception of pragmatist public pluralism begins with a characteristically pragmatist thought about politics. Publicity is best brought into focus in terms of the way in which a public historically and temporally develops rather than in terms of what a public essentially is. Publics are transitional sorts of things. They are processes. Publics are not best conceived of as spheres of politics that can be carefully differentiated, or purified, from a sphere of the private. There is no such thing as the public sphere. There are, rather, a plurality of public processes, each of which contingently forms as a response to certain political conditions impacting the people who, whether they are self-conscious of it or not, comprise that public.

There are plural publics in part because publics develop according to the exigencies of a plurality of mechanisms and factors. These include: ethnic and national patterns of affiliation, identification with inherited gender categories, ascriptions of racial categories, acceptance or rejection of prevailing norms of sexuality, material-economic interests, class consciousness, constraints of geography and natural environment, material structures including built environments and technological artifacts, interests due to profession, identity effects of consumer fetish practices, histories of familial descent, plain old self-interest, projects of self-cultivation, and more. These mechanisms and

claim that Rorty really is a pragmatist need not entail the further claim that all pragmatists agree about core questions of political theory and ethics. One way of describing my work is to say that I want to move past the usual debates about whether or not Rorty really is a pragmatist so as to clear up some space and energy for staging a confrontation between Rorty’s neopragmatism and Jamesian-Deweyan classical pragmatism with respect to core questions of liberal democratic political theory. Rorty relies on the standard liberal strategy of a split between the public and the private as much as any other contemporary philosopher. If James and Dewey help us see our way past this divide, then here is a place where we find two kinds of pragmatists disagreeing about what liberal democracy ought to look like. But, importantly, both parties to the disagreement can be, and in fact are, pragmatists.
factors at best bear a family resemblance to one another. There is no easy way to tie them all together under one overarching rubric.

Two claims serve as crucial points for distinguishing my conception of a plurality of publics from a view that takes as its core the opposition between publicity and privacy. First claim: on my new liberal view publics are not understood as all referring to one overarching public sphere which mediates amongst them. There is no meta-public through which the claims of each and every public are mediated. Sovereign institutions like states are just one tool amongst many which might be employed to constitute a public or further its ends. Since there is no overarching context which determines what is and what is not public, it follows that almost every important practice in human life is potentially public. This is my second claim: a corollary of the pluralization of publicity is the politicization and hence pluralization of privacy. Under conditions of political pluralism, privacy should be understood in contextualist terms as a norm of protection from this or that public regulation rather than in monistic terms as a norm of absolute depoliticization securing absolute insulation against a singular public sphere.7

Pragmatist public pluralism can thus be schematically characterized in terms of two theses which I call ‘the pluralization of publicity’ and ‘the politicization of privacy’ theses.8 Two things are thus asserted by pragmatist public pluralism: there is no unified public sphere and there is no singular depoliticized private sphere. Everything is potentially public such that there is an overabundant plurality of publicity. Privacy


8 The first thesis is that there is a plurality of publics constituting our political reality today (call this the pluralization of publicity thesis). The second thesis is that each of these publics is itself internally pluralistic in such a way that the very terms on which any public is established is itself political (call this the politicization of privacy thesis).
correlatively develops within the context of processes of public formation and so is itself pluralistic.

This new liberal political philosophy of pragmatist public pluralism departs rather significantly from traditional liberal political philosophies that emphasize a rigid purification of public and private spheres. Since there is much in the old purifying liberalism that is worth retaining, I want to be clear on exactly how and where the new pragmatist liberalism departs from the tradition. A first point is that my argument is not that the new liberalism requires fully abandoning the old liberal distinction between publicity and privacy. My argument is rather that the old liberal distinction no longer usefully serves as a conceptual fulcrum for theorizing contemporary political practices. The old liberal split between a public sphere of state power and a private sphere free from state intrusion can be seen as a practical response to the sensible idea that the state should not control all political power or, as it is sometimes put, that legitimate state power cannot be unlimited. I do not aim to deny that this claim is true. What I aim to deny is that this true claim is as central for contemporary liberal democracy as is commonly assumed by liberal theorists. My argument is that cultural conditions have changed over the last half century such that this true claim is no longer as important for liberal democracy as it once was. To take an analogy, consider the true claim accepted by all liberals that the church should not wield unlimited political power. While certainly true, this claim is clearly not as central to contemporary liberal democracy as it was to seventeenth-century liberal democracy. I am not putting forward a political claim that we ought deny any and every separation of public and private. I am making a philosophical point that such a separation is not as crucial for contemporary political practice as many
political philosophers continue to suppose. In other words, this separation or purification does not today take us nearly as far as it perhaps once did. Pragmatist public pluralism should thus be understood as suggesting that we pay less attention to this distinction and focus instead on the plurality of publics which we find ourselves in the midst of and the plurality of privacies they engender.

**Pragmatist Public Pluralism in James**

Armed with this working summary of the conception of public pluralism, I would like to describe this conception as it is featured in the work of William James. While the metaphysical, epistemological, and religious aspects of James’s pluralism have been the subject of much study, there has been far less work on understanding and extending the moral and political consequences of Jamesian pluralism.\(^9\) There are, of course, important connections between pluralism as a metaphysico-epistemological position and pluralism as a politico-moral position. But I will leave these connections aside, and focus instead on drawing out the political pluralism implicit in James’s most thorough statement of his

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\(^9\) The best accounts of the metaphysical and religious aspects of Jamesian pluralism include Lamberth (1999) and Levinson (1981). The best account of both the political upshot of Jamesian pluralism, and the relation between political and metaphysical pluralism, is given by Cotkin (1990), though the contributions by Connolly (xxx) and Ferguson (xxx) cannot be ignored. Pratt (2007) offers some interesting suggestions about how a reconceptualization of Jamesian pluralism as experiential can lead us from the epistemologically-ontological to the moral-political.


pluralistic moral philosophy, namely the essay “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life.”

The crux of this essay is captured in James’s eminently quotable line that “[s]ome part of the ideal must be butchered.” James’s claim here is that “tragic” moral conflict is a real feature of our moral pluriverse insofar as real ideals and real values are sometimes crushed out of existence without some higher purpose justifying their demise. Think Isaiah Berlin here but note also that James was writing a full half-century before Berlin’s liberal pluralism came onto the scene.

To unpack James’s claim for the reality of moral conflict we have to first understand the conception of moral ideals with which he was working. James’s view is that ideals are morally significant only to the extent that they are held and put forward by actual people. The view is that ideals issue in moral obligations if and only if actually claimed such that claims and obligations are “coextensive.” It is as actualities and not mere potentialities that ideals sometimes come into serious conflict with one another. In some possible world in some possible library of some possible philosopher, all ideals are reconcilable with one another. But this is only because in the world of potentiality it is all too easy to wiggle free of contradiction. It is, after all, possible that you are right and that I am right. But as soon as our ideals are forced out into the open world of actuality,

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10 James (1891); this is certainly not the only statement of pluralism to be found in James’s writings, and other sources of moral and political pluralism include James (1899a, 1899b, 1899c).
11 James 1891, 622
12 James 1891, 617
we find sometimes that we cannot both live by our conflicting claims. And since our actualized ideals are the only ones with any moral significance according to James, it follows that the moral realities we inhabit are often conflicting and not always harmonious. This is why James asks us to “see everywhere the struggle and the squeeze; and everlastingly the problem how to make them less.”

This essay demonstrates James divesting his moral theory of the traditional view that there is some single overarching space in which all ideals might harmoniously intersect. There is no Natural Law or Leviathan or Moral Reason or Original Position capable of organizing us all. My way of recasting James’s moral pluralism as political pluralism is to say that there exists a plurality of publics constituted in a plurality of ways by a plurality of persons in response to a plurality of intersecting claims, ideals, and values. So publics, on a political translation of the Jamesian view, get formed out of diverse intersections of persons, claims, interests, and values. These intersections can take the form of communities, states, cultures, identities, associations, corporations, non-governmental organizations, and other forms of associated and individuated practices, as well as intersections among and between the various forms of publicity just listed. It is clear that each of us here today inhabits a plurality of such publics and that each of these publics are themselves constituted by a plurality of intersecting public practices such that it is publicity all the way down. The idea of a singular overarching public sphere is

13 James 1891, 624
14 For example, the city of Berkeley is constituted as a fairly determinate public just as the Fair Trade movement is a fairly indeterminate public. More interesting, of course, are those publics of publics. Consider, for example, that publicity constituted by the intersection of leftist political activists participating in the World Social Forums, the World Trade Organization, transnational corporations in the beverage industry such as Starbucks and Green Mountain Coffee Roasters, non-profit organizations like the fair-trade certifier TransFair USA, and a municipality such as Berkeley or Eugene.
15 The view seems to entail the ontologically-suspicious claim that it is publics all the way up and publics all the way down. This is not problematic because the view is not ontological so much as it is analytical.
thus challenged on two fronts: both by the strong internal differentiation of every public and by the severe external differentiation among all such publics.16

Jamesian pluralism was later taken up and reworked by the next great pragmatist philosopher, namely John Dewey, who in his *The Public and Its Problems* (1927) described the new condition of publicity in terms of its being “scattered, mobile and manifold.”17 Dewey’s point was just that we have no easy way of gathering all of what is public together into one unified sphere of publicity. The pragmatist view, as inspired by

This means that ‘publicity’ is an analytical category. As an analytical category, we can assert that there are publics all the way up and all the way down, without ever needing to rest at some ultimate macro-level at the top or micro-level at the bottom. The point of the analytic category of public as I am describing it is that we can always keep analyzing into broader or finer categories. For related thoughts see work by the Deleuzian social theorist Manuel DeLanda (2006).

Dewey’s point was just that we have no easy way of gathering all of what is public together into one unified sphere of publicity. The pragmatist view, as inspired by Dewey 1927, 146. Consider how John Dewey would later extend James’s moral and political pluralism.

I have said that the best source of Dewey’s political pluralism is his book *The Public and Its Problems*. But I find this book mistitled. It should have been called *Publics and Their Problems* because Dewey’s vision is not that of a unified monistic public sphere so much as of a plurality of publics interacting in a plurality of ways. These publics will in some cases cohere, in some cases conflict, in other cases mutually enhance one another, and in still other cases drag each other down. There is, it was one of Dewey’s central points, no single overarching public sphere which can render all of these various other publics compatible or even commensurable in some basic way. The argument which Dewey develops in building his way to this conclusion is, I think, extraordinarily difficult to follow. This is an unfortunately common feature of much of Dewey’s writing. I shall not here present my interpretation of that argument because it is in the main an exercise in scholarly nitpicking. Instead let me cut to my interpretation of Dewey’s conclusion. Two key points are established by Dewey’s book. The first is diagnostic. The problem, for Dewey as for many others in his day including Walter Lippmann and Randolph Bourne, and not long before them all William James, is that of ‘the lost public’. The problem, Dewey tells us, is that we find ourselves amidst new public forms for which the old organizational powers of the state are inadequate. Dewey sums up the difficulty thus: “The prime difficulty is that of discovering the means by which a scattered, mobile and manifold public may so recognize itself as to define and express its interests.” Dewey’s second key point is anticipatory or reconstructive. The aspect of this point that I call your attention to concerns Dewey’s explicit refusal to seek a monistic answer to the problem of the lost public. Dewey’s analysis indicates that the traditional liberal solution of a separation of public and private spheres as achieved by the organ of the state will no longer work. Dewey, in other words, is moving in the direction of post-statism, and so in the direction of a democracy that is beyond the public/private split. Dewey’s conclusion in the book is that the problem of the lost public must be democratic. In specifying what democracy is, Dewey emphatically proclaims that, “The idea of democracy is a wider and fuller idea than can be exemplified in the state even at its best.” Democracy, in other words, is itself pluralistic. This is in keeping with the pluralistic conditions of publicity and privacy that is the basis of Dewey’s diagnosis of his contemporary political reality.

That Dewey’s pluralistic political philosophy is post-public/private can be seen in other texts, for instance in his *Liberalism and Social Action*, where he writes critically: “There are still those who call themselves liberals who define liberalism in terms of the old opposition between the province of organized social action and the province of purely individual initiative and effort” (1935, 26).
James and later worked out in detail by Dewey, involves a recognition of *severe pluralism* as a condition of politics today. We can contrast this to other prominent statements of pluralism, such as the mild *reasonable pluralism* of John Rawls and Joshua Cohen as well as the extreme *agonistic pluralism* of Chantal Mouffe and Bonnie Honig—equally notable are similarities between the pragmatist-historicist version *severe pluralism* and the *liberal deep pluralism* endorsed by analytic-historicist political philosophers like Isaiah Berlin, Stuart Hampshire, John Gray, William Galston, and most notably Bernard Williams.\(^\text{18}\)

Some of these other pluralists, namely those who concentrate on Rawlsian reasonable pluralism, have suggested that we can find a way of gathering and unifying publicity such that the appropriate task for the political philosopher is to construct a monistic theory of justice whose aim would be to normatively instruct each and every instance of publicity. The pragmatist position is that publicity is irrevocably sundered from itself such that the political philosopher today faces the new task of theorizing justice for conditions of severe pluralism. Pragmatist public pluralism asks us, then, to adjust ourselves as political philosophers and political agents to the fact of severe pluralism as a crucial aspect of what Rawls called the ‘circumstances of justice’ or what I would call ‘the orienting conditions of justice’.

**Pragmatist Inclusive Tolerance: An Overview**

Considerations of justice should weigh heavily for we pluralist political theorists. For one familiar refrain about a severe pluralism of the sort I am attributing to our contemporary political realities is that it entails an inevitable slide into relativism. A

\(^{18}\) Cf. xxx cites
result of relativism, such as that endorsed by some of the extreme agonist pluralists I just mentioned, should be seen as a deal-breaker for any political or moral philosopher. So, one important challenge facing any pluralistic conception of the political is that of putting forward a conception of justice suitably oriented to these conditions of severe pluralism. One way to meet this challenge would be to develop a normative account of justice which can be thought about in terms of specifying conditions for justice between publics. I offer the beginnings of such an account here in terms of the temporal-historical interplay generated by the tension between two key principles of liberal democratic justice: I refer to these as the Harm Principle and the Inclusion Principle.

The Harm Principle, canonically stated by John Stuart Mill in his famous treatise about liberalism, holds that the only justification we have for interfering with a person’s actions is to prevent their harming someone else.\(^{19}\) The Inclusion Principle, as developed by a variety of twentieth-century democratic theorists including for instance Iris Marion Young, states that agents have an obligation to include all those affected by their actions in deliberations concerning whether or not and how to undertake those actions.\(^{20}\) My view is that these two principles need be deployed together so as to realize justice in dynamical conditions of pluralism.

Here is how this works. The Harm Principle stabilizes our political formations in a way that is consonant with a Millian liberal conception of separate public and private

\(^{19}\) Mill writes in *On Liberty*, “the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection…. the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others” (1859, Chapter One).

\(^{20}\) Young writes, “The normative legitimacy of a democratic decision depends on the degree to which those affected by it have been included in the decision-making processes and have had the opportunity to influence the outcomes” (Young 2000, 5-6).
spheres. The Inclusion Principle is at the same time constantly working to open up our harm-based normative formations to destabilization in the face of a dynamic political reality. This generative relation between norms of tolerance and inclusiveness enables our harm-centered conceptions of what is public and what is private to be responsive to changing circumstances. More importantly, it also helps us avoid lapsing into a condition in which harm-based norms work in a monistic fashion so as to institute a singular private sphere insulated from a singular public sphere—this monistic insulation can be bad insofar as it leads to the sheltering of oppressions in the private sphere as protected from public scrutiny. The Inclusion Principle enables us to apply the Harm Principle pluralistically and contextually so that what stabilizes is a plurality of publics which contextually generate a plurality of corollary privacies and so that these pluralities are always checking, ramifying, and destabilizing one another.

The Inclusion Principle, in other words, functions to insure that the Harm Principle maintains its normative grip on political conditions which vary independently from existing interpretations of the idea of harm. If the Harm Principle were timeless and ahistorical, as many liberals have taken it to be, then we would not require an Inclusion Principle that would allow us to reinterpret the concept of harm in political conditions that are historically new or contextually different. But political conditions

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21 Allow me to offer a metaphorical image for how these two principles can work together. Picture the Inclusion Principle as a clutch which occasionally engages the engine of the Harm Principle so as to contextually reapply the way in which the Harm Principle hooks up with the dynamically rotating wheels of publicities and privacies. This enables the Harm Principle to perform normative work under conditions that are both dynamic and pluralistic. Without the clutch mechanism of the Inclusion Principle, the engine of the Harm Principle would freeze up whenever the substantive harms it attempts to track are irrelevant to the actual political practices in which the Harm Principle plays its normative role of separating out publicity and privacy.

22 Another way to think about the relation between the Harm Principle and the Inclusion Principle is that the latter functions as a means of guiding the application of the former. This is important because, as Wittgenstein reminds us, rules cannot contain the criteria for their own application. In the case of the Harm
do vary and radically so. In combination with one another, the ideas of inclusiveness and of harm function in such a way as to enable the possibility of justice in such conditions of variance.

**Pragmatist Inclusive Tolerance in James**

The political ramifications of the characteristic pragmatist attitude of experimental uncertainty have typically been brought into view through the lens of the liberal democratic conception of tolerance, as formalized for instance in Mill’s Harm Principle just discussed. The classical pragmatists were eager to endorse liberal tolerance.\(^{23}\) James himself often emphasized the value of tolerance as a consequence of pluralism.\(^{24}\)

But while James was a good man of his time in his eagerness for liberal tolerance, he also at times recognized a tension between his version of severe pluralism and the standard liberal interpretation of tolerance. I would like to tease out this tension by considering two James essays in which he dwells on these matters at some length. The two essays I want to consider are the companion pieces titled “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings” and “What Makes a Life Significant?”.

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23 As Louis Menand (xxx) argues, this is perhaps due in part to the vicious intolerance fomenting the Civil War that was a historical condition impacting the development of American pragmatism. XXXMenand

24 In his *Talks to Teachers*, for example, he offered the philosophical perspective of pluralism so as to urge that “[t]he practical consequence of such a philosophy is the well-known democratic… tolerance of whatever is not itself intolerant” (1899a, 19). And in “The Will to Believe” (18xxx), James should be read as endorsing an idea of tolerance which takes shape as a right due to each of us to believe what we find inside of ourselves even if there remains insufficient evidence for this belief according to public standards we all normally assent to.

An organizing idea for this essay-pair is the blindness we often suffer toward what James calls “the inward significance” of the lives of others.\footnote{James 1899b, 631} Such blindness, James tells us at the outset, leads to “stupidity” and “injustice” and “falsity.”\footnote{James 1899b, 630} This is no small charge, being issued as it was by the typically-generous William James. What worries James most is how hard it is for us to see what makes another life not our own significant in its own unique way.\footnote{James makes his point, as was his wont, by way of a series of literary and personal examples. One involves a comparison of himself with some farmers in Appalachia. The Yankee James narrates his personal tour through the North Carolina countryside in which he came upon one of those long valley clearings populated by ramshackle cabins, small fields of corn, and a multitude of charred-out old tree stumps left standing long after their timber was felled. James was disgusted at the loose destruction of nature and the poor conditions of life carved out in that mountain cove. But soon he came to realize that he was failing to see the life in the mountain coves as the settlers themselves were seeing it. These remains of burnt timber and these tiny cabins spoke simply of the significance of a way of life up there in the mountains that one could indeed live well. James concludes: “I had been as blind to the peculiar ideality of their conditions as they certainly would also have been to the ideality of mine, had they had a peep at my strange indoor academic ways of life at Cambridge” (1899b, 631).}

And what are we to make of our blindness to the inward significance of other lives? What does James himself make of his own blindesses? He draws out two lessons from his experiences of blindness. Each lesson relies on a different way of understanding our blindness toward others. Do we take our blindesses toward others as an unavoidable condition or do we take them as temporary vices which we can go beyond? James’s essay-pair offers evidence for both interpretations. And rather than tying these lessons together, his essays seem to uncomfortably hop back and forth between them.

Locating blindness in the first sense as a condition, James observes that, “We have unquestionably a great cloud-bank of ancestral blindness weighing down upon us.” This leads him to ask, “Cannot we escape some of those hideous ancestral intolerances and cruelties?”\footnote{James 1899c, 646} If blindness is an inheritance conditioning who we are, then an...
acknowledgment of this blindness should incline us toward tolerance. We know that there is an inward significance to this life of seeming deprivation, and we know that we are blind to that significance, and so it is a life we ought to tolerate, assuming that this life itself is not intolerant or harmful to others. What some fandom of collectors finds in their fetish objects, say for instance their little Hello Kitty figurines, I shall never know, but knowing that I do not know this suggests that it is unwise for me to interfere with these other lives, striving as they are for that in which they find their highest glory.²⁹

Consider now a second interpretation of the blindness featured in James’s essays. There is something unsatisfying about accepting blindness as our condition. When philosophers employ the metaphor of blindness they usually do so to suggest that we should learn how to stop being blind even if we cannot yet see our way to gaining sight. James employs the metaphor in this way throughout both essays, for instance when he concludes a personal anecdote about one of his own former blindnesses with the observation that “the scales seemed to fall from my eyes.”³⁰ This suggests a second reading according to which James is advocating for a practice of overcoming our inherited and acquired blindnesses. If I am blind to the value of your collection of fetish objects, I can back away to leave you in peace, or I can seek you out and invite you to help me catch hold of the inner significance of that little universe perched there upon your mantle. A practice of tolerance follows from acknowledging our inability to see.

²⁹ Note that James concludes both of the essays on decidedly Millian notes. At the end of the first he urges that we, “tolerate, respect, and indulge those whom we see harmlessly interested and happy in their own ways, however unintelligible these may be to us” (1899b, 645). At the end of the second he thinks of, “what tolerance and good humor, what willingness to live and let live, would come into the world” if we could affirm our blindnesses to one another (James 1899c, 660).

³⁰ James 1899c, 649
But if we are able to positively overcome this inability, then we have achieved something further, which I am calling inclusiveness or inclusion.

Inclusiveness involves a set of interrelated virtues not emphasized enough in modern liberal moral philosophy: these virtues include vulnerability, receptivity, and what a colleague and friend of mine calls open-heartedness. One form they might take involves active work to expose ourselves to transformations that another may enable in us. One way to think about this activity of exposure is in terms of the work that passivity often requires of us.

A good handle to pick this idea up by is the pragmatist reconstruction of empiricist epistemology. This handle is particularly pertinent for James’s essays insofar as he is advocating a return to “pure sensorial perception” as a way of “seeing” inside another’s life.\(^{31}\) This appeal to pure experience might worry some contemporary philosophers, myself included. This is because it can be read through a classical empiricist model according to which perceptual experience is passive on the side of the subject in a way that invites what Wilfrid Sellars called the Myth of the Given and what Richard Rorty diagnosed as representationalist foundationalism.\(^{32}\) On one reading of classical pragmatism, James and Dewey backslide into a form of classical empiricism that cannot close the door to givenism, representationalism, and foundationalism despite their own better intentions—but there is another reading of classical pragmatist empiricism.\(^{33}\) According to this other interpretation, pragmatism models experience as

\(^{31}\) James 1899b, 643  
\(^{32}\) Sellars xxx, Rorty xxx  
\(^{33}\) I cannot adjudicate this debate here. Indeed my view is that this debate cannot be adjudicated with respect to James and Dewey, for they are ambivalent about this problem. This ambivalence is due to their inability to get a clear view, in their time and place, on the problem itself. See chapter three of my Pragmatism as Transition (2009) for an argument to this effect.
an active process on the part of the subject, such that perceiving is less a matter of the world just pouring into us through the avenues of the senses and more a matter of our actively working to let the world in through our senses. This is the view that tells us that it takes a lot just to perceive.\textsuperscript{34}

This shift of emphasis in how to understand empiricist epistemology has implications for an empiricist moral and political theory. James claims that when we achieve an overcoming of blindness, “the whole scheme of our customary values gets confounded… our self is riven and its narrow interests fly to pieces… a new centre and a new perspective must be found.”\textsuperscript{35} The work of inclusiveness involves opening ourselves up to such transformations: old scales might fall from new eyes: historied selves might give way to new living.

These thoughts resonate with a key text for grasping James’s contribution to the idea of inclusiveness as a virtue, namely “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life” which I referenced earlier as the index text for James’s moral pluralism. The severe moral pluralism articulated in that essay leads James to a defense of what he there calls “the more inclusive side,” which is that moral path along which we push ourselves to “[i]nvent some manner of realizing [our] own ideals which will also satisfy the alien demands.”\textsuperscript{36} The inclusive path is not that of merely putting up with ideals which one is blind to the value of, but is that of working to form new ideals as yet nonexistent which can satisfy otherwise contradictory claims. Inclusiveness does not require that everyone

\textsuperscript{34} Consider, for instance, Wittgenstein who told us not to think but to look. What Wittgenstein did not tell us is that it is enormously hard to just see anything insofar as seeing requires a great deal more than just opening our eyes. This has to do with one reason why I find anthropological inquiry of enormous value for contemporary political and moral philosophy.

\textsuperscript{35} James 1899b, 634

\textsuperscript{36} James 1891, 623
must be brought into a single public sphere so as to agree on a single set of guiding norms, but rather that we ought to improve our publics by developing innovative practices that enable those who are already engaged in these publics to transform themselves toward coexistence. I take this to be James’s key contribution to moral philosophy. Allow me, then, to repeat it. The potential tragedy of moral pluralism is best avoided by way of an energetic moral inclusiveness that works to innovate more capacious moral ideals than what we had previously dreamt of in our philosophies and practices.\footnote{Dewey would later follow James in defending precisely this conception of inclusiveness when he located the moral value of freedom not in the mere choice amongst conflicting preferences, but in the innovative construction of new and more integrative preferences: “Choice, in the distinctively human sense, then presents itself as... the formation of a new preference out of a conflict of old preferences” (Dewey 1928, LW3.96). xxxDewey, John. 1928. “Philosophies of Freedom” in LW3.}

Let me now wrap up my discussion of inclusive tolerance before turning in conclusion to the place of pragmatist public pluralism in the landscape of contemporary political philosophy. I have been arguing that James’s vision of an inclusive moral culture is best regarded as a vision of how to respond to the fact of severe moral pluralism. I have also been arguing that we can translate James’s insights in moral philosophy into conceptions valuable for contemporary political philosophy. I have characterized the pragmatist conception of pluralism in terms of the two-sided idea that there is no unified public sphere capable of mediating all our conflicts such that there is no singular private sphere in which our ideals can be protectively insulated from conflicts with opposed ideals. The result of such pluralism is inevitable conflict. Is this severe pluralism a tragic condition? Yes and no. While the vicious slaughter of the ideal can never be eliminated, it can ever yet be mitigated. Tolerance by itself merely seeks to negatively avoid the slaughter of the ideal. Inclusiveness seeks to positively promote...
ideals which do not regard themselves as needing to slaughter one another. Tolerance as enriched by inclusion thus enables us to envision justice in the context of public pluralism as an ongoing process of liberal democratic melioration.\textsuperscript{38}

**Concluding by Carrying Forward: Pluralism, Egalitarianism, Cosmopolitanism**

My view is that the worth of pragmatist public pluralism should be located in terms of its value for key debates in contemporary political and moral philosophy. To take an example, pragmatist public pluralism might be judged by the value of its contribution to debates over the proper relation between what we today call the politics of redistribution and the politics of recognition. In the larger project from which this talk is drawn, I show how pragmatist public pluralism provides a model for contemporary political philosophy that enables us to reconstruct conceptions of egalitarian redistribution and cosmopolitan recognition in ways that strengthen each. In that larger project, one key aim is to show how pragmatist public pluralism offers a conception of liberal democracy that usefully accommodates some of the most important work going on in contemporary liberal democratic theory. This includes work by, to name some of the key figures I engage with in that larger project, a host of philosophers including Amartya Sen, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Bernard Williams, Iris Marion Young, Cornel West,

\textsuperscript{38} These ideas can again be seen in James. For James clearly recognized the value of practices of tolerance, but also clearly recognized the limits of this quintessential liberal strategy or technique when taken on its own. The problem is that tolerance is, to put it simply, too easily a misguided pilot through the stormy waters of pluralism where we rely on tolerance alone to get us through to safer shores. This point has been made in recent political and moral theory by a variety of thinkers working in radically different philosophical traditions. See most impressively Brown (2006) and Williams (1996) on the trouble with the morality of tolerance; the most important work perpetuating the ongoing association of pragmatism with a politics of tolerance is that of Rorty (1989) but see also Fiala (2002). We stand in need of a further normative commitment which reaches up through tolerance so as to enable achievements that are requisite for living in our age of severe pluralism. If inclusion is to play the role of this further normative commitment, then we should see inclusion not as opposing tolerance but rather as deepening and enriching practices of tolerance.
James Bohman, Manuel DeLanda, and most importantly Nancy Fraser. Pragmatist public pluralism helps us understand why the egalitarian politics of redistribution and the cosmopolitan politics of recognition can be successfully expanded only if developed in conversation with one another. Fraser’s way of putting this point has been in terms of a need for understanding the requisite synergies among the politics of redistribution and the politics of recognition. My pragmatist view is that the synergy between redistribution and recognition is best affirmed by reconstructing the terms in which both of these contexts for justice are understood. The new terms according to which we ought to approach these two families of political issues are those of public pluralism. Pluralism, in short, can help us see not only why redistribution and recognition go hand in hand but also how redistribution and recognition must each be implemented in pluralistic fashion if they are to be implemented at all in contemporary political conditions. This pluralistic interpretation of redistribution and recognition functions, I argue, to tease out some of the best insights in Fraser’s valuable work that remain implicit in her presentation of her own views.

I have mentioned Fraser only in passing here. But I wanted to do so in order to underscore how my pragmatist public pluralism makes use of classical figures like James and Dewey at the same time that it enables us to build upon conceptual resources offered by some of our best contemporary political philosophers working in a variety of traditions including but not limited to: critical theory, feminist theory, analytic political

39 Xxx Cites
40 Cf. Fraser xxx
philosophy, as well as interdisciplinary inquiries at the border of philosophy, anthropology, history, cultural studies, and literary theory.

I draw on both classical pragmatist philosophers in the narrow scholarly sense and contemporary pragmatist theorists in a broader sense for two related reasons. The first is that I find no reason for thinking that James and Dewey back in their day solved the most critical challenges we political philosophers face in the present of our own day. Things are just too different around here right now for us to expect that they even could have anticipated an answer to the critical conditions of our present. A second reason I draw on both contemporary and classical pragmatists is that I believe that classical pragmatism can indeed make valuable contributions to contemporary projects of philosophically reflecting on the political, ethical, social, and cultural consequences of the severe pluralism that is increasingly our condition today. I close, then, with this small claim on behalf of the promise of the work of a generously-conceived pragmatism that looks forward with hope into our fragile futures.

List of References (Partial)


