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THE TRUTH IS IN THE MAKING: BORGES AND PRAGMATISM

Jorge Luis Borges's affinities with pragmatism, while certainly no secret to his critics, have rarely been studied before with the intensity and seriousness they otherwise undoubtedly deserve. This fact in and of itself should not come as a surprise; rather, it is consistent with a widespread tendency to speak only with a great deal of irony about this author's philosophical alliances. Did not Borges himself talk of his "basic skepticism" as a tendency "to evaluate religious or philosophical ideas on the basis of their aesthetic worth and even for what is singular and marvelous about them" (*Other Inquisitions* 189)? Such an evaluation in terms of aesthetic worth would seem to preclude interrogations of a strictly theoretical kind, as if the sheer marvel of a philosopher's inventions could not but overshadow their truth content. Aside from the occasional mentions of Arthur Schopenhauer and Fritz Mauthner as the philosophers whose books he annotated the most, Borges also only rarely pronounces his philosophical commitments other than in literary-aesthetic terms, for instance, when he refers to metaphysics as a branch of "fantastic" literature. Quickly making this skeptical stance their own, many of Borges's critics in turn shy away from a sustained inquiry into the coherence of his philosophical beliefs. In so doing, they all but completely lose sight of the possibility that beneath the surface of irony they might find a small but fairly systematic set of philosophical principles, the genealogy of which is worth looking into as well. In the case of pragmatism, especially the version dear to William James, this is all the more unfortunate insofar as Borges's debts to James warrant such a genealogical inquiry perhaps more so than his affinities with any other modern philosopher.

Indeed, what should come as a surprise even to the skeptics is the strong language with which Borges, in a few marginal texts, expresses his utmost admiration for James's philosophy. In the most significant of these texts, the preliminary note to the 1945 Argentine translation of *Pragmatism*, Borges even goes so far as to abandon his commonly self-proclaimed skepticism for an outspoken ethical judgment in favor of James. Never included in Borges's complete works nor in any of the collections of essays and prologues published during his lifetime, this text is now at last more widely accessible thanks to the materials gathered in *Textos recobrados*. "For an aesthetic appreciation," Borges writes, "the universes of other philosophies might be superior (James himself, in the fourth conference of this volume, speaks of

'the music of monism'); ethically, William James is superior. He is the only one, perhaps, for whom human beings have something to do" ("Nota preliminar" 11). For a writer who only rarely invokes the term of ethics, it must be said that these are unusually strong words indeed. How, then, should we understand this alleged superiority of James's philosophy? What exactly is this doing or this making that is allowed to, or demanded from, all human beings according to the view that Borges attributes to James?

The claim that I want to defend in the following pages holds that James's pragmatism is actually far more central to Borges's work than is commonly accepted—not just in the prologue to *Pragmatism* or even in the one written for the translation of *Varieties of Religious Experience* as part of Borges's *Biblioteca personal*, but right from the earliest beginnings of his career as a writer and essayist. Of course, we all know that as an adolescent Jorge Luis was fond of hearing his father lecture on philosophical topics with James's *Principles of Psychology* as his manual. Less well-known, if not completely speculative, is the fact that another of Borges's teachers, Macedonio Fernández, for a while kept a correspondence with William James—with a signed photograph from the New England philosopher as the only surviving proof now in the possession of Macedonio's son and archiver Adolfo de Obieta (cf. Biagini and Nubiola). But these influences would remain of purely anecdotal interest for us today if it were not for other and more profoundly formative links.

There are in fact a number of fragments in Borges's early writings that would seem to be direct paraphrases of some of James's texts. To give but one example, let us consider how Borges in "Examen de metáforas" from *Inquisiciones*—in other words long before he would come to embrace his much better-known nominalist critique of language—describes the purpose of words and concepts. We start out from the appearance of the world as a perceptual jumble, such as during a walk in the countryside, only to move almost instantaneously to the act of its conscious abbreviation:

The appearing world is a jumble of deflected perceptions. A view of the country sky, that smell as if of resignation which the fields breathe, the tasty bitterness of tobacco burning the throat, the tall wind flagellating our road and the submissive rectitude of a walking stick offering itself to our fingers, all fit together in any consciousness, almost at once. ("Examen de metáforas" 65)

The effective fitting together of this experiential flow, however, happens not in the subject's mind so much as in language:

Language is an efficacious ordering of this enigmatic abundance of the world. What we call a noun is nothing but an abbreviation of adjectives and, often, their fallacious probability. Instead of saying cold, hurting, unbreakable, shining, sharp-pointed, we

state dagger; to substitute the absence of the sun and the progression of shadow, we say that it darkens. Nobody will deny that this nomenclature is a grandiose relief for our everyday life. Yet their aim is stubbornly practical: it is a prolix map that steers us through appearances, it is a most useful sign that our fantasy will at some point deserve to forget. ("Examen de metáforas" 65-66)

Language, according to this view, is not, or not just, an arbitrary system of signs and symbols, as a strictly nominalist view would hold; it is also a practical map of relations. It possesses an efficacy of its own beyond the limitations that a critique of language, such as has become commonplace after the linguistic turn, would typically highlight.

Now let us compare this perspective on language with the views presented by James in *Some Problems of Philosophy* regarding the role of percepts and concepts. Like Borges, James starts out from a perceptual flux which he describes as a "big blooming buzzing confusion" and in which concepts make "cuts" and introduce "boundaries." To illustrate this process, James cites a wide range of examples that are almost identical to those used by the author of *Inquisiciones*:

Out of this aboriginal sensible muchness attention carves out objects, which conception then names and identifies forever—in the sky "constellations," on the earth "beach," "sea," "cliff," "bushes," "grass." Out of time we cut "days" and "nights," "summers" and "winters." We say *what* each part of the sensible continuum is, and all of these abstracted *whats* are concepts. (*The Writings of William James* 234)

And James, too, goes on to compare the function of concepts to the usefulness of a topographic map:

Concepts not only guide us over the map of life, but we *revalue* life by their use . . . They steer us practically every day, and provide an immense map of relations among the elements of things, which, though not now, yet on some possible future occasion, may help to steer us practically. (*The Writings of William James* 243)

We need not continue this comparison with other examples in order to come to the provisory conclusion that Borges's early writings are indeed strongly indebted to the works of William James. We could even speak of explicit rewritings. For me, at least, there is a sense in which James, without being mentioned by name, serves as a filter through which the young Borges especially reads and interprets other philosophers.

In my eyes, however, merely to reconstruct influences such as these only has a limited value. We would still miss the opportunity to grasp the unique inflection which pragmatism in a lasting manner seems to have given to much of Borges's work, including at later points of his career. At the same time, we also would lose the chance to rethink, in light of Borges's rewritings, the place of American pragmatism in the wider context of contemporary theoretical and philosophical developments, from the linguistic turn to deconstruction and after, in which the author of *Ficciones* otherwise figures so prominently.

Beyond the simple reconstruction of textual influences, therefore, a much bolder move is needed if we want to appreciate Borges's pragmatist orientation as part of the contemporary philosophical scene of the Americas in dialogue with Europe. While other critics, such as Luce López-Baralt, have zoomed in on Borges's views about the mystical experience in relation to *Varieties of Religious Experience*, in my eyes the best point of departure for such a move is undoubtedly the abovementioned prologue or preliminary note to the 1945 Argentine translation of *Pragmatism*—a text which, to my knowledge, only Jaime Rest and Robert Lemm have highlighted as being absolutely key for our understanding of Borges, and which only very recently has started to attract the attention of specialists of James such as Jaime Nubiola in Spain.

Borges opens his preliminary note with a reminder about the crucial importance of the millenary debate between realism and nominalism not just for the status of universals but also for their opposing views on language, truth, and free will. Incidentally, I might add, to assign such centrality to this debate for contemporary philosophy is already quite an unusual approach that Borges shares with pragmatism, beginning with its founder Charles S. Peirce. Both Borges and Peirce furthermore agree that nominalism today is so widespread as to have become nearly unavoidable. "Now, like the spontaneous and bewildered prose-speaker of comedy, we all do nominalism *sans le savoir*, as if it were a general premise of our thought, an acquired axiom. Useless, therefore, to comment on it," Borges writes in the title-essay of his *History of Eternity* (135), while Peirce had made the same point in similarly grandiose terms: "The nominalistic Weltanschauung has become incorporated into what I will venture to call the very flesh and blood of the average modern mind" (*Collected Papers* 5.61). Except that Peirce always presented himself as a scholastic realist of an extreme stripe, considering nominalism as the most powerful cause of mental blindness, whereas Borges's never hid his nominalist sympathies.

Most readers, of course, will be familiar with other versions of Borges's summary of the dispute between realists and nominalists, as depicted in canonical texts from *History of Eternity* all the way to *Other Inquisitions*. The following fragment, nevertheless, is worth quoting in detail because in order to introduce

James's *Pragmatism*, Borges offers the reader an extraordinarily concise yet all-encompassing variation:

Coleridge observes that all men are born Aristotelians or Platonists. The latter intuit that ideas are realities; the former, that they are generalizations. For the first, language is nothing but a system of arbitrary symbols; for the second, it is the map of the universe. The Platonist knows that the universe is somehow a cosmos, an order; that order, for the Aristotelian, can be an error or a fiction of our partial knowledge. Across the latitudes and the epochs, the two immortal antagonists change their name and dialect: one is Parmenides, Plato, Anselm, Leibniz, Kant, Francis Bradley; the other, Heraclitus, Aristotle, Roscelin, Locke, Hume, William James. The English nominalism of the fourteenth century reemerges in the scrupulous English idealism of the eighteenth century; the economy of Occam's formula, *entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*, permits or prefigures the no less precise *esse est percipi*. From 1881 onward, William James enriches this lucid tradition. Like Bergson, he fights against positivism and against idealist monism. Like him, he advocates in favor of immortality and freedom. ("Nota preliminar" 9; see also "The Nightingale of Keats" 123)

Borges's suggestion, though, should not mislead us: William James's philosophy and pragmatism in general are not just an extension of the nominalist argument. In fact, for the remainder of the prologue, the image of a harsh either/or choice such as the one between nominalism and realism is abandoned altogether in favor of a focus on a third, intermediate position. "Middle solutions are one of the characteristics of pragmatism," Borges writes, using the debate of determinism and free will as an example of how pragmatism breaks with the strict terms of the alternative: "James intervenes; he conjectures that the universe has a general plan, but that the right execution of this plan remains our task. He thus proposes us a lively world, unfinished, whose uncertain and precise destiny depends on us, 'a true adventure, a true risk' (*Pragmatism* VIII)" ("Nota preliminar" 11). While Borges himself does not apply this principle of *tertium datur* to the debate between nominalism and realism, there are good reasons to believe that in this rather technical debate, too, pragmatism for him could have intervened with a moderate, intermediate solution. Understanding this last possibility will also give us a better grasp of the mutual reorientation undergone by Borges and American pragmatism.

Anyone even vaguely familiar with the opening arguments in *Pragmatism* will remember how William James orders a whole series of philosophical positions into two broad columns, divided under the headings of "the

tender-minded” and “the tough-minded” as the two fundamental temperaments in philosophy, religion, epistemology, and so on. These headings correspond, respectively, to the following traits according to James:

Rationalistic (going by ‘principles’),	Empiricist (going by ‘facts’),
Intellectualistic,	Sensationalistic,
Idealistic,	Materialistic,
Optimistic,	Pessimistic,
Religious,	Irreligious,
Free-willist,	Fatalistic,
Monistic,	Pluralistic,
Dogmatical,	Sceptical. (<i>Pragmatism</i> 13)

Pragmatism cancels out the underlying opposition behind these columns by rendering the listed traits less mutually exclusive than they appear to be at first sight, or by weakening their antagonism. “It is at this point that my own solution begins to appear,” says James, before adding: “I offer the oddly-named thing pragmatism as a philosophy that can satisfy both kinds of demands. It can remain religious like the rationalisms, but at the same time, like the empiricisms, it can preserve the richest intimacy with facts” (*Pragmatism* 23).

Adopting almost the exact same terminology, in many of his early works Borges too seeks to find—in his case through literature, particularly through the use of metaphor—a third way that would break with the binary oppositions of rationalist and empiricist, intellectualistic and sensationalistic. In “Acerca del expresionismo,” from *Inquisiciones*, he first of all lays out the binary opposition itself in terms of its customary effects on literary usage:

The thoughtful, intellectual man lives in intimacy with concepts that are pure abstraction; the sensitive, carnal man, in contiguity with the external world. Both kinds of people can achieve noticeable eminence in the world of letters but on different paths. The thoughtful, by metaphorizing, will elucidate the external world by means of incorporeal ideas that for him are what is immediate and palpable; the sensitive will corporealize concepts. (“Acerca del expresionismo” 157)

The use of metaphor, though, not only differs depending on which side is dominant; it also allows literature to break with the stark dualism itself between the conceptual and the corporeal. Speaking of his youthful avant-gardistic enthusiasm for creating striking metaphors, Borges writes the following in “Después de las imágenes,” also from *Inquisiciones*:

We came upon the metaphor, that resonant conduit our paths will never forget and whose waters have left their mark in our writing. . . . We came upon the metaphor, and it was the conjuring

trick with which we disordered the rigid universe. For the believer, things are the realization of God's word—in the beginning Light was named, and then it illuminated the world; for the positivist they are the fated accidents of interlocking events. Metaphor, linking distant things, fractures that double rigidity. At length we exhausted it, in sleepless, assiduous nights at the shuttle of its loom, stringing colored threads from horizon to horizon. ("After Images" 10–11, trans. modified)

The most eloquent argument for pragmatism as a philosophical middle solution, though, brings us back once again to the 1945 prologue, when toward the very end Borges concludes with the following lines:

The universe of the materialists suggests an infinite, sleepless factory; that of the Hegelians, a circular labyrinth of vain mirrors, prison to one person who believes to be many, or to many who believe to be one; that of James, a river. The unending and irrecoverable river of Heraclitus. Pragmatism does not seek to restrain or attenuate the richness of the world; it wants to keep growing like the world. ("Nota preliminar" 11–12)

Whether this version of the "unending and irrecoverable river of Heraclitus," fountain of true novelty, is actually the same as that "resonant conduit," or "little stream," which serves as a metaphor for metaphor in the fragment quoted earlier, should not concern us here. What matters is the consistency with which Borges, in the name of change and adventure, traces a diagonal across the rigid philosophical divides that throughout the ages have separated idealists and materialists, rationalists and empiricists, and so on.

Could we not make the same gesture with regard to the quarrel between nominalists and realists with which I began? In fact, should we not argue that, for Borges, it is pragmatism itself that occupies a middle position in this quarrel? Our next question then becomes: How should we understand the concrete procedures by which a pragmatist intervention would be able to trace an innovative diagonal in this debate, too?

Admittedly, this is the most speculative part of the gesture I am proposing: it is a matter not just of solving a difficult puzzle but of combining select pieces from different puzzles in order to obtain a glimpse of the overall picture that otherwise would remain sublimely invisible. To be more precise, I propose that we supplement Borges's 1945 preface to *Pragmatism*, via the scattered fragments just quoted regarding the search for a middle solution, with a bold rereading of his early essay "History of Eternity."

Borges at first sight seems to structure this essay around the idea that there have been two and only two versions of eternity: one realist, originally proposed by Plato and Plotinus, and the other, nominalist, found in Saint Augustine and

Irenaeus. His is thus a history of eternities in the plural, “for human desire dreamed two successive and mutually hostile dreams by that name” (“History of Eternity” 135). In the realist version, eternity appears as a stable archetype or idea, of which time is but a fallen copy or imitation. The mystery in this case concerns the way in which the temporal nonetheless can be said in some way (*aliquo modo* in Latin, or *de algún modo* in Spanish, a technical expression that actually appears throughout Borges’s work) to participate in the eternal. In the nominalist version, by contrast, eternity lies in the possibility, usually reserved for God alone, to perceive at once (in Latin, *uno intelligendi actu*, in Spanish *de golpe*, or *de una vez*, to use the other technical expression) all the moments of time. It is the nature of this all-encompassing embrace or synthesis of time, then, that presents a lasting mystery in the nominalist version of eternity (see Bosteels for a more detailed reading of “History of Eternity”).

Insofar as Borges proposes his personal theory of eternity right after making the argument that there have been only two versions of eternity, there is a lingering doubt that his own version might somehow occupy an unnamed middle position. One passage in “History of Eternity,” furthermore, puts us right on track toward understanding pragmatism as a possible name for this third position. Traditionally, that is, the debate over realism and nominalism can be reduced to a choice between the view that universals are real, or that they exist *in re*, to use the scholastic jargon, and the view that they exist as conventional names, *in nomine* or *in voce*. But, at one point in his essay, Borges invokes a later, tripartite scholastic distinction, which he borrows from Albertus Magnus:

As objects of popular veneration, the archetypes ran the risk of becoming angels or divinities; consequently, while their reality—still greater than that of mere creatures—was not denied, they were reduced to eternal ideas in the creating Word. This concept of the *universalia ante res* stuck with Albertus Magnus: he considers them eternal and prior to the things of Creation, but only as forms or inspirations. He separates them very deliberately from the *universalia in rebus*, which are the divine concepts themselves, now variously embodied in time, and, above all, from the *universalia post res*, which are those same concepts rediscovered by inductive thought. (*Selected Non-fictions* 131–132, trans. corrected)

Among these three types or modes of universal, the first and the last can easily be understood but it is the middle solution that will retain us the most in relation to Borges’s debts to pragmatism.

Schematically and using a slightly modernized vocabulary, we could specify the characteristics and procedures that go with each of the three types as follows:

1. *universalia ante res* correspond to an extreme form of realism, in which the universal term is prior and superior to the individuals with which it entertains a relation of hierarchical subordination. In the

field of logic, reasoning along these lines would take the form of a deduction of the individual from the universal.

2. *universalia post res* correspond to an extreme view of nominalism that will be continued into empiricism. There there are no pre-given universals but only conventional general terms that are posterior to the particulars. In logic, reasoning of this type is inductive rather than deductive: instead of applying a given universal law to an individual example, thought passes from a series of particular instances to a general rule.
3. *universalia in rebus* would stand for a moderate position in between realism and nominalism. The key here is the notion of a generic term that would be neither the universal idea or archetype nor a general rule. Universals, when they are generic in this peculiar sense, would be as it were immanent to the singular occurrences to which they give the unity of an instantaneous abbreviation. Here, in other words, a principle of regularity has to be invented or fabricated at the same time as the world's continuing jumble is perceived in all its abundance and multiplicity.

Now can we give this third view a more precise outline? Or to phrase the same question in more speculative terms: Is there a philosophical position that would avoid the two extremes of realism and nominalism, breaking with the double rigidity of both idealism and materialism, so as to keep growing with the world? Because this is not only what Borges says about James, it is also what he himself seeks to do as well, at least according to the early essay "Otra vez la metáfora" in *El idioma de los argentinos* in which he anticipates the conclusion from his 1945 prologue to *Pragmatism*: "When life astonishes us with undeserved misfortunes and undeserved adventures, we almost instinctively metaphorize. We do not want to be less than the world; we want to be as out-of-the-ordinary as the world" ("Otra vez" 55). Finally, within this philosophical tradition, is there a logical procedure that would be neither deductive nor inductive but that would allow us to keep apace with the extraordinary growth and novelty of the world?

To answer the first of these questions, let us listen to the way in which William James describes the pragmatist conception of truth:

Our account of truth is an account of truths in the plural, of processes of leading, realized *in rebus*, and having only this quality in common that they *pay*. They pay by guiding us into or towards some part of a system that dips at numerous points into sense-percepts, which we may copy mentally or not, but which at any rate we are now in the kind of commerce vaguely designated as verification. Truth for us is simply a collective name for verification-processes, just as health, wealth, strength, etc., are names for other processes connected with life, and also pursued because it pays to

pursue them. Truth is *made*, just as health, wealth and strength are made, in the course of experience. (*Pragmatism* 104)

While most critics of pragmatism traditionally have stared themselves blind on the economical or even downright capitalist connotations of truths that *pay* (in the Spanish translation that Borges is prefacing, the term used is much more neutral: *retribuyen*), perhaps the more significant contribution in this account is the revival of a position of *universalia in rebus*, that is to say, of truth, or rather of truths in the plural, that are *in the process of being made* based on singular events.

The truth is in the making, both in the sense of being an open-ended process, or a real adventure, as Borges quotes James as saying, and in the sense that it is the making or doing that is constitutive of truth. "The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth *happens* to an idea. It *becomes* true, is *made* true by events. Its verity *is* in fact an event, a process: the process namely of its verifying itself, its *verification*," James also affirms in *Pragmatism* (97), before he explicitly connects the older way of looking at truth to the ossified position of scholastic realism: "Truth exists *ante rem* just as much and as little as the other things do" (106). That is to say, not at all.

In saying truth is in the making, I am also thinking of another line from Borges's prologue to *Pragmatism*, in which he quotes Chesterton: "What I like about this novelist—G. K. Chesterton said, referring to God—is the time he takes with secondary characters," to which Borges adds: "In the unpredictable world of James there are no characters that are *a priori* secondary" ("Nota preliminar" 12). It is precisely because truth must be made that all characters in James's world can become protagonists, or at least co-workers, so to speak, in the process leading up to a new truth. This is, in the final instance, why Borges considers James's pragmatist philosophy to be ethically superior to all the others: because there is an active process of doing or making involved at all, in which everyone is expected to participate.

As for the second question, regarding the logical procedure that would best suit the pragmatist view of truths in the making, it is now common knowledge also among Borges scholars that Peirce's concept of abduction, or hypothetical inference, adds an important missing link to the logic of scientific discovery, beyond the usual alternative between deduction and induction. Umberto Eco, for one, is fond of illustrating Peirce's concept with examples taken from Borges's fiction, most famously in the essay "Abduction in Uqbar," taken up at the center of his book *The Limits of Interpretation*, which also serves as Eco's reply to the excesses of deconstruction. Indeed, as he puts it elsewhere, "many of Borges's stories seem perfect examples of that art of inference which Peirce called *abduction*, and which is nothing else but *conjecture*" ("Het interessante en Borges" 36; see also Almeida). Borges's detectives, especially, are masters of abduction, but in the end anyone intent on deciphering the continuum of everyday life must at one point or another pass through the narrow gates of

hypothetical inferences. "The true conjectures are not the ones in detective novels," Eco observes in a correspondence with Stefano Rosso: "Those are just representations of thoroughly successful conjectures, which in real life are extremely rare. In real life we first make a conjecture, then we make the conjecture that perhaps our conjecture was correct, and so on, till the conjecture is squared, cubed, ad infinitum. In this sense, in real life as well as in philosophy, the process never ends: there is no closure" (252). Borges's frequent reliance on various types of abduction in his detective stories, in other words, would merely be the index of a much broader trend toward the generalization of an abductive paradigm. But what should we understand by this?

Abduction, briefly put, is an inference from a *result* and a *rule* to a *case*. Confronted with some surprising fact or singular *result*, we hypothetically suppose a *rule*, which would explain the result as a *case* of that rule. Depending upon whether this rule or code (a) existed already but had to be applied to this particular instance, (b) is the combination of two or more previous hypotheses, or (c) had to be invented, Eco then expands upon Peirce's notion by further distinguishing between (a) overcoded, (b) undercoded, and (c) uncoded or creative abductions. As Eco explains in *A Theory of Semiotics*, this third and most radical instance involves a situation whereby the subject "delves directly into the as yet unshaped continuum, mapping his perception as he organizes it" (254). We have not ventured very far, it seems, from the use of language as a map that guides us through appearances. Again, creative abduction is "a mode of production whereby the producer of the sign-function chooses a new material continuum not yet segmented for that purpose and proposes a new way of organizing (of giving form to) it in order to *map* within it the formal element of a content-type" (245). This process thus entails an inventive activity of code-making simultaneous to the application of that code to the singular result at hand.

The notion of abduction which is so central to the philosophical tradition of pragmatism could serve us, I believe, further to develop Borges's unexplored suggestion, especially in "History of Eternity," of a third position in the age-old feud between realism and nominalism. Far from relying on a pre-existing universal law, as would be the case in a deduction, and without having the opportunity to repeat the experiment so as to infer a general rule from a series of particulars, as would be the case in an induction, abduction proceeds by inventing a generic rule while already deploying it to account for an otherwise inexplicable result as a case of that rule. Because of this strange loop, reminiscent of the future anterior tense involved in an understanding of that which will have been the case, abduction is also sometimes referred to as retrodution, or backward inference.

If this reading of Borges and pragmatism is supposed to lead to a truly mutual reorientation, though, we have to do more than link the Argentine's name to the established pantheon of New England pragmatists. Or, to put it differently: unless we add something new to our broad understanding of the

place of Peirce and James as well, the hypothesis about Borges's pragmatism itself will at best have been an overcoded abduction, but not a truly creative one. By way of conclusion, therefore, I would like to add three general remarks to show in what way this hypothesis works has the potential of being innovative in both directions.

Peirce's theory of abduction, first of all, is only meant to be a contribution to the logic of scientific discovery. For Peirce, as I mentioned earlier, all novelty in science depends on abduction. From there, the process continues so as first to deduce a case from the hypothesis and finally by way of induction to guarantee its scientificity. From the perspective of the logic of scientific discovery, in other words, the sequence is as follows:

abduction → deduction → induction

But what if we looked at these types of inference from the broader point of view of intellectual history, or from a perspective similar to Borges's in "History of Eternity" about the passage from a realist to a nominalist type of eternity? Could we not argue that, seen in such sweeping world-historical terms, the paradigm has shifted following a completely different order:

deduction → induction → abduction

Thus, with the work of Sir Francis Bacon in the *New Organon*, the step-by-step testing of inductive generalizations displaces the deductive logic dominant among the schoolmen of the Middle Ages, whereas it took the wild genius of Peirce to give the name of abduction to a process of hypothetical or conjectural reasoning that seems to become dominant in the wake of positivism's decline. This is obviously not meant to imply that abduction did not exist before, nor to ignore the classical definitions of induction such as Aristotle's. But it is hard to ignore the evidence of what I would call a change of dominant with the entry into a general regime of abductive reasoning.

Carlo Ginzburg, for example, has written some illuminating pages about the coincidence of new, indexical types of information such as fingerprints and other clues in the work of police detectives, or lapsus and inadvertent little gestures in the kind of case-study that is central to psychoanalysis. In both lines of work and in the absence of ready-made rules or laws, the need arises to think on the spot in terms of creative hypotheses or conjectures by which to interpret the unique fact of a crime or a singular perversion. Sherlock Holmes and Sigmund Freud thus are strict contemporaries, not just in terms of history or biographical coincidences but also for their place in the larger paradigm shift toward a generalized epistemological model of abduction, as was to be have been theorized by Peirce. The fundamental underlying idea behind this shift is that singularity is not or no longer beyond the reach of reason. "Reality is opaque; but there are certain points—clues, symptoms—which allow us to decipher it. This idea, which is at the heart of the conjectural or semiotic paradigm, has made itself a place in a wide range of intellectual contexts,

most deeply affecting the human sciences" ("Clues" 109). Thus, toward the end of the nineteenth century, the conjectural paradigm or model, which can be described in technical terms by way of the logic of abduction, comes to dominate especially in the field of the human sciences.

If Borges's essays and detective stories bring us back to the abductive paradigm of pragmatism, he might also reorient our understanding of William James. Thus, in *Pragmatism*, James at one point invokes three examples of how our conception of truth, law, and language must adapt to the fact that there are no longer any stable guarantees or pre-given universals:

But imagine a youth in the courtroom trying cases with his abstract notion of 'the' law, or a censor of speech let loose among the theatres with his idea of 'the' mother-tongue, or a professor setting up a lecture on the actual universe with his rationalistic notion of 'the Truth' with a big T, and what progress do they make? Truth, law, and language fairly boil away from them at the least touch of novel fact. These things *make themselves* as we go. Our rights, wrongs, prohibitions, penalties, words, forms, idioms, beliefs, are so many new creations that add themselves as fast as history proceeds. Far from being antecedent principles that animate the process, law, language, truth are but abstract names for its results. (*Pragmatism* 116)

In a world increasingly dominated by the presence of singularities beyond the grasp of deductive authority, truth and justice too must be made on the quick. "The world stands really malleable, waiting to receive its final touches at our hands. Like the kingdom of heaven, it suffers human violence willingly. Man *engenders* truth upon it," James also concludes: "No one can deny that such a role would add both to our dignity and to our responsibility as thinkers. To some of us it proves a most inspiring notion" (123).

As for Borges, our understanding of his writing too receives a completely different slant when seen in the light of its pragmatist orientation. I already mentioned that in terms of his conception of language, for example, most critics tend to favor the nominalist critique according to which language serves above all as a prison-house, delimited by its arbitrary link to reality. From a pragmatist standpoint, however, language acquires an almost boundless capacity to keep growing on a par with the changing world of percepts, affects, and concepts. Above all, language in this tradition is judged not in terms of adequacy or inadequacy, parallel to the correspondence theory of truth in logic, but in terms of efficacy—or what Peirce liked to call "uberty."

Borges is of course better known for statements such as the one from "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins" according to which "obviously there is no classification of the universe that is not arbitrary and conjectural" (*Other Inquisitions* 104). But what if the second of these predicates actually

adds something new to the first? What if conjectural means that we are not bound by the arbitrariness of the sign alone? And what if this exponentially broadens our responsibility, rather than reducing us to a stance of essential skepticism? After all, Borges himself adds that the reason for the arbitrary and conjectural nature of all classifications is not only that "we do not know what the universe is" but also: "We must go even further; we must suspect that there is no universe in the organic, unifying sense inherent in that ambitious word. If there is, we must conjecture its purpose; we must conjecture the words, the definitions, the etymologies, the synonymies of God's secret dictionary" (104). If there is a secret dictionary of the universe, in other words, its truths too are in the process of being made by way of abductive inferences.

Seen in this light, it is no longer paradoxical that Borges, in the early text from *El tamaño de mi esperanza* quoted at the beginning of this essay, trades his almost innate nominalism for the belief in language's unlimited inventive power. "I am insisting on the inventive character of any language, and I do so intentionally," he writes: "Language constructs realities. The various disciplines of intelligence have engendered worlds of their own and possess an exclusive vocabulary to describe them" ("Verbiage for Poems" 7). I would add that it is thanks to a pragmatist orientation that this efficacy of language to order the world's abundance becomes transparent in the first place. Furthermore, there is no doubt on my mind that this constructive, pragmatist, and conjectural dimension of language permeates other parts of Borges's work as well. To continue reading Borges with Peirce or James thus might serve as a counterweight to balance out the importance given to the usual suspects on the side of the nominalist critique of language, from Ferdinand the Saussure all the way to Jacques Derrida.

One final advantage of a pragmatist rereading of Borges that is certainly not negligible concerns the possibility to continue, or to reestablish, the philosophical dialogue between the Americas and Europe. Borges himself compares James favorably to Bergson, but we could also draw intriguing parallels for the previous stage between Peirce and Nietzsche. Did the latter not write obsessively in his so-called "Philosopher's Book" about the pivotal role of "backwards inferences" in the creation of truth, for example in the inference from actions to properties:

One shows confidence in a *truth* he has found by wishing to communicate it. One can then communicate it in two ways: in its effects, so that others are convinced by a backwards inference of the value of the foundation; or by demonstrating [its] generation from and logical interconnection with truths which are all certain and previously recognized. The interconnection consists in the correct subordination of special cases under general principles—it is pure categorization. (*Philosophy and Truth* 58)

Nietzsche, admittedly, finds that most of these inferences are false and logically invalid: "All *rhetorical figures* (i.e. the essence of language) are *logically invalid inferences*. This is the way that reasons begins" (48). However, his interest in the logic of backwards inferences should at the very least be compared in greater detail to the concept of abduction or retroduction in Peirce.

To my knowledge, only the Italian philosopher Carlo Sini has suggested along similar lines—even if it is by way of the idea of infinite semiosis rather than that of abductive inference—to reconnect the so-called Continental and American philosophical traditions. Speaking of Nietzsche, he writes: "With regard to contemporary hermeneutics, this thinker has the same function of precursor that we must assign to Peirce with regard to semiotics in the strict sense. Thus, if we consider things in depth, we would see that the analogy between Peirce and Nietzsche is not as 'strange' as it might seem at first" (10). Borges, without a doubt, sits astride these two traditions, even though his work has for the most part been linked to the advent of structuralist and poststructuralist philosophies of language originating in France. In fact, we might say that whenever the French, from Michel Foucault to Derrida to Gilles Deleuze, quote Borges, as they almost all do toward the late sixties, they are in fact bringing in a Trojan horse inside the walls of the philosophical city of Paris, insofar as the Argentine's work is much more deeply influenced by the thought of "the American way of life" than any of the structuralists or poststructuralists would like to admit.

Only Deleuze escapes this trite and narrow-minded argument: among the French, he is also not surprisingly the only one who seems capable of spelling Peirce's name correctly; and, towards the end of his life, he was working on a grand reevaluation of pragmatism, particularly through the work of William James, as a revolution on a par with that of socialism in the Old World. "One cannot understand pragmatism if one sees in it a summary philosophical theory fabricated by the Americans," Deleuze wrote in what seems to be an excerpt from the larger project: "By contrast, one understands the novelty of American thinking when one sees in pragmatism one of the attempts to transform the world, and to think a new world, a new man insofar as they *make themselves*" ("Bartleby, ou la formule" 110; cf. the work of one of Deleuze's disciples, Lapoujade). Ultimately, as I have tried to argue in the previous pages, this is also what Borges understood when he celebrated the ethical superiority of pragmatism in the philosophy of William James.

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