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Category: Publication

Title: Pragmatism and Theories of Emergence

Description: Call for Papers for Special Issue of European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy

“Pragmatism and Theories of Emergence”

Guest Editors: Guido Baggio (Roma Tre University) and Andrea Parravicini (University of Milan)

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Deadline for submissions: 30 June 2019

European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy is currently inviting submissions for a special issue on Pragmatism and Theories of Emergence. The issue intends to reflect on the relevance of pragmatism to current theories of emergence, both from a historical and a theoretical point of view, and to inquire whether pragmatism provides a distinctive and original approach to this notion. The recently renewed debate on the concept of “emergence” is particularly varied, and it widely refers to biology, metaphysics, philosophy of mind, as well as to social sciences.

Emergence is a notoriously difficult phenomenon to be studied rigorously. The difficulties arise from the definition of what emergence is, the nature of the related causal powers and its causation role. It is generally accepted that emergent phenomena have properties that are qualitatively different from those of the parts by which they are composed or from the lower-levels' entities from which they arise, regardless of whether they may or may not be causally reduced to such lower-levels. In other words, emergence is the rise of a novel system whose properties cannot be fully reduced to those of its previous conditions. Therefore, emergence is a pivotal concept for interpreting the reality of natural and social human life in all its processual complexity. In this perspective, some authors support a form of emergentism, which opposes any form of dualism that presupposes a complete independence of the domain of the matter from that of the mind, of the physical from the social, thus avoiding,

at the same time, any reductionist causal explanation of the latter through the former.

Although references to classical pragmatists and their more direct forerunners have been and still are rare in literature, it is undoubted that the contributions that those thinkers provided to the debate on emergentism and to the related notion of emergence are highly significant and deserve to be furtherly investigated from a historical and theoretical point of view.

The earliest formulations of the notion of emergence date back at least to John Stuart Mill (Mill 1843, Bk.III, Ch.6, §1). A few decades later, Chauncey Wright, the “coryphaeus” of the Metaphysical Club in Cambridge (Mass.) and the philosophical mentor of William James and Charles S. Peirce, coped with the Darwinian difficulties about the continuity and the differences between animal and human forms by putting at the center of his reflections the notion of “novelty”, whose meaning was quite the same as that of “emergence”. In his long essay “The Evolution of Self-Consciousness” (Wright 1873), the American philosopher established an evolutionary continuity between animal instincts and human intelligence by showing that the latter emerged as a new function of some older traits and powers that were already present, to a lesser degree, in our proto-human ancestors. In 1896, the British biologist C. Lloyd Morgan, who would have led early in the Twentieth century the emergentist movement, gave a lecture on “Habit and Instinct” at the University of Chicago, the very same year in which the functionalists James R. Angell and Addison W. Moore undertook a psychological experiment on attention and habit under the guidance of John Dewey and George H. Mead (Angell & Moore 1896). Morgan’s thesis was that human evolution occurred mainly at a social-economic emergent level, which is not explicable in merely biological terms. He further developed his ideas in the following years and in 1923 he integrated his emergentist view of evolution with Einstein’s special and general theories of Relativity. Following his track, a few years later Mead (1932) tried to integrate his social psychology with the processual philosophy and the activity which structures the reality that organisms inhabit. In the wake of Mead, Dewey developed a distinct variant of emergentism based on the concept of experience as “the result, the sign, and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment” (Dewey 1934: 22). Before them, William James developed an evolutionary epistemology (James 1878; 1880; 1890; 1911) that can be seen as a way to explain the emergence of novelties in nature. New ideas and behaviours emerge in our social and natural environmental interactions as possible adaptive responses. Furthermore, many interpreters of Charles S. Peirce noted that his metaphysics entails a form of emergentism.

Among all the possible research questions related to the notion of emergence, the following ones are particularly intriguing:

- What can classical pragmatism offer to the contemporary debates in philosophy of biology and evolution, particularly with respect to the notions of emergence and novelty, and to a multilevel view of evolutionary causation and processes?
- What can James's, Mead's and Dewey's distinct views on emergentism offer to the renewed debate on emergence in natural and social sciences?
- Can pragmatism provide some new insights into the philosophical issues about the causal relations among emergent entities and properties and lower level factors?
- What would it be the contribution of classical pragmatists' views on the emergence of human uniqueness, self-consciousness, and cultural-symbolic behaviors to today's debates about the same issues?
- How to think a 'pragmatist turn' in current philosophy of biology?

The following subjects are particularly worthy of further investigation:

- The history of the notion of "emergence" in pragmatism.
- Emergentism and pragmatism
- Pragmatist issues in contemporary philosophy of biology, particularly with respect to the emergent biological processes and multilevel evolutionary theories.
- Pragmatist philosophy of biology.
- Multilevel causation.
- Pragmatist 4E cognition and emergence
- Pragmatism and today's human evolution issues (in particular, the emergence of the human mind and culture).
- The correlation between natural and social emergence from a pragmatist point of view

Papers should be sent to Guido Baggio (guido.baggio[at]uniroma3.it) and Andrea Parravicini (andrea.parravicini[at]unimi.it) by June 30th, 2019. They should not exceed 12,000 words and must include an abstract of 150-400 words and a list of works cited. Papers will be selected on the basis of a process of blind review. They will be published in December 2019.

Link: European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy

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