HISTORY, INFORMALLY SPEAKING:

MARGOLIS' CULTURAL PRAGMATISM

Abstract: This essay aims to adumbrate the relationship between ordinary language, history, and cognition in Joseph Margolis' pragmatist account of the historical constitution of the human, cultural world. It emphasizes the important connections between his arguments for the essentially practical grounding of all forms of cognitive activity; the existential primacy of the historically evolved ordinary language in the formation of aptly socialized human persons as well as of productively functioning human societies; the transformational role of consciousness in history, including the history of cognition; and the insuperable informality inherent in all philosophical attempts to justify our historically articulated norms of cognition and our way of life. Margolis' analysis of these relationships claims to show that cultural tolerance and historical plasticity deserve to displace the philosophical ideas of invariance and fixity as the favored resources of conceptual and social stability. This recognition, on Margolis's view, constitutes pragmatism's distinctive promise and advantage.

Keywords: language, history, pragmatism, rationalism, culture, persons, generativity, plasticity

1.

As David Carr, a prominent philosopher of history, once observed, history for Margolis was “not so much a problem as a way of redefining all other problems” (139). It captured in a word the fundamental insight at the core of his conceptual vision, namely that reality “far from presenting us with an unchanging face, is actually the changing product of the mental conditions for grasping it” (141).

A lot is packed into this statement. To begin with, the proper application of the concept of "history" must presuppose the involvement of some minded beings, paradigmatically – human persons. Without thought there may well be events, temporal sequences… something happens. History, on the other hand, requires an agential structure: there has to be someone to whom what happens makes a difference. In other words, the possibility of history rests on a form of consciousness capable of imagining some pertinent alternatives to the actual course of events – both retrospectively and prospectively – and of assigning differential values to possible outcomes. In order to say that reality has a history, therefore, we have to confine ourselves from the outset to the conception of the world as it appears in experience and thought – the human world, the only one that we are capable of knowing. As a corollary, a realist conception of this world must usually include a stipulation that such a world perpetually exceeds any finite conception that we might form of it.

We understand this human reality by understanding our own place within it and in relation to it; and our conception of reality is gradually transformed as we continually arrive at new altered understanding of our own cognitive faculties and horizons. In this sense, history can be rightly regarded as "the living process of human thought considered in its social dimension, moving through time with regard to understanding itself” (Margolis 2000, 116). It has this ineliminable, Socratic dimension.

Human reality, thus circumscribed, comprises the sphere of the Intentional (Margolis' elaboration on *lebensformlich*) (2021, 155): the panoply of the interpretively significant occurrences, relationships, and entities, whose meaning is culturally emergent on the basis of collective practices (163). Importantly, this cultural sphere embraces, among other things, our evolving conception of nature. The natural world is only present to us, ordinarily, as mediated by the cultural consciousness: be it the mundane competence of the common sense or the refined constructions of scientific intellect. There is, as Margolis explains, "no principled demarcation between what is real and what is interpreted to be real” (1995a, 2). Reality is “cognitively intransparent” – “meaning that all discourse about the world is mediated by our conceptual schemes” (ibid.)

Conceptual impossibility of shedding these (potentially distorting) lenses that we are can be experienced as an embarrassment or a "benign paradox": what we regard as independently real cannot, in fact, be independent of our very inquiries (9). In this sense, what we take to be real is simultaneously an intellectual construction. Moreover, we have good reasons to believe that some previous constructions along these lines have been profoundly mistaken, and we have no infallible way to assure ourselves that our own present conceptions of reality will not end up performing just as poorly down the line.

Nevertheless, on pain of practical failure, we are compelled to regard the cardinal posits of our cultural, *lebensformlich* world as real (2021, 206), even as we admit its contingency and fallibility at the meta-level (1995, 266). We are virtually certain that our historical successors will eventually "outlive" our world, that our *epistemes* will be displaced in favor of the as-yet-unimaginable ones; yet, in our current practice, this conviction cannot play any criterial role (192). We can concede that all truth-claims are necessarily historicized; but we cannot historicize truth (1993, 205). We simply cannot function successfully in a world where truth itself is regarded merely as a matter of perspective. Hence, we are "always caught between our desire to identify the world we see with reality and the realization that it is just our way of seeing the world" (2017, 104): an awkward but entirely manageable philosophical impasse, provided we accept Margolis' advice to treat such philosophical problems with a measure of tolerance and informality, under the heading of what he calls "mongrel liberties."

The culturally interpreted human world, our "quotidian world" (67), is, for the most part, an informal, practical affair. "Collective practices," as Margolis put it, "evolve through the effect of their actual exercise" (2021, 221-2): and their associated norms are reinterpreted in this process of practical application. Persons become historical agents – "though not the only causes of effective historical change" (225) – because they are capable of working, i.e. deliberately engaging in activities and enterprises receiving their primary meaning within the context of maintaining and extending a particular cultural *Lebensform*. In order to do so, however, they are obliged to offer an interpretation of their action or activity, along with some contextualizing interpretation of the pertinent aspects of the cultural world in which it is situated. By doing so, they inadvertently contribute to the gradual changes of the entrenched cultural meanings, spontaneously altering both their world and themselves in the process.

Our conceptual tools, including our norms of rational coherence and objectivity, are simply regimented abstractions, derived from our previous cognitive and practical engagements with the world (2002, 47): they are devices, products of historically situated invention, empirical "modes of active intervention" – not timeless categories of eternal reason (126 & 49). Our cardinal epistemological, metaphysical posits are always derivative, always secondary (and, therefore, always revisable, always provisional); the existential and philosophical primacy is accorded instead to the practical, living, mundane world. This world, in turn, is held together by knowledge of the sort that Dewey had once described as being both "more liberal and more humane" than philosophical aspirations to certainty and permanence: one where the events are "so discriminately penetrated by thought that mind is literally at home in them," the kind of knowledge employed in "engineering, medicine and the social arts" more prominently than in physics or mathematics (LW 1.128). Norms, when considered in the practical context, require a measure of fluidity, of tolerance for improvisation: they function more as heuristics than as categorical standards.

Fluidity is necessary for fluency; but fluency also presupposes a measure of constancy in its underlying structure. In theorizing about the cultural world, we must resist embracing the dichotomy between eternal foundations and orderless, whirling chaos. Flux is potentially too racy a metaphor: history's flow is more viscous than that, with different layers of cultural consciousness moving at significantly different speeds. This point is intended to clear up a number of philosophical confusions: we do not require eternal forms in order to devise forms that are both stable and viable. From Plato on, in Margolis' estimation, philosophers dreaded the prospect of ultimate norms becoming malleable, dependent on human activity. If the content of the norms is in our hands then they can no longer remain fixed in the firmament as the dispassionate objective signposts by which to steer our course. Margolis, on the contrary, argues that the reality of the norms – along with the necessary measure of objectivity and independence from the vagaries of particular practical instantiations – is warranted and sustained by their concrete and discernible performance in shaping distinctly promising possibilities of life (Margolis 2021, 272).

Cultural forms and norms, in other words, can be perfectly real (and justified) without being eternal. The cultural historical world "has no fixed structures of its own of any kind" (ibid.), the discernment of norms essential to the intelligibility of its functioning is affected and transformed by the structure of the historically changing cognition – changing, in part, in response to the implementation of the earlier norms (in the way that empiricism rises to counter rationalism, and transcendental philosophy derives from the aspiration to reconcile the best insights of the two). Nevertheless, historical change of this sort need not disrupt either reasonable practice or rational discourse, for it presents us (more often than not) with "evolving, perfectly legible stabilities" (273) sufficient for maintaining responsible conversation and coordinating purposeful action over considerable stretches of time.

Once we concede that the changing world of our experience does not require permanent invariances or fixed foundations in order to remain intelligible and manageable, thinking of its history in terms of flux, characterized by a stable order of change that is itself not invariant, emerges as a clearly favored option, allowing (among other things) for the perpetual possibility of genuine historical novelty, excluded or significantly attenuated by the more rigid counterparts (1993, 7 & 11). The measure of significant cognitive stability that we enjoy amidst this changing world is due to the eventual entrenchment of our most successful guesses about the enduring aspects and tendencies of reality, which – although "still forever open to enlargement and correction" – sufficiently ground our sense of what it means to have a realistic grasp of our circumstances (2017, 106-7). This stability of our practical world, in turn, underwrites the possibility of pursuing precision and exactitude in areas where the enhanced penetration and control appear desirable. Structural fixity, understood as the precondition of the success of all cognitive practices, is simply outmoded by the continuous intelligibility of socially fluent and practically coordinated discursive competences of the living culture (2021, 277-8). The only price for thus renegotiating our conception of the ultimate basis of confidence in the realistic bearing of our cognitive enterprises, is the admission of a certain "logical informality and provisional diversity" inherent in all practical coordination and adjudication of promising discursive (or conceptual) options (286).

This minimal description of the nature of the cultural world and our cognitive standing within it sets, then, the parameters for what can count as reasonable conjectures regarding the shape of its constitutive histories. What must be immediately apparent, on the basis of the foregoing discussion, is the imminent plausibility of a principled pluralism with respect to the conceptual options, vocabularies, sets of principles, and entrenched habitudes that must be considered adequate or viable in a realistic sense. This, of course, does not rule out the possibility that some of these may be evidently superior to others in determinate respects; however, the essentially practical grounding of all cognitive activity appears to suggest the feasibility of successfully configuring our social relationship to reality in a number of alternative non-equivalent ways. Hence, our conception of reality (and of ourselves in relation to it) can shift significantly over time; meaning that our world can undergo profound cultural and historical transformations of the sort that has no analogues in nature. It can sustain consecutive historical revolutions within the relatively uniform space of the temporally disposed universe.

This revolutionary conception of history as "a sui generis form of change" is quintessentially modern (149). The earlier philosophical tradition, all the way to back to the ancients, did not distinguish, in principle, between historical, cultural changes and mere temporal alterations (ibid.). The order of the cultural world had been conceived on the model of the natural world, suppressing thereby the possibility – undeniable from the perspective of the modern historical consciousness – that this order may be capable of radical re-invention. Once countenanced, in the immediate aftermath of the French Revolution, this possibility had given rise to a long period of vigorous philosophical speculation regarding the shape and meaning of history. The grand changes of consciousness were believed to follow some determinate – usually, progressive – pattern, with the promise of an eventual convergence towards some ultimate and final horizon (2013, 93). In somewhat less immodest, more traditionalist dispensations, certain “effective saliences” could be discerned within the past history of consciousness (95), so as to guide its open-ended future development in an exemplary fashion. All these attempts have been aimed, in Margolis' view, at deliberately eluding the most obvious and empirically the most plausible possibility: namely that, while "history forms and reforms human thinking" (just as the human thinking, to some extent, forms and reforms history), it does so without any discernible unified trajectory or pattern (16). In other words, the historical (reality-altering)[[1]](#footnote-1) transformations of consciousness follow no determinate algorithm.

2.

History written from the perspective of the transformational role of consciousness revolves around human persons (or selves) and, therefore, something needs to be said about the peculiar mode of their constitution, their cultural, existential historicity (2021, 148). Persons, generally, can be seen as representative utterances, as expressive articulations of their cultural milieu, who simultaneously transform it by articulating their own expressive positions and possibilities within it (cf. 232). A person emerges in the first place by internalizing the cultural language of her home society (192). Language, here, is not meant to be confined to the narrowly linguistic competence: it includes concepts, attitudes, manners, semiotic conventions – in fact, the entire spectrum of the meaning-generating conduct (both verbal and non-verbal) circulating within a culture, its essential practices and its conventional habitudes. It is primarily in this sense that language can be regarded as a repository of "our evolving categories and theories" (10), formed and reformed by the history of usage. Nevertheless, the linguistic competence proper still provides us with the best model for thinking about acquiring fluency in an idiom: the combination of constraint and enablement, acceptance of the shared norms and the resulting generative capacity for virtually unlimited novelty and nuance. In mastering a social language, the persons acquire a capacity (unavailable to members of the merely natural species) of becoming uniquely themselves, on their own terms. Their existential historicity, in conceptual terms, is inherited from the historicity of the concrete cultural language that they internalize (11).[[2]](#footnote-2)

The language of one's culture, intimately intertwined with its characteristic forms of life, becomes, then, the fundamental precondition – and constraint – for all possible meaningful developments within the finite career of an individual consciousness (18). This has some important implications for the way in which we comprehend the reality of our world. Simply put, our ordinary, mundane, historically informed cultural language must simultaneously perform two functions that may not always remain favorably aligned: one, to produce a functioning, fluent human personality capable of independent development and growth; the other, to provide the basis for attaining reasonably systematic objective understanding of reality. Contrary to the usual philosophical predilections, the first function must be regarded as more vital (if not more fundamental) than the second. Imagine, for a moment, that we have succeeded in discovering the perfect language, a calculus uniquely suited for the maximally accurate limning of the proverbial "god's point of view." However, young children raised by internalizing this new language, would suffer from severe cognitive and psychological dysfunction and, for all practical purposes, would have to count as completely and utterly mad. Our brilliant invention would turn out to be entirely self-defeating, because no one could master it properly without literally losing their mind. We may want to opt for a less perfect, less objective idiom that would yield functional individuals capable of pursuing knowledge in the first place.

The trouble is that we cannot segregate, at the level of the initial personality constitution through the internalizing of one's own home language, the interests of the theoretical dispassionate observer favored by the traditional epistemology from those of a participant in the active cultural life and practical discourse of a viable human society. When push comes to shove, practical participatory competence has existential primacy; our human world simply cannot subsist otherwise. But this means that the cognitive demands of ordinary practical life, of a functioning human personality, must have precedence over the claims and aspirations of theoretical reason aimed at precision, completeness, and rigor associated with the usual philosophical ideals of knowledge and objectivity. In fact, a practically adequate language, Margolis suggests, would have to, above all, exhibit a considerable degree of flexibility and tolerance, of what, in a term of art, he designates as mongrel liberties (9). The reason for this insistence on flexibility derives from the essential observation that, unlike animals belonging to other species, humans do not have any predeterminate niche or telos, no fixed appropriate or ideal form of life (2017, 40). Hence, their languages and social practices have to be flexible enough to easily accommodate "*whatever* continually invented novel ways of living in, and transforming, the world happen to mark human career" (41). This flexibility, in turn, translates into a certain tolerant informality, which consequently infects the foundations of the human personality and human reasoning, constituted through the internalization of the distinctly flexible, historically formed cultural languages. The practical demand for conceptual, linguistic tolerance and flexibility, therefore, must be acknowledged as both legitimate and ubiquitous, even as it frustrates our pedantic penchant for rigor and clarity, which nonetheless it occasionally manages to indulge and accommodate whenever the circumstances are appropriate.

This conclusion can be further strengthened by considering the actual demands on language and concepts exerted by the practical, historical world. What counts from the perspective of our essential human needs is that we have a "viable sense of a social and humanly familiar world" (84), sustainably supporting some conventionally entrenched forms of life; in other words, simply a world that "we can live with" (88). Demands of life, articulated in the vision of such a mundane, viable world, have precedence over the problems of cognition (96), the exercise of which itself becomes realistically possible only within the confines of such an established, functional world. The mundane language, in the amplified pragmatic sense that concerns us here is, to a considerable extent, a product of evolving, dynamic, historical cultural traditions (cf. 2021, 204). Habitual forms and norms which constitute such traditions, on pain of debilitating ossification, must bear a somewhat provisional and experimental aspect, remaining open to gradual adjustment and change. Capacity for such change, however, must presuppose a measure of "improvisational power" (1984, 9) contained within the mundane language and its associated conceptual apparatus.

A living cultural tradition is usually not a monolith structure: it is heterogeneous, conflicted, comprising various incommensurable resources and techniques. Its posited unity is always a result of improvised compromises, partial adjustments, provisionally contained tensions. Within this messy disjointedness, however, lies the potential for novelty and change, resulting from the unexpected re-alignment of established relationships through the inspired re-interpretations of their import within a historically evolving context. Margolis' pragmatism is genuinely attracted to this *carnivalesque* capacity of cultural language, to its ability to equivocate, to rearrange, to subvert, and to preserve apparently contrary implications. In informality, he sees the source of its flexibility. The mongrel function, as he calls it, of natural language "positively thrives on deliberate vagueness, indeterminacy, equivocation, *ad hoc* improvisation, error, ignorance, inconsistency, empty placeholders, opposed and uncertain purposes, passing fictions that masquerade as substances of some familiar quotidian sort that need hardly be challenged or confirmed in all their presumed adequacy” (2017, 83).

This seemingly inexhaustible generativity of natural language, which constantly reinvents itself without, nevertheless, sacrificing the underlying stability of meaning and signification can serve as a model (or a metaphor) for the historical growth of culture in general. One should be careful not to push the analogy too far. Comparisons to language should not encourage, for example, the baseless speculation that just like language cultures must be resting on some nearly invariant structures, on some kind of cultural grammar. A contrary lesson seems, in fact, much more plausible: it is remarkable how little our understanding of the grammatical structure of a natural language can tell us about its historical cultural transmutations, the unpredictable unfolding of its expressive and representational resources. Viable cultures appear to retain the same practically unlimited expressive developmental flexibility, despite the lingering foundational structures rooted in the relationships of power, exchange, etc.

As Roberta Dreon has noted in an excellent summary of the latest version of Margolis' position, we are invited "to consider this relative indeterminacy of language not as a kind of defective situation in need to be corrected or contained, but as a structural element characterizing our enlanguaged experience of the world, and playing a basically positive role in human experience" (Dreon, 25). For Margolis, flexibility which contributes to "quotidian fluency" (Margolis, 2017, 51) of our cultural, discursive practices is essential; clarity, articulation, rigor are optional, and invariably parasitic on the functional fluency of the everyday discourse. When it comes to our cardinal conceptual options "plausibility of usages" counts for more than the formal virtues of supporting arguments (91).

Improvisational vitality of a language (or a form of life) derives from its built-in flexibility, exemplified by the *mongrel liberties* that it is prepared to license: i.e. the ways of speaking (and thinking) that are "not literally true (or false) but, rather, adequate with regard to our conceptual needs (2021, 209). A mongrel expression is one that cannot be rightly pressed for greater precision, because its very function is to elude or bypass unnecessary confusion that results from the misalignment of underlying concepts. We all have, for example, an intuitive, functionally adequate grasp of the difference between the mind and the body, without being able to spell out, in a conceptually transparent way, the exact nature of the relationship between the two. Our ordinary conversations involving this distinction treat it as both perfectly real and functionally significant, not merely a convenient fiction or a figure of speech. Nevertheless, we are also aware of the fact that this way of speaking harbors a considerable measure of indeterminacy, of ignorance even, and a potential for misunderstanding; yet, we refuse to permit this awareness to disrupt the intelligible flow of our transactions. Mongrel expressions, in other words, facilitate "the assured fluency of a continuing discourse or conversation already in play" (8).

The boundaries of tolerance, the nature of the pivotal distinctions permitted to provisionally benefit from consensual indeterminacy, must shift over time with changing cultural literacy (12). The essential point for Margolis is that the criteria for what is to be tolerated (or rejected as inadequate) cannot be determined or fixed in advance by any purely cognitive analysis or standard, remaining throughout, above all, a matter of practical adequacy – of what a particular historical cultural situation allows us to get away with. The pragmatist primacy of cogent conversation over formalized theory, of fluency over conceptual determinacy, subverts the conventional philosophical assumption that rational proceedings require the ineluctable support of (or reliance upon) some invariant regulative structure: stable and viable practices stand on their own two feet. Moreover, the demand for improvisation and flexibility, necessary for provisionally stabilizing successful practices, allowing them to evolve and adapt over time, tends to impose certain limits on our aspiration towards conceptual clarity and formal rigor. We cannot afford to have too many clear and distinct ideas for the same reason that we need not be concerned about radical doubt and indiscriminate scepticism: our thought is always grounded in historical social practices, borrowing its initial naturalistic warrant from their viability and practical fluency. However, in thus grounding it, these practices also impose a limit on its autonomy and, consequently, its capacity for indefinite (theoretical) refinement.

Approached in this way, the very possibility of rigorously structured conceptual reasoning turns out to be dependent upon the viable cultural practices of concrete historical societies sufficiently advanced to concern themselves with trying to articulate the proper norms ideally governing rational discourse. There is no privileged source of reason aside from our currently most reliable models for producing good reasoning. Conceptual invariances, then, are not eliminated, but their status is adjusted, and their authority curtailed. As the conception of plasticity displaces fixity as the foundation of cognitive stability, the origin and warrant of provisional invariances that we posit must be redeemed in pragmatic rather than purely rationalist terms. The norms we are committed to upholding are “no more than the slowly changing transient forms of the viable praxis of our species, now congealed sufficiently to judge themselves constant for a time” (1993, 98). Our standards of rationality are “abstracted from a tradition’s ongoing practice” (1996, 56) and can only be made plausible as “a summary of a tendency never actually operative or binding as such” (ibid.).

Our starting point is invariably that of a success in dealing with some notable problem, and the standards that we posit to explain this success are posited retrospectively, as analytic reconstructions of the unstated premises of the practical competence demonstrated therein. Once fully elaborated, these standards can further guide our reasoning in sufficiently analogous situations; yet, these standards themselves could not be deduced in a purely abstract fashion without first witnessing their (implicit) operation in practice. This is why Margolis is so intent on stressing the importance of Peirce's abductive logic, which ascribes the central generative role in cognitive ventures to the "*experimental* minds, whose most‐admired conceptual guesses go deeper than the truth of any merely isolated propositions" (2021, 5).[[3]](#footnote-3) Such guesses, occasionally capable of producing far-reaching transformations of our conceptual resources and modes of cognitive comprehension tend to rely on tacit knowledge implicit in our practices (10), and, at the point of origin, bear prominently the aspect of the "guesswork of informed ignorance" (4-5). This is a crucial point for Margolis: we succeed but we don't know how. Once the mind chances upon the solution to a difficult problem (in mathematics, for example) we can convincingly explain the step-by-step structure of the resulting solution; but there was no sure "method" to arrive at the solution in the first place – it came to us without fully indicating the mechanism of its generation.

3.

The notion that significant cognitive advances result from the concrete historical instances of practical success, and that the course of such cognitive developments need not, in any sense, follow some overall immutable "logic" or a determinate trajectory is central to Margolis' conception of pragmatism. As pragmatists, we have to accept both the "mystery of cognitive success" and the recurrent "failure at the level of explicating the precise nature of such success" (2021, 10-11). We can have science; and we can have rational thought. But we cannot have a science of rational thought. "We require a logic," Margolis concedes, "but an ineluctable formal methodology of science, as well?" (4). A rationalist, interested in codifying the most promising and success-conducive cognitive strategies and methods, dreams that one day they may add up to a closed system, which would allow us to cheat history by consistently generating near-ideal strategies for cognitive advancement. One in possession of such a system would no longer be forced to wait for the complex solutions to difficult problems to come on their own. A pragmatist, on the contrary, insists on the insuperable "existential primacy of history in human affairs" (20), cherishing vis-à-vis any provisionally promising locally-efficient form of reasoning the "intellectual flourishing of an entire form of life" (5), capable of recurrently generating successful solutions and insights. This is the reason why Margolis regards rationalism and pragmatism as "irreducibly opposed" (2017, 61).

One way to state or illustrate the difference would be to say that a rationalist considers logic, in some form, to be more fundamental to thought than natural language, whereas a pragmatist accords primacy to the natural language, while recognizing logic as an important but highly-derived form of culturally elaborated reasoning. Rationalist's insistence on systematicity, which he attributes to a preference for order and precision, runs afoul of the pragmatist's interest in the empirical rigor, which forces us to acknowledge real indeterminacy and discontinuity, irreducible complexity, and the frequently apparent impossibility of a clean closure that goes beyond the partial, pragmatically adequate solutions. As the psychologist Daniel Kahneman explains, "we are prone to exaggerate the consistency and coherence of what we see" (Kahneman, 114) because of "our apparent inability to acknowledge the full extent of our ignorance and the uncertainty of the world we live in" (14). A pragmatist corrective, then, is meant above all to counter-act the rationalist's tender-mindedness on this score.

For a pragmatist, cognition is in large part a product of history and remains necessarily embedded in and intertwined with other cultural practices enabling its continuing exercise and development. History, in turn, is understood to resemble most of all an open-ended conversation in natural language with no obligatory course or predetermined direction – neither a gradual convergence, nor a repetition of the same with a difference – with the historically articulated naturalistic criteria of cognitive adequacy remaining always tentative, provisional, evolving, fluctuating without any overarching trajectory to follow or a telos to approximate. This, in a very rough outline, is what is meant by the pragmatist privileging of "flux over fixity": championing the principled affirmation of "the inherently informal, contingently plausible, instrumentally limited, improvisational, diverse, never completely grounded or uniquely systematized cognitive practices" (Margolis 2021, 3), imposing "an insuperably limiting constraint on the would-be autonomy of rational thinking at any level of inferentialist construction" (2017, 54). Pragmatism's advantage, Margolis claims, lies in its capacity to examine and embrace these "altered limits of conceptual tolerance" under the conditions of flux and historicity (2002, 86). "It's the profound informality of philosophy that I wish to promote," he explains (2021, 20); the informality that can be superseded only by denying or ignoring the genuine historicity of human condition, with history unfolding as a cultural conversation that cannot be convincingly shown to be decisively shaped by any kind of a-priori constraints.

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1. We are speaking, of course, about cultural or culturally-mediated reality, not Reality with a capital "R" (whatever that might be). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. "Language" in the rest of this paper, unless otherwise specified will be used in the broader, pragmatic sense outlined at the start of this paragraph. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Italics are mine. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)