PRAGMATIC PLURALISM
AND AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

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Abstract
This paper approaches “multiculturalism” obliquely via conceptions of social and political pluralism in the pragmatist tradition. As a matter of social analysis, the advent of multiculturalism implies some loss of confidence in our prior conceptions of accommodating ethnic, social, and religious diversity: the conversion of traditional American cultural diversity into a war of political interest groups. This, and the corresponding tendency toward cultural relativism and “anything goes,” is fundamentally a product of over-centralization and cultural-political exhaustion in the wake of the long ordeal of the Cold War. An over-emphasis on the political and national centralization, have pressured our cultural variety toward more political forms, and “multiculturalism” is both product and backlash.

Many issues connected with the general theme of multiculturalism parallel philosophical debates on objectivity and the diversity of cultural perspectives. Successful treatments of these themes, drawing on the pragmatist tradition, need to be developed and applied to contemporary problems. The general approach here emphasizes a relative or limited autonomy of religious, ethnic, and cultural-racial groups, the need to be wary of both exclusion and self-insulation, and the roles of individuals in mediating group differences. In the concluding section, specific issues relating religious pluralism and secularism will be addressed.

1. Background of Cultural Pluralism
Cultural pluralism as an explicit social philosophy arose in the U.S. around the time of WWI, as part of the influence of William James. James was a steadfast opponent of every variety of philosophical rationalism and monism, particularly the varieties conducted in the grand idealist style. He set out his own alternative in his late work, A Pluralistic Universe (1909). This influence of James represented a break with some tendencies of Peirce’s thought, though it also has roots in Peircean pragmatism. It was subsequently carried forward by James’ student Horace Kallen, by Randolph Bourne, and Alain Locke, and expressed in writings of John Dewey.

Dewey remarked, as early as 1902, on James’ role in giving currency to pluralism. “The term pluralism,” Dewey wrote, “is very recent in English”; and James, “has probably done more than anyone else to give it currency,” though he remarks that Howison also employed the word “to denote the substantially distinct existence of free ethical personalities.”

There is a limited kinship here between the pluralism of William James and the person-alism of George Holmes Howison (1834-1916). Howison, however, stressed the autonomy of the free moral person, in somewhat the style of Schelling, to the point of making each person

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1. Dewey 1902, p. 204.
uncreated and eternal. Howison was more the idealist and rationalist in contrast with James certainly, holding that the world is a “spiritual reality” developing teleologically with God as the goal of the process. It seems that this concept reflects something of the earlier ideas of Leibniz, where only God sees to the coordination of the otherwise atomized individuals, and interaction is a kind of well-founded illusion. (Recall the Leibniz’s monads “have no windows.”) But in James, there is no overall plan to the world, and relation and interaction are intrinsic to reality.

An influence of some versions of philosophical personalism on James’ pluralism is pretty certain, since James was deeply influenced by the French personalist philosopher Charles Renouvier (1815-1903), sharing with him an emphasis on personal freedom and the concept of a finite God. Like James, Renouvier was a vigorous opponent of Hegelian or Absolute idealism. The kinship of James to Renouvier is greater than that between James and Howison, since James and Renouvier escape the controlling idealist holism according to which only the totality (or its original elements) can act with any independence.

James wrote in his Essays in Radical Empiricism (1912), that his own philosophy “harmonizes best with a radical pluralism, with novelty and indeterminism, moralism and theism, and with the ‘humanism’ lately sprung upon us by the Oxford and the Chicago schools.” The last pair of references is to the work of the Oxford pragmatists F. C. S. Schiller and to John Dewey.

James argued, in a famous passage early on, that “The difference between monism and pluralism is perhaps the most pregnant of all the differences in philosophy:"

Prima facie the world is a pluralism; as we find it, its unity seems to be that of any collection; and our higher thinking consists chiefly of an effort to redeem it from that first crude form. Postulating more unity than the first crude experiences yield, we also discover more. But absolute unity, in spite of brilliant dashes in its direction, still remains undiscovered, still remains a Grenzbegriff. “Ever not quite” must be the rationalistic philosopher’s last confession concerning it. After all that reason can do has been done, there still remains the opacity of the finite facts as merely given, with most of their peculiarities mutually unmediated and unexplained. This Jamesian pluralism is a view about the general features of the world, both as we first encounter it and as it remains after the best efforts of reasoning have been applied. In spite of all our “brilliant dashes” in the direction of “absolute unity,” the rationalistic philosopher is bound to admit that absolute unity is “ever not quite” within our reach, it remains a “limit concept.” If James is right about this, then, the criticism applies not only to idealistic totalizing but equally to materialist or physicalist schemes of philosophical monism and reduction. The latter point emphasizes the relative autonomy of a plurality of distinct sciences and disciplines, along with the differences in their typical objects or subject-matter, in opposition to the reduction of all to purely physical terms, whether as motions of atoms in the void, or in later versions.

James’ pluralism was not merely an abstract philosophical doctrine. Social and political applications or lessons are frequently in the offing. Monism and absolutism are not merely philosophical errors, according to James; they are also and perhaps primarily social and political errors. For instance, there is a balance to be sought between the unity of the country and the diversity of its constituent social and political elements or units. This balance is reasonably sought in the intellectual and moral roots of American federalism and pluralism, as these have been contrasted with American nationalism. After the Cold War, we need to see again that liberal nationalism is always an unstable doctrine. America must be liberal and inclusive or it risks self-destruction.

James would surely agree with Theodore Roosevelt’s warning that “the one absolutely certain way of bringing this nation to ruin, of preventing all possibility of its continuing to be a nation at all, would be to permit it to become a tangle of squabbling nationalities.”

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2. James 1912, p. 90.
how close this negative image comes to thinking of America’s racial and ethnic diversity as formed into blindly contenting interest groups. But in some tension to this point, there is room to doubt that James would have greeted Israel Zangwill’s concept of America as a “great melting-pot” with Roosevelt’s enthusiasm for Zangwill’s play. The pluralistic thought is that we might all manage to be something of the “Yankee-doodle dandy,” while never quite melting together completely.

Sidney Ratner supplies the following short picture of the perspective of Zangwill’s play:

But in 1908 Israel Zangwill, an English novelist and playwright who knew the United States well, wrote a play, The Melting Pot, which made the term and the idea part of American language and thought. In this play, the hero announces that America is God’s Crucible, the Great Melting Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and reforming!...the real American has not yet arrived, he is only in the Crucible, I tell you— it will be the fusion of all races, the coming superman.

What is objectionable here is not the idea that there is some melting of differences going on, or the idea that America is still in development. What is objectionable is a final fusion of all as an ideal. There is always more to our diversity and differences than can ever be aufgehoben into any higher unity we can, or will ever, foresee. “Ever not quite,” as James put it.

Dewey, in any case, was explicit on the point, famously holding that “the theory of the melting-pot” gave him “rather a pang.” This is partly because the idea of America as a great melting-pot, fails to distinguish between democratic interaction and mutual influence of diverse sources, on the one hand, and forced assimilation to a dominant paradigm, whether old or new, on the other. While emphasizing the value of democratic interaction among diverse cultural groups, Dewey wrote in the Menorah Journal that “the concept of uniformity and unanimity in culture is rather repellent”:

one cannot contemplate in imagination that every people in the world should talk Volapuek or Esperanto, that the same thoughts should be cultivated, the same beliefs, the same historical traditions, and the same ideals and aspirations for the future. Variety is the spice of life, and the richness and the attractiveness of social institutions depend upon cultural diversity among separate units. In so far as people are all alike, there is no give and take among them. And it is better to give and take.

The value of American diversity includes the diversity among American regions: “The United States is very much more interesting and more promising a place just because there is so much local diversity,” says Dewey, and the point of insisting on their own differences and potential contributions was surely not lost on Dewey’s intended audience. Given the value of diversity, it surely follows that no matter how much our present or past differences may need to be reduced, on occasion, there should always remain room for them to continue to grow or increase in other ways.

Similarly, to take a contemporary example, the rejection of cultural uniformity as an ideal is doubtlessly a crucial ingredient in the efforts at European unification. The Europeans simply do not want to be blended into some imagined uniform European culture, a new Western super-ethnicity perhaps. The idea is resisted on just about every side. But this does not mean that Europe sees no value in reducing those differences which have traditionally brought it into great tragic conflicts.

William James’ comments to a similar point are sometimes less clearly stated, in amongst his arguments against metaphysical or philosophical unifiers of various sorts. But it is surely part of his point in making such arguments that we may be held in the sway of a rationalistic, unifying image of the world to such an extent that we naturally carry it over into social and political thinking, even without being fully aware of doing so.

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2. Pluralism and Open Community

James argues that “Pragmatically interpreted, pluralism” or the doctrine that the universe is many “means only that the sundry parts of reality may be externally related.”

Everything you can think of, however vast or inclusive has on the pluralistic view a genuine “external” environment of some sort or amount. Things are ‘with’ one another in many ways, but nothing includes everything, or dominates over everything.

Looking at our social and cultural world pluralistically, each particular person or group must be seen to have its own partial autonomy and “external environment.” Though no man or cultural group in America or elsewhere is completely an island, still, the degree or importance of relations to others is not everywhere or always the same. James continues:

The word ‘and’ trails along after every sentence. Something always escapes. ‘Ever not quite’ has to be said of the best attempts made anywhere in the universe at attaining all-inclusiveness. The pluralistic world is thus more like a federal republic than like an empire or a kingdom. However much may be collected, however much may report itself as present at any effective center of consciousness or action, something else is self-governed and absent and unreduced to unity.

So, James gives us very general grounds for thinking that we ought to recognize a degree of autonomy, and a right to self-definition, of any given social group as distinct from all the rest. As regards our ethnic, cultural, and racial diversity and differences, it is surely to the point to say that America, by tradition, has no national ethnic identity.

Most places are otherwise. There are nations for the Germans, for the Italians, for the Thais, for the Chinese, and much the same might be said about many others. But America has always lacked an official ethnic definition suited to the relatively homogeneous standards of ethnically defined nationality.

We don’t mind our hyphenated status as African-Americans, Polish-Americans, Mexican-Americans, or Chinese-Americans, say, so long as the “hyphens bind and do not separate” us to the point of Roosevelt’s “tangle of squabbling nationalities.” Other nations resist this kind of thing. We have not heard much, perhaps until very recently, about “Turkish-Germans,” or “African-Frenchmen.”

The basic definition of citizenship in Germany is ethnic, where in France, in contrast, it is defined by reference to a relatively thick common culture. American national culture is relatively thin in comparison, something more like a loyalty to on-going debates on our guiding political ideals. We traditionally have no recognized national religion, or costume, no single set of customs, no official language, color, or ideal of beauty. This is surely part of the reason that we have largely avoided the periodic life and death communal strife and national and tribal battles of others, enacted on their home grounds. It is also part of the reason why, except under duress, we never quite manage the same levels of national unity or centralization.

America’s decentralized constitutional system creates greater unity and “great Presidents” only under conditions of stress; and otherwise, political power tends to flow away from the center. This is part of what makes our non-ethnic national identity possible. After 50 years of Cold War, we must learn again the need of this. Otherwise, the current degree of centralization will surely tend to support all manner of purely particularistic protest, political ideologies, and the yearning for excessive unity.

Viewed in a somewhat different perspective, America’s ethnic and racial diversity is in significant degree a matter that can be defined by reference to religion. Often enough, that is, any given ethnic group can be seen to have a traditional religious definition or definitions. So, the Irish-Americans are not simply Irish, but largely Irish Catholic, just as the Polish-Americans are easily thought of as Polish Catholics. Again the Scots-Irish, as we call them, are usually Presbyterian or sometimes they belong to similar Calvinist derived denominations.

such as the Southern Baptists. The Germans are largely Catholic or Lutheran by tradition, the Scandinavians mostly Lutheran, and further examples are easy to produce.

Along with the role of religion in defining the American communities of Italian, Polish, Irish, or New England British descent, it is difficult to think of an American ethnic or racial group more fundamentally active in religion than our African-Americans. Recall that the civil rights movement largely arose from King’s Southern Christian Leadership Council. All in all, the Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups (1980) distinguishes over 100 ethnic groups in the U.S. population.10 Highlighting the role of religious freedom and the separation of church and state in the development of American society, we might even say that our ethnic diversity has traditionally been socially organized by religious affiliations. In contrast to this, one important element of multiculturalism is the aim of politicizing ethnic diversity as a matter of social-political loyalties and sometimes a Hegelian struggle for recognition. Removing the ideal aims of religious affiliations, I suspect, the result is likely to more resemble conflicting political interest groups.

I share the prevalent perspective among the pragmatists that the greatest weakness of American society is our tendency to dissolve ourselves into unattached or atomized individuals. This weakness is connected with our strength or virtue in avoiding the extremes of ethnic and racial conflicts, though of course, we don’t always manage this either. But both of these characteristics of American society are strongly related to the relatively “thin” civic culture of the country. So, again, part of the point is that we have no “thick” national or common ethnic identity.

It is precisely these and similar points which lead the pragmatists to their stress on community. Its social sources are akin to those of the strong tradition of American voluntary organizations. But in rightly emphasizing the need for community and the need to build communities, it is important not to mistake our own particular communities of memory, tradition, and affinity for a uniform overall American ideal.

Dewey wrote, most convincingly on the point in a frequently quoted passage from an article devoted to American nationality:

No matter how loudly any one proclaims his Americanism, if he assumes that any one racial strain, any one component culture, no matter how early settled it was in our territory, or how effective it has proved in its own land, is to furnish a pattern to which all other strains and cultures are to conform, he is a traitor to an American nationalism. Our unity cannot be a homogeneous thing like that of the separate states of Europe from which our population is drawn; it must be a unity created by drawing out and composing into a harmonious whole the best, the most characteristic which each contributing race and people has to offer.11

“Our national motto, ‘One from Many,’ cuts deep and extends far,” Dewey wrote, on the same page from 1916. Even external threat and war should not distract us from the point. What unity we can have must be created or composed largely by a democratic process of drawing out the best from all those who stand to make a contribution. This makes the task of building or maintaining national unity more complex, but it also holds out the promise that the result may be something greater than any of the parts could accomplish on their own.

Our national commitments, therefore, cannot be made at the expense of all other commitments. Though we may wish to bring out the best from those 100+ American ethnic traditions, we are each in degree also tied to one or another of them, maybe even stuck there. This is the difficult idea which pragmatic pluralism needs to communicate. How do we combine our own particularities with tolerance, acceptance, even encouragement to the contributions of others? The answers are chiefly to be found in the openness of our particular communities.

So, we need to ask what can be expected from our communities, given that they are not to becoming obligatory paradigms for everyone. Lacking a national ethnic identity we cannot afford to sacrifice all difference for unity. Instead we have to find ways to build unity out of our differences, as needed, and this point implies respect for differences of others as consis-

tent with self-respect within our various particular communities of history, memory, and affinity. The last thing we need is new emphasis on mutual exclusion in our conceptions of community. That would be communitarianism with a vengeance. So, our particular communities must remain open to outside influence and we require a certain freedom to refuse rigid separation, segregation, or self-insulation. In order that our particular communities can fully or better understand each other, we require a certain openness of their boundaries, and some limits on competitions.

3. Continuity and the Logic of Pluralism

Synechism, the Peircean theory, insists that “continuity” is “of prime importance in philosophy.”12 Whatever is intelligible, can be understood in terms of unbroken relations with no absolute breaks or gaps. Rejecting the Kantian “thing-in-itself” out of all relation to experience, and insisting on the reality of relations, Peirce’s metaphysics shares themes with the idealists and may seem to invoke an unrestricted holism. But the theme of continuity does not exhaust Peirce’s metaphysics, and it is worth noticing that James also invokes the term “synechism,” while insisting on pluralism.

The differences arise in part from James’ emphasis on a range of relatively “internal” vs. “external” relations, a theme not emphasized by Peirce. If all relations obtaining between one thing and another were purely “internal,” as for the Absolute idealists, then it would make sense to insist that all separation is falsification and that only the totality is genuinely and fully real, only the totality of truth is genuinely true. But from a common-sense perspective we resist similar conclusions. My relation to my family, nation, or religion may contribute to my self-definition and identity, but it makes little difference to me whether I live on a North-South street vs. an East-West street, for example.

My objective is not to explore or criticize the holistic and idealist notion, instead I want to briefly explore the resources available within Peirce’s work suited to resist similar ideas. The Peircean concept of continuity is intimately related to his development and application of the logic of relations.

If we view meanings of expressions, for instance, as dependent upon larger contexts of discourse, thinking of the relation of one expression to another in discourse as often crucial, then there are grounds for Peircean fallibilism in this. For, we cannot evaluate claims making use of such vocabulary independent of changing contexts and the growth of knowledge. This suggests immediately, that there can be no absolutely a priori truths, since such a status would imply context-free meaning and context-free validity. But likewise, reports of observation are subject to reinterpretation and revision in the light of expanding contexts of knowledge, since their meaning is also dependent upon broader contexts of discourse.

Now Peirce can be found to say that “The principle of continuity is the idea of fallibilism objectified.”13 This injects discontinuity and difference into the heart of the notion. “The doctrine of continuity rests upon observed fact,” Peirce claims, “But what opens our eyes to the significance of that fact is fallibilism.”14 Once we become “fully impressed with the fact that absolute exactitude never can be known,” we “naturally ask whether there are any facts to show that hard discrete exactitude really exists. That suggestion lifts the edge of that curtain,” says Peirce, and we “begin to see the clear daylight shining in from behind it.”15 Fallibilism is a chief clue to Peirce’s metaphysics. All measurement and observation involves inexactness and a margin of error, and is thus subject to error, but if all our evidence is inexact, we cannot conclude to an exactly definite and absolutely continuous reality on the basis of it.

“But fallibilism cannot be appreciated in anything like its true significance,” Peirce proceeds, “until evolution has been considered”16 Neither can “fallibilism objectified,” i.e., Peircean continuity, be understood except in connection with Peirce on evolution, which will

13. CP 1.171.
14. CP 1.172.
15. CP 1.173.
bring us to the pragmatists’ conception of development. Though spontaneity presents no instance of presently know uniformities or regularities, the unexpected is something to be expected in the world which Peirce envisages, and in view of the fact of evolutionary change, it is something which may lead on to new regularities. The emergence of new biological species, reproducing after their kind, is the most obvious case in point. This exemplifies discontinuity with structures heretofore developed.

If Peircean continuity is “fallibilism objectified,” then this suggests that general continuity allows of local discontinuities. Continuity implies the regularity of systems of relations, but we do not suppose on that ground alone that every system of relations is absolutely continuous or allows of no breaks against a background of other relations. Thinking of continuity as fallibilism objectified, we will naturally expect that this allows for inexactness and even relative disruptions of systems of relations. The connection Peirce makes between continuity and evolution suggests somewhat the same point. For in evolution, against the background of species regularly reproducing after their own kind, we expect disruptions of this regularity in the form of mutations which sometimes lead on to the development of new species and thus new regularities.

Another way of looking at related points is in terms of Peirce’s criticisms of necessitarianism. In writings of 1903, Peirce distinguishes several versions of the uniformity of nature, and takes a stand with one of these. The objective is to defend an Aristotelian conception of chance, as accident or coincidence. Peirce maintains that Boethius misunderstood Aristotle’s view of chance, and takes an argument from the Consolations to illustrate the mistake involved where the necessitarian argues against the Aristotelian conception of chance, as accident or coincidence.

By a geographical fiction Boethius represents that the Tigris and the Euphrates flow from a common lake. Now suppose a boat to be wrecked in that lake and one part of it is carried down the Tigris, the other part down the Euphrates, and where these rivers, after being separate for hundreds of miles, flow together again those two parts of the boats are dashed against one another. There is a fortuitous event if there ever was one; and yet, says Boethius, the currents forced them to move just as they did so that there was no chance about it.17

So, was this a chance event or was it caused, for the Aristotelian? No doubt, the flow of the two rivers respectively caused the two parts of the boat to arrive where they did at just the time that they did, but Peirce’s point is not that chance in this sense involves any violation of natural laws, instead his point is that the coincidence in the working of the laws of nature is not itself always governed by law. Peirce continues:

The event, it is true, was governed by the law of the current. But the fact which we are considering is that the two pieces that were dashed together had long before belonged together. That is a fact that would not happen once in ten thousand times, although when you join to this fact various circumstances of the actual event, and so contemplate quite another fact, it would happen every time, no doubt.18

What was accidental, a matter of chance, was that the two parts of the boat, which had once been joined, meet again as the two rivers meet, and this is surprising, something which we would not expect to be repeated. But it is part of Peirce’s larger point that once we understand the laws and initial conditions involved in the accidental event, then we have the option to intervene in nature, controlling the initial conditions in such a way that what was first purely accidental may become the first instance of a new regularity. In general terms, this is a way that Peirce has to provide for the evolution of law and the development of regularity. It is important to notice his very broad conception of the regularities of nature and its Aristotelian character. Regularity is a matter of what happens “always or for the most part.”

The connection of all this to pluralism has to do, first with the plurality of regularities, and their change over time—the development of new regularities, which may even serve to

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17. CP 6.93.
18. CP 6.93
define a new domain of inquiry. Secondly we want to see some of the application of the basic
ideas from Peirce to social development.

So, in place of the two parts of the boat and the two rivers, imagine distinct social
groups. These may have some common origin in the distant past, but they have developed
separately, in accordance each with its internal needs and the environments encountered. Now
consider what can happen when these two social groups encounter each other. Immediately
their environments are changed by the encounter. Such an encounter was not a regular feature
in the continuing lives of the two groups, and often has an accidental character to it, involving
the lack of mutual comprehension. But if we imagine that each has something positive to
offer to the other, then something new and valuable has arisen through the accidental
encounter, and once the sources of this are better understood, the two groups may proceed to
reproduce the positive aspect of their interaction and control the negative aspects.

Similar ideas underline the pragmatist emphasis on communication and interaction.
Although the emerging novelties of interaction are not always positive, and correspondingly,
most biological mutations are in fact lethal, still social intelligence allows us to select and
cultivate what is preferred and this may develop into new beneficial regularities. In general,
the social pragmatist see a pluralistic society as open to this kind of positive social evolution
and development and as involving a richness which social monocultures lack.

4. Kallen, Locke, and Cultural Pluralism

Horace Kallen’s conception of “cultural pluralism” has been dated to magazine articles from
as early as 1915 and attributed to even earlier lectures. Since Kallen was a student of William
James at Harvard, there is every reason to relate Kallen’s cultural pluralism to James’ more
general philosophical notion. Still the term “cultural pluralism” apparently only came into use
following publication of Kallen’s 1924 book, *Culture and Democracy in the United States*.
While Zwangwill’s 1908 play might be seen as celebrating the immigrant’s new-found
freedom to escape the bounds of tradition and to freely interact, Kallen, in contrast, formul-
ated a protest against xenophobia during WWI and the 1920’s and against conformist
versions of the melting-pot idea.

A Jew born in Germany, Kallen insisted on the right of immigrant groups to maintain
their own integrity and autonomy, so that his original position has been described as “at the
proto-separatist extreme of cultural pluralism.” His vision was of the United States as a
“federation” of ethno-racial groups each maintaining its own distinctiveness. This was to be
like a “symphony orchestra” in which each group would play together harmoniously with the
others. His vision appealed to a number of American intellectuals, including the critic
Randolph Bourne, who acknowledged Kallen as the inspiration of his famous article
“Transnational America” (1916). Bourne definitely saw America’s Anglophile tradition as the
source of both American entry into WWI on the British side (which he resisted) and as the
source of the demand for one-side assimilation, in contrast to the influence of William James.
Still, it is worth mentioning that Americans of English and British descend have been among
the most Anglophobic among us, from the 18th century Adams and Witherspoon to the 20th
century Lodges.

Kallen’s contributions to a pluralistic philosophy of culture extended over a life time of
writings. He persisted in using the melting-pot idea as a symbol of the rejected concept of
forced assimilation, though there is certainly also recognition of the value of inter-cultural
relations in his writings. This theme connects with his concept of the roles of individuals
within and between groups. The thin common culture of the United States, which allows us to
resist forced assimilation, is essentially a matter of the intercultural. In the 1956 book,*Cultural Pluralism and the American Idea*, Kallen speaks of the intercultural, the interfaith,
and the interracial character of American culture:

All three denote conscious ends and conscious means to attain the ends. All three are descrip-
tive of the goals and methods in a team-play of churches and of governments, urban, state and

federal, as well as of voluntary *ad hoc* societies. The intent is in the common prefix: *inter*, which here postulates the parity of the different and their free and friendly communication with one another as both co-operators and competitors; it postulates that every individual, every society thus realizes its own being more freely and abundantly than it can by segrega-

tion and isolation and struggle to go it alone.  

Basically, I think there is no other way for America to be one country, consistent with the rejection of cultural uniformity as an ideal. It is not, certainly, that we expect all intercultural relations to be smooth and trouble-free. But, by means of communication and interaction of groups and individuals, carrying or representing the various cultures, we do expect that democratic experience can grown and become fuller and more secure. Kallen’s later views agree with the Dewey of 1939, in “I Believe,” who said:

> I should now wish to emphasize more than I formerly did that individuals are the final deci-
sive factors of the nature and movement of associated life ... only the voluntary initiative and voluntary cooperation of individuals can produce social institutions that will protect the liber-
ties necessary for achieving genuine individuality.

Kallen commented in 1956 that this emphasis in Dewey’s work might be looked on as an influence of his own earlier article “Individualism,” and we can be certain that Dewey was then under the influence of the anti-Stalinist “Committee for Cultural Freedom,” founded by Sidney Hook, among others, to help meet the twin threat of Stalinism and fascism. This liberal “Individualism” of Kallen’s, like the related views of Dewey, recognizes the need of individuals for community, but refuses submission to collective egoism as the price.

While the term “cultural pluralism” originated with Kallen in resistance to forced assimilation, it was also employed in the pragmatist tradition, in protest against forced segre-
gation. Here I want to mention some recent work due to Leonard Harris, Nancy Fraser and Charlene Seigfried on the African-American philosopher Alain Locke (1886-1954). Locke is best known for his role as “midwife” to the Harlem Renaissance, and as an advocate of distinctively African-American art. But his cultural thought has recently gained recognition as a contribution to the pragmatist tradition.

Locke took an undergraduate degree at Harvard, studied at Oxford and Berlin and returned to take his Ph.D. at Harvard in 1918, where he worked first with Royce and finished with Ralph Barton Perry after Royce’s death in 1916. Early on, and for a long time afterward, he was an associate of Horace Kallen. For nearly 40 years, apparently including some disrup-
tion, Locke taught at Howard University, retiring as Chair of the department in 1954. Based on his studies of African culture and its influences on Western civilization, he urged black artists to draw on African sources and to discover there mate-
rials and techniques for their work. He encouraged black authors to find subjects in black life and to set high artistic standards.

Locke emphasize race and race-consciousness, in common with many or most African-
American intellectuals, and his conception of race is largely cultural rather than biological. Race, as he saw it is “primarily a matter of social heredity;” and thus “a fact in the social or ethic sense,” but it is an error to equate the fact of racial differences with a biological deter-
mination of culture. According to Locke his position leads “if soundly developed, not to cultural separation but to cultural pluralism.” To be “Negro,” he held, “in the cultural sense, then, is not to be radically different, but only to be distinctively composite and idiomatic, though basically American, as is to be expected.”

Locke makes room for African-American racial, social, and political solidarity, while at the same time resisting racial or biological determinism. The concept is somewhat akin to the best in some 19th century conceptions, where “race” is not strictly distinguished from ethnic-

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20 Kallen, 1956, p. 98.
24 Locke in Harris, 1989, p. 213.
ity and social culture. One key here in Locke seems to be the idea that racial differentiation itself is subject to cultural conditions, and it may in turn influence cultural conditions.

Fraser provides the following characterization of the import of Locke’s distinction between “civilization type” and “social culture:”

More restricted than a “civilization type,” a “social culture” in Locke’s usage comprehends a substantive nexus of concrete life forms, including ethical horizons and interpretive traditions. Civilization type, in contrast, comprehends the more abstract, formal structures that sub tend such life forms in a modern pluralistic society. Thus a single modern civilization type can encompass a plurality of social cultures. To invoke a language not available to Locke, members of different ethnicities, subcultures, “communities of value,” and religious confessions, can all participate in the same civilization type.25

Assimilation to our “civilization type” is needed for full participation in American life, though this is not to be defined, and certainly not set in stone, by reference to any particular contributing social culture. So, while Locke provides resources for resisting forced assimilation to any established model of social culture, he also leaves the door open to democratic exchanges and mutual influences. Locke reclaims the American “melting-pot” from the specter of forced assimilation. As Fraser puts the matter, “Locke appreciates the emancipatory dimension of this ideal.”26 In some degree, if the ideas of assimilation and forced assimilation are kept distinct, then we all ought to be able to appreciate the same emancipatory potential. Even those Americans with British or English roots, after all, are not therefore British or English.

Locke’s conception of a “civilization type” insofar as it can remain under debate and review, in light of the perspectives of various component social cultures, has some resemblance to the idea of a “thin” American national culture which allows for many variations on the unifying themes. This would appear to allow, too, for the conception of American national identity as a continuing arena of debate on unifying political ideals and mutual influences. It seems certain that Locke’s writings may repay further study.

Charlene Haddock Seigfried points to Locke’s contributions to pragmatism, in her 1996 book *Pragmatism and Feminism*. In her chapter on “What is wrong with Instrumental Reasoning?” she says that in his 1942 book, “Alain Locke sounded the alarm on the mainstream, positivist science that had continued to dominate in universities and institutions around the world, despite pragmatists’ objections.” Locke wrote:

...with the broadening scientific perspective on human social history that has been achieved one might logically expect enlightened social understanding and intercultural appreciation and tolerance. But this has not been so...people still read and write history from the chronic attitudes of cultural pride and prejudice, and sometimes deliberately, sometimes subconsciously, impose interpretations upon civilization that are steeped in cultural bias and partiality.27

The problem is that too much of theory about civilization and culture is a matter of “rationalizations” for claims and counter claims of ethnic, national, or racial groups, a matter of partisanship. In consequence, argue Seigfried and Locke, special interests and prejudices get reinforced with “the outward stamp of scientific objectivity and impartiality...and irrationality in social thinking grows apace.”28

While elaborate systems of rationalizations may strengthen particular groups in conflict with others, as in the nationalist ideologies of old Europe, the danger is that the differing groups may become unable to communicate or solve outstanding problems. “According to Locke,” says Seigfried, “racialist doctrines incite group rivalry as a weapon in the struggle for group power and dominance, and it is of the greatest importance to see and understand them in this light. Carefully analyzed, their major objectives are seen to be the justification of

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28 Locke quoted in Seigfried, p. 190-191.
conflict and exploitation through the disparagement of other group cultures and the promotion of prestige and group morale through self-glorification and claims of superiority’.”

The alternative to this kind of rationalization is an interpretive social science and discursive forms of appreciation which seek to bring out the best in the cultures of our concern. As Seigfried wrote, in a somewhat different context: “James’ principled pluralism continually urges on us the importance of sympathetically and imaginatively recognizing the specific power of those who satisfactorily order their world differently from us.”

5. Pluralism vs. Relativism

I quote below some passages from Sidney Hook’s *The Quest for Being* (1961) which speak directly to the issue of cultural relativism. Hook puts his finger on a genuine problem of the pragmatist tradition:

The most common objection to naturalistic humanism is not that it has no place for moral experience but that it has no place for an authoritative moral experience except one that rests merely on arbitrary preference, habit or force. In consequence, it is accused of lapsing into the morass of relativism despite its desire to discover inclusive and enduring ends which will enable human beings to live harmoniously together.

The intention is to base authority in the results of inquiry. But if we think of inquiry as essentially open-ended (as of course we do), then how can we call a stop to it to draw conclusions? How do we know when we have had enough inquiry? This must be a collective decision. But when we come to the point of making a collective decision, how are we to prevent the working of collective egoism of the kind which Locke highlighted, irrational bandwagon effects, and so on? This is both a theoretical problem related to the tendency toward a purely process reading of inquiry (a metaphysics that over-emphasizes the continuity of inquiry as against the discreetness of conclusions or results) and also a very practical problem in that the pragmatist tradition has been seen as sponsoring relativism—tendencies toward relativism have in fact developed out of it, or under its influence.

As Hook continues, he stresses two elements of the problem. First that the emphasis upon solving specific problems in specific situations reinforces the impression of relativism, and secondly there is a prevalent confusion regarding the difference between claiming validity of results “relative” to situations and claiming validity of results in relation to situations.

The impression that relativism is entailed by every form of naturalism is reinforced by the refusal of current humanists to content themselves with the affirmation of general ends certified to immediate intuition and by their insistence that ends must be related to means and both to determinate conditions of trouble and difficulty in specific historical situations. This makes value judgments in the only form in which they count, “relative”—but “relative” not in the sense of subjective but rather relational.

Thus, Hook distinguishes relativity, which invites the charge of subjectivism, from relationality, which plausibly does not. If we are to use the term “relative” at all, then it is not put in contrast with “objective,” instead it contrast with what is supposed to depend on no relations. Hook continues:

The opposite of “relative” is not “objective” but “absolute” or “unconditional.” This emphasis upon relational character reflects the dependence of value qualities, like all other qualities in nature, upon activities in process of objective interaction with each other. It should then be clear that the assertion “a value is related to a situation of concrete historical interests”—and the further assertion that “a judgment of value is warranted when reflection indicates that what is declared valuable promises to satisfy these interests,” does not add up to the view that anyone can legitimately believe that anything is valuable in any situation. On the contrary, inquiry into the relational character of values, their historical, cultural and psychological

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reference, aims to find reliable values to guide action, reliable because they have objective grounds.\textsuperscript{32}

So, Hook is insisting on the (potential) objectivity of results, even when such results (e.g., value judgments) relate only to specific situations and solutions to specific problems. The obvious question, once we put aside the confusions of “relative” validity vs. validity in relation to situations is whether such results as have been certified for given situations cannot be made to generalize, in some way, over ranges of other situations. It seems clear that no one will object to the generalizations of chemistry, say, on the grounds that they have no application at the time, just after the “big bang” when the chemical elements had yet to form. So, results can retain application to a “limited” range of situations while still having what we would call a universal character: this is the idea of a domain of discourse, implicitly defined with reference to results obtained (and not “\textit{a priori}”).

What interests Hook is situations of conflicting values, and he observes that “One can hold to the belief in the objectivity of values without guaranteeing that agreement among conflicting values, all of which are objective from their own point of view, can be won.”\textsuperscript{33} The method which Hook shares with Dewey holds out the possibility of reaching agreement through further inquiry, but it does not maintain that such an agreement can always be reached (or, of course, that it can always be reached within time limits set by our prior expectations).

Hook’s idea is that in situations of conflict, we may have to construct new values and interests “which will transform the conflicting values into a satisfying integrated whole.”\textsuperscript{34} (This idea is very Deweyan, of course.) I suspect we must agree, in some sense, that “How far such an agreement can be won cannot be foretold until actual investigation into the conditions and consequences of value claims in definite situations is undertaken ...” (p. 207). Moreover, he insists that the idea that “an objective moral resolution of value conflicts is possible, entails the belief that men are sufficiently alike to work out ways of becoming more alike, or sufficiently alike to agree about the permissible limits of being different ” (p. 207). Interestingly, he also maintains that “The willingness to sit down in the face of differences and reason together is the only categorical imperative a naturalistic humanism recognizes.”

The point is of special interest, because it seems to generalize a value over all situations of conflicting values. This much generalization seems to be implicit in the methodology which Dewey and Hook share. But it is of some importance to emphasize, in this connection that not all differences, and not even all conflicts immediately call for mediation. Or, to put the point in other words, one rational response to conflicts is to enter into what James called the “and relation,” and simply allowing different people to be different. We don’t need to settle all of our differences in order to live in one pluralistic society. Sometimes, good fences make good neighbors, though we need to be wary of transforming fences into permanent barriers.

6. Pluralism, Religion, and Secularity

A pluralistic society, consisting of different ethnic, racial, and religious groups, will surely do better practicing a scrupulous neutrality among the diversity, though of course, it must also pursue goals favored by particular sub-groups and disfavored by others. In consequence there is a relatively benign sense of the word “secular,” in accordance with which American society is secular. What we do officially we do not do for any officially religious reasons, nor do we officially identify ourselves as a particular ethnic or racial group.

Our secularity is represented most strikingly by the constitutional prohibition of the establishment of religion. Though America is strongly Protestant, up to 65% count as “Protestant” by tradition, understood broadly in contrast with the Catholics (who are the largest single religious group), most agree that we do better in accommodating our diversity by conferring no official status on any religion. So understood, a secular state stands equally

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Ibid.}.
\textsuperscript{33} p. 207.
\textsuperscript{34} p. 206.
distant from theocracy on the one hand and an anti-religious establishment on the other. The constitution both prohibits establishment of religion and guarantees freedom of religious belief and practice. America’s secularism, historically, is not anti-religious. On the contrary, there is some reason to believe that our not being anti-religious is crucial to the prosperity and mutual toleration of diversity. It is only where secularism is viewed as a replacement for religion that it threatens to become a quasi-established religion itself.

Though secularity is sometimes given an anti-religious meaning, the secularity of American society need not be seen in anti-religious terms. Here the point will be illustrated by reference to recent work of Michael Walzer. Secularity is to be preserved by means of neutrality among religions.

In the Epilogue to his book, On Toleration (1997), Walzer writes of a role for the public schools in reference to cultural plurality and mutual toleration. But he does not explicitly address a point I have in mind, concerning the teaching of the history of religions in the schools. I would like to explore here this difference. The idea is that teaching the history of religion in America would facilitate socialization within the larger society and mutual adjustments.

Part of the point in the Epilogue concerns government aid to private, associational, cultural, and religious organizations involved in the development of human capital. Walzer’s argument goes somewhat as follows. If we think of contemporary American society as tending strongly toward the isolation or atomization of individuals, then part of the solution is to try to strengthen those sources of community which we have.

Toleration, remember, is not a formula for harmony: it legitimates previously repressed or invisible groups and so enables them to compete for available resources. But the presence of these groups, in force, will also increase the amount of political space and the number and range of institutional functions and, therefore, the opportunities for individual participation. And participating individuals, with a growing sense of their own effectiveness, are our best protection against the parochialism and intolerance of the groups in which they participate (Walzer, 1997, p. 107).

Walzer doesn’t see a chief danger in a “balkanization” of American society; instead he points in the opposite direction, toward the breakdown of ties to communities. He argues for government policies which would tend to counter-balance atomizing effects. Obviously, in a pluralistic society, such policies have to be neutral among cultural groups, broadly inclusive of our diversity, while also discouraging the excesses of intolerance.

If I go back a page in Walzer’s book, to quote a paragraph there, this will illustrate the kinds of policies Walzer has in mind. According to Walzer, “we need more cultural associations, not fewer,” and “more powerful and cohesive ones, too, with a wider range of responsibilities” (p. 106).

Associations of this sort are not the objects of toleration in immigrant societies, but they can be made the objects—or better, the ends—of government policy. Consider, for example, the current set of federal programs—including tax exemptions, matching grants, subsidies, and entitlements—that enable religious communities to run their own hospitals, old age homes, schools, day care centers, and family services. Here are welfare societies within a decentralized (and still unfinished) American welfare state. Tax money is used to second charitable contributions in ways that reinforce the patterns of mutual assistance and cultural reproduction that arise spontaneously within civil society. But these patterns need to be greatly extended, because coverage at present is radically unequal. And more groups must be brought into the business of welfare provision: racial and ethnic as well as religious groups (and why not unions, co-ops, and corporations too?).

Essentially, this approach would build on American volunteer organizations, and organizations in civil society, without, of course, giving them any official status and without incorporating their functions into government. This might better be done by the states, instead of the federal government, but it is the general point I want to emphasize: the idea is to reinforce

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35 Walzer 1997, p. 106.
“the patterns of mutual assistance and cultural reproduction that arise spontaneously within civil society.” Doing that, we will also foster community and self-development of individuals within community. “The cohesiveness of the group invigorates its members,” argues Walzer, “and the ambition and mobility of the most vigorous members liberalizes the group” (p. 109). What Walzer says here seems particularly valuable and worthy of consideration.

But what Walzer says about the public schools is somewhat weaker. “Public schools,” he says, “bring together the children of parents committed to different religious and ethnic communities—as well as the children of parents who have escaped such commitments” (p. 109). No doubt many people in America feel themselves simply American, and we cannot require them to see themselves differently. But this is quite distinct from providing the opportunity to see themselves and each other in terms of historical background, origins, and commitments. After all, the story of how different peoples contributed to the country is part of our story too, no matter how little we may presently know of it. The “neutrality” of the schools, on Walzer’s recommendations, seems perhaps a bit too neutral.

Themselves supposedly neutral with reference to the communities and their escaped members, the schools, ought to provide a sympathetic account of the history and philosophy of our own regime of toleration, which can hardly avoid specifying its particularist (English Protestant) origins. They ought to teach American civil religion and aim to produce American citizens, and so they will inevitably challenge cultural communities where citizenship of that sort is unfamiliar.36

Now no one will question, I hope, that American schools should teach children about citizenship, tolerance, and its historical origins. We surely want to encourage citizen participation in government and politics, as is much needed in any democratic society. But part of my concern here is with the role of the schools in socialization as contrasted with education.

I think that socialization fails were those who themselves have the kind of Protestant and Congregationalist background Walzer mentions, e.g., fail to distinguish themselves from “our own regime of toleration.” These people too ought to have some greater opportunity to rediscover their own distinctive past and to overcome the blindness involved in thinking that all the world ought to be just like “us”—here by thinking, mistakenly, that all the (American) world is just like them. Out of such a mistaken perception of American society, the recognition of their own need for community is considerably diminished.

Arguing for a second aim in the schools “to produce hyphenated citizens,” so that those with a loyalty to some particular religious, ethnic, or racial group will “defend toleration within their different communities while still valuing and reproducing (and rethinking and revising) the differences,” Walzer call on the schools to “recognize the plurality of cultures” and “to teach something about the different groups” (p. 110). But this falls short of teaching the full historical variety of American religion.

It is a continuing weakness of American society, I believe, that many within it are so uninformed of their own past. Given that particular Protestant groups were historically involved in crucial ways in the origins of American liberal society, the particular problem I see is that of their socialization within it, their needed facility to distinguish themselves from other similar groups or from the overall character of the society. Without this we get a homogenizing effect.

More generally, I think that we would all benefit a great deal by knowing more about the history of religion in America. What are the virtues or weaknesses of all those various groups—the New England Puritans certainly have got considerable attention. But what of the Unitarians, the Presbyterians, the Methodists, the Baptists, the Episcopalians and the Catholics, the Amish and the Quakers, the Mormons, the Mennonites, the Lutherans and Reformed, the Orthodox, Conservative, and Reformed Jews, etc, etc. If we are living among all these people, and especially insofar as their differences have persisted, then we need to better understand those differences in order to better understand American society. Far too many of us are simply invisible to others, and even to ourselves. On the other hand, mutual prejudices persist.

I doubt that each locality has exactly the needs of every other locality in the U.S., since these various groups are not equally distributed in every area. But there is almost no area without this kind of variety. So, the local public schools might do well to teach a general history of religion in America and the particular needs of the area. We would all do well to understand the neighbors in more detail.

Walzer’s account of the matter concentrates too much on the needs of those groups which tend more toward hyphenation, while the socialization and education of others in relation to their own traditions is gone over too lightly. Even the education of those with newer or more unusual particularities might benefit from a greater appreciation of the history of their neighbors. Moreover, the lack of expressed affiliation is sometimes just as plausibly viewed as a form of alienation as it is viewed as a matter of successful integration. Given that the U.S. is one of the most religious countries in the Western world, why should American public schools so largely ignore religion? I fear that the long-term effect of this is to convert mutually tolerant ethnic-religious groups into competing political factions, with lots of excessive atomization along the way.

Works Cited


Pluralism as a political philosophy is the recognition and affirmation of diversity within a political body, which permits the peaceful coexistence of different interests, convictions, and lifestyles.[1] While not all political pluralists advocate for a pluralist democracy, this is most common as democracy is often viewed as the most fair and effective way to moderate between the discrete values.[2]. Madison feared that factionalism would lead to in-fighting in the new American republic and devotes this paper to questioning how best to avoid such an occurrence. Pluralism advocates institutional design in keeping with a form of pragmatic realism here, with the preliminary adoption of suitable existing socio-historical structures where necessary. YouTube Encyclopedic. 1/3. 33 four pragmatic pluralism and american democracy â€¦.. 47. Five sidney hookâ€™s john dewey â€¦. â€¦â€¦â€¦â€¦â€¦Â 3. M.L. King 1967, â€œWhere do We Go from Here?â€œ in King 1986, A Testament of Hope, p. 252. 184 Pluralism, Pragmatism and American Democracy. rise again, â€œand there will be a â€œnot too distant tomorrowâ€ when we will encounter from the perspective of a â€œcosmic past tenseâ€ that â€œWe have overcome!â€ 2. Divine providence and historical inevitability. This paper approaches "multiculturalism" obliquely via conceptions of social and political pluralism in the pragmatist tradition. As a matter of social analysis, the advent of multiculturalism implies some loss of confidence in our prior conceptions of accommodating ethnic, social, and religious diversity: the conversion of traditional American cultural diversity into a war of political interest groups. This, and the corresponding tendency toward cultural relativism and "anything goes," is fundamentally a product of over-centralization and cultural-political exhaustion in the wake of the long Foundations of American democracy. Types of democracy. Types of democracy. Introduction to democracy and its variations. Types of democracy. This is the currently selected item. Types of democracy: lesson overview. Practice: Types of democracy. Next lesson. Challenges of the Articles of Confederation. Arts and humanitiesUS government and civicsFoundations of American democracyTypes of democracy. Ap.gopo: LORâ€۪1.b.1 (ek). There are several types of democracy. In this article, learn about participatory democracy, pluralist democracy, and elite democracy.