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## Hegel and Pragmatism

### 1. Introduction

Philosophical pragmatism emerged in North America at the 19<sup>th</sup> century. German philosophy had a strong influence on the local intellectual climate because a group of philosophers, called St. Louis Hegelians, advocated Hegelian eternal historical dialectic and published a periodical, *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* (1867–1893), which was the only available philosophical journal at that time. Charles Peirce and John Dewey, among others, published papers in it. The other important source of inspiration was Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. What has to be changed in philosophy if Darwin is right?

Peirce was the main figure in the emergence of pragmatism. He emphasized that the earlier conception of experience as sense perception is too narrow. Action must be included in the notion of experience. Peirce was highly critical to the Cartesian tradition: meanings cannot be separated from the sphere of experience into a different substance. However, Peirce retained some basic features of German idealism in his thought. He said that his philosophy “resuscitates Hegel, though in a strange costume”.<sup>1</sup> He also called himself “a modified Schellingian, or New England transcendentalist”.<sup>2</sup> One strange feature in this modified costume is the fact that Peirce rejected one feature of earlier philosophy, namely the *a priori* method of conceptual analysis, and appealed to the method of science instead.<sup>3</sup> Every phenomenon and problem in the experiential sphere is to be addressed with empirical methods of science and there is a continuum between science and philosophy.

Dewey was originally a Hegelian and wrote about the *Absolut* in the journal mentioned above. But under Darwin's influence he became a consistent naturalist and anti-transcendentalist: culture is simply a product of nature, a system created by one animal species as a special kind of social and historical environment.

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<sup>1</sup> CP 1.42. CP followed by the number of volume and paragraph is the standard way of referring to C. Peirce, *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, edited by C. Hartshorne/P. Weiss et al., Cambridge, MA 1931–1958.

<sup>2</sup> C. Peirce, *Writings of Charles S. Peirce. A Chronological Edition*, edited by M. Fisch/E. Moore et al., Bloomington 1982 ff, Vol. 8, 392.

<sup>3</sup> CP 5.358–387.