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Abstract: Pragmatism is usually viewed as a unified school, movement or tradition. Lists of its most important tenets typically include advocacy of open inquiry, pursued with an awareness of human fallibility, a view of justification that appeals to shared experience in all its manifestations – aesthetic, religious, moral, political and scientific – and a conception of philosophy as a practice interwoven with problems of contemporary life. While disagreements among pragmatists are widely acknowledged, they are most often treated as easily resolved or of marginal importance given the substantial body of doctrine that pragmatists are thought to share. I argue that this view of pragmatism obscures important philosophical differences among its proponents, to the serious detriment of our understanding of the tradition. I point out that figures most often credited with advancing pragmatism – Charles Peirce, William James, John Dewey, W.V. Quine, Hilary Putnam and Richard Rorty – defend significantly divergent views, views that are anything but easy to reconcile. Their differences go to the very heart of how pragmatism is to be understood and defended and present serious obstacles to any characterization of it as a tradition with a common philosophical method, purpose or core set of doctrines. Pragmatism is far more diverse, subtle and difficult to come to terms with than contemporary accounts of what is living and dead in it commonly presume.

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