

## Examples for MRes Philosophy of Knowledge (positivism vs pragmatism session)

### Pierce

*So with all scientific research. Different minds may set out with the most antagonistic views, but the progress of investigation carries them by a force outside of themselves to one and the same conclusion. This activity of thought by which we are carried, not where we wish, but to a foreordained goal, is like the operation of destiny. No modification of the point of view taken, no selection of other facts for study, no natural bent of mind even, can enable a man to escape the predestinate opinion.*

*The opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate, is what we mean by the truth, and the object represented in this opinion is the real. That is the way I would explain reality.*

*These thoughts, however, have been caused by sensations, and those sensations are constrained by something out of the mind. This thing out of the mind, which directly influences sensation, and through sensation thought, because it is out of the mind, is independent of how we think it, and is, in short, the real.*

### James

*The true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief, and good, too, for definite assignable reasons. (1907: 42)*

*'The true', to put it very briefly, is only the expedient in the way of our thinking, just as 'the right' is only the expedient in the way of our behaving. Expedient in almost any fashion; and expedient in the long run and on the whole, of course. (1907: 106)*

*Ideas ... become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relations with other parts of our experience. (1907: 34)*

*Any idea upon which we can ride ...; any idea that will carry us prosperously from any one part of our experience to any other part, linking things satisfactorily, working securely, saving labor; is true for just so much, true in so far forth, true instrumentally. (1907: 34)*

*When we talk of reality "independent" of human thinking, then, it seems a thing very hard to find. It reduces to the notion of what is just entering into experience and yet to be named, or else to some imagined aboriginal presence in experience, before any belief about the presence had arisen, before any human conception had been applied. ...Superficially this sounds like Kant's view; but between categories fulminated before nature began, and categories gradually forming themselves in nature's presence, the whole chasm between rationalism and empiricism yawns. (P, 68).*

### Rorty

*Pragmatists think that the history of attempts to isolate the True or the Good ... supports their suspicion that there is no interesting work to be done in this area. It might, of course, have turned out otherwise. People have, oddly enough, found something interesting to say about the essence of Force and the definition of "number." They might have found something interesting to say about the essence of Truth. But in fact they haven't.*

*... This does not mean that they have a new ... set of answers .. to offer, but rather that they do not think we should ask those questions any more. ... they do not invoke a theory about the nature of reality or knowledge or man which says that "there is no such thing" as Truth or Goodness. Nor do they have a "relativistic" or "subjectivist" theory of Truth or Goodness. They would simply like to change the subject.*

*Pragmatism cuts across this transcendental/empirical distinction by questioning the common presupposition that there is an invidious distinction to be drawn between kinds of truths. For the pragmatist, true sentences are not true because they correspond to reality, and so there is no need to worry what sort of reality, if any, a given sentence corresponds to -no need to worry about what "makes" it true.*

## **Putnam**

*The heart of pragmatism ...—of James's and Dewey's pragmatism, if not of Peirce's—was the insistence on the supremacy of the agent point of view. If we find that we must take a certain point of view, use a certain 'conceptual system', when we are engaged in practical activity, in the widest sense of 'practical activity', then we must not simultaneously advance the claim that it is not really 'the way things are in themselves'. (MFR, 70).*

*What I find attractive in pragmatism is not a systematic theory in the usual sense at all. It is rather a certain group of theses... Cursorily summarized, those theses are*

*(1) antisepticism: pragmatists hold that doubt requires justification just as much as belief... (2) fallibilism: pragmatists hold that there is never a metaphysical guarantee to be had that such-and-such a belief will never need revision (that one can be both fallibilistic and antiseptical is perhaps the unique insight of American pragmatism.); (3) the thesis that there is no fundamental dichotomy between "facts" and "values"; and (4) the thesis that, in a certain sense, practice is primary in philosophy. (WL 152)*

*The pragmatist picture is totally different [from Carnap's]. For Peirce and Dewey, inquiry is cooperative human interaction with an environment; and both aspects, the active intervention, the active manipulation of the environment, and the cooperation with other human beings, are vital. ...Ideas must be put under strain, if they are to prove their worth; and Dewey and James both followed Peirce in this respect. (POQ 70-71)*

## **Quine**

*(about quine's theory in "Two Dogmas of Empiricism")*

*It proposes a kind of "onion" type theory of truth. Truth is like an onion, and at the outer most layer there is a correspondence between statements (beliefs) and experience; but once we pass inside the onion the correspondence breaks down; what we have on the inside is a web of statements that cohere with each other. ... In the end the total system of beliefs is justified by a mixture of its coherence within the system and its correspondence on the periphery with experience.*