Pragmatic Metaphysics – William James and Alfred North Whitehead
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Even though the impact of William James' works on a large number of thinkers can hardly be exaggerated, Alfred North Whitehead is not usually considered to be one of them. His admiration for and criticism of James, however, pervade almost his entire oeuvre, stretching from philosophy of religion to epistemology. Since reception history has generally focussed on the novelty of Whitehead's speculative process metaphysics, it tends to overlook his great indebtedness to pragmatism.

Two aspects of the connection between James and Whitehead are of particular importance: Both devise a concept of truth that can be characterised as speculative as opposed to dogmatic or positivistic, and both develop a metaphysical position that aims at overcoming the gap between facts and values, which Whitehead refers to as the "bifurcation of nature"[1]. In my talk I want to re-examine James' pragmatic notion of truth in order to free him from the charges of subjectivism and relativism. Particular attention will be paid to the elements of "applicability" and "coherence", which do not only serve as the central systematic criteria in James' theory, but also function as the cornerstone for his understanding of intersubjectivity, where "[w]e trade on each other's truth"[2]. In contrast to Peirce, James rejects *all* a priori limitations of the 'truths' considered, but subjects them to a number of tests, which, if passed, make up their "satisfaction". Methodologically, his radical empiricism and his pluralism take the truth conception to its extreme, insofar as they give a metaphysical underpinning to the idea of provisional, pluralistic 'truths'.

Following James, Whitehead bases his speculative cosmology on the four criteria of coherence, logic, applicability and adequacy, thus imposing a stricter framework on philosophical theories than James. At the same time, Whitehead draws heavily on the idea of radical empiricism, integrating scientific as well as moral, aesthetic, or commonsense concepts into his cosmological scheme. Truth, as conceived of by Whitehead, is a melioristic concept that can, however, be approached in a unified cosmological scheme open to revision.

A detailed analysis of the two positions will shed light on the respective philosophical outlooks and help to establish Whitehead among the pragmatist tradition. Moreover, a systematic comparison will offer an alternative for elaborating a pragmatist theory which

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[1] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality. An Essay in Cosmology* (corrected edition), New York: The Free Press, 1979, p. 289.
[2] William James, *Pragmatism. The Works of William James, Vol. I*. Edited by Frederick H. Burckhard, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975, p. 100.

comprises the advantages of James' psychological and radically empiricist focus without being open to the common charge of framing a "wishy-washy form of pragmatism"[3] that ignores the success of the natural sciences.

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[3] Nicholas Rescher, *Realistic Pragmatism*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2000, p.68.